Subjectual Visibility and the Negotiated Panopticon: on the Visibility-Economy of Online Digital Photography

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Abstract: Fragments of mundane social life are increasingly filmed/photographed and published online, being made accessible to wide and unexpected audiences. This makes impression-management harder, but doesn't bring forth a total disciplining panopticism. Not only is photography collectively regulated by moral agency, sometimes it is also used by people to resist (or cope with) oppressive power and struggle over power. In some senses, this new regime-of-visibility even increases social equality. Foucault's statement that 'visibility is a trap' has great analytic purchase, yet it shows only part of the picture.

Keywords: agency, digital photography, Foucault, internet, photography, visibility.

In the last decade, the economy of visibility has transformed. New patterns of self-documentation relying on new technologies have changed the rules concerning who can (and may) see whom doing what and when. People always have their camera phones available, which enables them to photograph spontaneously and free-of-charge. The range of photographic objects widens (Okabe, 2004; Rivière, 2005). The internet makes documentary texts (blogs), photos and videos concerning the lives of individuals accessible to wide, often unpredictable audiences. Digitization makes the storage, location, replication, and dissemination of information fast, cheap and easy. Local episodes gain continuity over time, space and context (Solove 2007). How (and to what degree) do these trends affect structures of power in late modern societies?

The new media literature often offers a dystopian answer, moulded by the Foucauldian imagery of the panopticon [so much so that Haggerty (2006) warned of the 'oppressiveness' of this paradigm which restricts research]. According to this version, under the new regime of visibility anybody may document anyone doing anything and share it with everybody. Through the panoptic perspective, this development seems to have dramatic and threatening impacts on society, subjectivity, freedom (or latitude) and power-relations. As the transient turns immortal, all our deeds may bear
unpredictable consequences in remote times and contexts. 'Big brother’ is coming true with no central political power needed behind it. Technology takes away our control over our personal information and leaves us much narrower a space for manoeuvre. Cascio (2005) and Dennis (2008) warn of the emergence of a 'participatory panopticon', composed of millions of camera-holding 'little brothers' performing decentralized practices of individual and group monitoring. In this allegedly emergent world, people are constantly aware of being potentially documented, lying makes no longer sense, and misbehaviour cannot be concealed, so much so that living under complete transparency is the least worst method of coping with 'mob vigilantism'. Solove (2007) argues that the convergence of internet and camera phones has reverted the world to a small village, in which gossip may be pernicious. Technology makes people accountable for all their past deeds, possibly presented to different audiences in different future contexts, extinguishing modern urban anonymity. Once documented, the least rule-breaking may result in disproportionate shaming and collective punishment.

Below I present the findings of a research on practices of lay photography and its online distribution among young Israelis, and their effects on power structures in youth societies, schools and army bases. My research offers a very different and much more nuanced answer than the panoptic dystopia. I show that though it's easy to imagine how contemporary technologies could be (mis)used in that manner, it's far distant from actual social developments. I first present the panoptic model and the attempts to apply it on digital photography, showing how increasing visibility may pose a threat to individuals. I then dedicate three sections to three qualifications to the panoptic model: 1. in actuality, not anything may be photographed or shared: individual and group agency, interpersonal negotiation, and moral considerations and norms restrict documentation. 2. within hierarchical institutions, photography is often used to challenge power-asymmetries, supplying people with new tools for resisting/coping with institutional power; and 3. in some contexts, being object of others' gaze grant people power and social gains rather than exerts power over them.
These empirical findings carry theoretical implications: In the gap between the panoptic potential of contemporary ICTs and the actual social practices we may find what (early-)Foucauldian theorization of visibility and power misses: agency (strategic usage of technologies to pursue perceived interests); moral agency and moral sensibilities; collective action (regulation of technological potentialities); and imperfect consciousness (against Foucault's assumption that actors are constantly cognizant of surveillance and its implication). While showing that non-agential model of power qua visibility-relations cannot adequately explain the entanglement of technology and power-relation, I suggest it may benefit from incorporating notions of agency, capital and morality.

Methodology

The article relies on various sources of empirical data. Four main sources are: 1. A qualitative web-based survey completed by Israeli teenagers and young adults from various backgrounds (n=25, median age=16). These age-groups are most inclined to intensive photography and its online dissemination. Respondents replied in detail to open questions about the usage of photos/videos in gossip or as evidence; their moral judgements of photography across contexts; conflicts over publication of photos/videos; harm caused by publication; photography within classroom; explicit requests for permission to take or publish photos; etc. 2. semi-structured in-depth interviews with 24 respondents (15 teenagers, 9 soldiers and young adults) on photography in army and school contexts, moral norms regarding photography and its publication, etc. 3. Thousands of videos and photos taken in schools and army bases and published online (in video-sharing/photo-sharing sites, blogs and social networking sites (SNSs). Surveying these materials (mostly allocated by search queries as 'teacher', 'school-fight', 'commander' etc.) helped me identify common genres. 4. Hebrew-Israeli mainstream media reports, which naturally focus on unusual or criminal cases.
Visibility as a Trap

The mutual constitution of power structures and of visibility (access to personal information) has long become commonplace in the social sciences. A common starting point is Foucault's statement 'visibility is a trap', against the Enlightenment's confidence in the liberating power of truth and light. The archetypal model of the panopticon is a gaol-design where each prisoner may always be watched by an invisible guard, hence prisoners assume constant surveillance, internalize the gaze and discipline themselves. The way visibility instills prisoners with the consciousness of power is an archetype for the way institutional power disciplines subjects in modernity (Foucault 1977). This became key concept in both internet studies and surveillance studies. Goffman (1961) too describes visibility as a threat: the capacity to hide personal information and use it strategically constitutes one of the major differences between free societies and total institutions. Backstage-regions are prerequisites for the very existence of a person. Losing control over one's representations and personal information accessible to others equals losing control over one's life (Cahill 1998; Goffman 1961). What do the metaphors of the panopticon and the total institution tell us about digital photography? And what do they hide?

No doubt, we leave more traces than our forefathers ever did: from automatic credit entries to initiated photography and blogs, substantial parts of everyday life are translated into 'information', i.e. lasting, reproducible and distributable data-objects. Alongside the traditional threats to personal information posed by governments and corporations, a new threat is allegedly posed by ordinary co-citizens. Ordinary people borrow methods from the espionage world to their interpersonal relationships to create peer-to-peer 'lateral surveillance' which doesn't replace traditional top-down surveillance, but rather strengthens it, 'redoubling' the panoptic model (Andrejevic 2005:485). Not only do people document each other, they also document themselves and share it with the world. Unlike the centralized panopticon-model, this is a networked, rhizomatic power-structure, in which everybody may monitor everybody. This participatory panopticon may apply more efficient and
thorough surveillance than vertical panopticism, and the data produced are accessible to more people, rendering it impossible to conceal anything from anyone (Cascio 2005; Denis 2008). For Ravindran (2009), '[c]amera phones are the panopticons in the palms of individuals engaged in the surveillance of their objects of desire', while their usage is itself controlled by the state's panoptic surveillance. For Kietzmann & Angell (2010) mobile documentation of minor misdeeds by fellow citizens is “the ultimate panopticon, and it’s coming soon to a neighborhood near you”, as “every honest citizen has become criminalized, with society itself as the prison, and each prisoner doubling up as a potential guard and bounty hunter”.

Digital camera phones may be introducing a powerful panopticism: almost every situation may be documented with the ubiquitous cameras (those documented needn't notice), and the products may be disseminated over the internet in unpredictable paths. In blogs and SNSs, people share photos and videos of their lives, often integrated within textual 'confessions' (another Foucauldian visibility-trap that transforms the self, subjecting it to the power of the authority that demands the confession: Foucault 1978) in front of one's peer-group. A first glance may well give the impression that the panopticon and the confession have merged to create a monster: young people's lives are objectified, divided into segments and disseminated on different sites and networks—either in textual or visual form; on the documented person's own initiative or by other bloggers/SNS users; willingly, or against one's will.

The panoptic potentialities of the ubiquitous digital cameras and camera-phones have already gained media attention around the globe. Two good examples are the South-Korean girl who was punished with social isolation and had her life ruined due to the online publication of photos presenting her refusing to clean up her dog's faeces in a train cabin (discussed in Solove 2007, who termed it a 'norm police'); and the Israeli girl who virally disseminated via e-mail the photo of a stranger she accused of sexually harassing her (Keinan 2004). Both cases are based on still photos (not video), which cannot prove the narrative, but supply it with an evidential aura and make
recognition and punishment of the alleged offender possible. Both incidents took place in public urban anonymous spaces, with only a few people present, and would have been soon forgotten, was it not for online-published digital documentation bringing it to huge audiences. Unlike the panopticon, based on the inmate's isolation, here surveillance is achieved by networking/communication among individuals. However, while avoiding the assumption of agential central power behind the gaze, this model fits better into Foucault's concept of power.

My data demonstrates that ever more events produce video-evidence. Drunken tomfoolery; a girl's laugh-attack; a boy's panic during body-piercing; school fights; firing shells; abusing Palestinians; vandalism; too tight a dance with a stranger, potentially disturbing one's partner; or drinking alcohol during army shifts against orders—all these episodes (actually mentioned by interviewees) leave behind video-evidence, accessible long after their completion for people who weren't present at the original situation, including complete strangers who stumbled upon it online. Once materials are online, they may be copied by anyone, and it's impossible to ensure their complete deletion. Digital networked data make 'starting over' ever harder (cf. Marx 1988:223), as our (criminal, social, romantic) pasts may always pop up (what Albrechtslund calls 'eternal friendships'). The damage for those documented may be serious: three respondents to my survey reported cases, in which teenage boys from their schools shared or published sex-videos with pernicious ramifications for their female partners. Indeed, aural gossip has always been used as an institutionalized means of social control on girls' sexuality, yet photography is much more effective, as unlike bragging and gossip, it creates nonnegotiable evidence which is hard to doubt.

**Converging Life Spheres**

The online publication of self-documentation blurs not only frontstage/backstage distinctions, but also distinctions between separate life-spheres (e.g. work, family, social-circles). Not only 'privacy' is threatened, but also the human capacity to perform different personae in different spheres, by
sharing different information-items with different audiences. Online publication of self-
documentation materials makes the audience of each performance/information-piece heterogeneous
and unpredictable. Some of my interviewees were surprised to find out that their co-workers or
fellow-students knew much about non-professional lives (army service, leisure) simply because
different photos are published on the same Facebook or Flickr-account.

This challenges common portrayals of late-modern networked society, where life-spheres are
allegedly ever more distinct from one another and people simultaneously participate in multiple
independent networks. Giddens accused Foucault of generalizing from his finding on surveillance
in total institutions to society at large (Giddens 1987:184-187). But if inmates' inability to prevent
leakage of their personal information between different life-spheres, a hallmark of total institutions,
is now indeed introduced to wider society, no wonder so many scholars interpret the online
distribution of digital photography, blogs and SNSs as agents of social totalization.

Evidence for the convergence of information spheres contradicts a major argument of scholars who
oppose the characterization of contemporary society as panoptic: Bruno Latour's argument that
surveillance is governed by 'oligopticons', incommensurable surveillance-mechanisms, each
documenting reality from a narrow perspective, unable of integrating into a single panopticon
(Latour 2007. For Boyne 2000, oligopticism explains why docile subjectivities haven't yet
emerged). However, Facebook and Google merge isolated oligopticons into a total surveillance-
apparatus. Gary Marx wrote as early as 1988 that new surveillance technologies used by
government agencies and corporations turn society at large into a Goffmanian total institution,
depriving it of backstage-regions (Marx 1988). Could this trend have extended into new life-
spheres, beyond the interests of governments and corporations? But is this really what's going on?
And if so, how have we not noticed?
The Limits of Power

'There are also videos, like if someone pushes the button in the middle of a lesson or something and films without anyone noticing it. But then, of course, you have to show it to [those photographed] and get their permission to keep it, or you should delete it (...) you don't photograph those who aren't your friends, because it creates an awkward situation (...) you'd have to show him the video, which is a bit embarrassing' (N., 15-year-old girl)

Albrechtslund (2008) suggests that the very language of panopticism and surveillance is irrelevant to non-hierarchic, participatory and mutual surveillance, which empowers subjects and enriches social life. However, as the cases discussed above indicate, the dystopic potential cannot be explained away so easily. In the following I present two main reasons why the panoptic dystopia (society as a total institution with neither backstages and secrets nor leeway) fails to realize. The first refers to the psychology of the gaze's objects, the second to their moral agency.

Hyper-rational psychology. Does knowing about the cameras in the others' pockets necessarily lead to self-disciplining? Millions of people across the globe have watched news reports about the 'dog-poop girl'. Could we simply assume (as the panoptic model would have it) all these people will always clean up after their dogs from now on? One reason why not, is that the 'dog-poop girl' is the exception rather than the rule: whereas any event may be documented, most events are not. Most people (including my respondents) don't constantly consider the possibility of being documented or its effects. The panopticon's disciplining power (visibility's ability to produce docility) depends on ideal subjects, with certain (prudent, risk-avoiding) psychology and constant full awareness of being monitored and its consequences (Yar 2003). The faithfulness of this ideal-type to the actual ways in which agents subjectively perceive their visibilities in different spaces and react to them is rarely studied. In reality, people may be conscious of cameras without necessarily taking 'practical cognisance' of them (Yar 2003:264). Even Facebook users don't permanently act as subjects of surveillance (Westlake 2008:36). My data indicates that usually people don't avoid rule-breaking or
embarrassing behaviours just because others carry camera phones in their pockets. Even once cameras are pulled out, only few informants reported feeling 'in danger', or that 'everyone behaves appropriately/nicer'. More often cameras encourage minor transgressions: as photography is usually used by well-meaning acquaintances to record collective moment of unconstrained fun, those photographed often switch to a funny/amused register, trying to produce entertaining materials.

**Moral agency.** The production and distribution of documentation depends on human agents who apply technology selectively, according to their perceived interests. Most happenings are not considered worthy of documentation. Hence, although participatory and rhizomatic, digital photography differs from Elmer's (2003) totalizing Deleuzian panoptic diagram. Digital photography and the internet indeed make it much easier for anybody to spy on anybody (Andrejevic 2005; Marx 1988). However, it doesn't mean people have any reason/interest to use technology in manners that may hurt others or restrain their liberty, not to mention finding it morally legitimate. Instead, local norms and judgement criteria are developed to restrict and regulate documentation's production and distribution and avoid perceived harm. **People are not cogs in a surveillance-machine, but rather agentic beings, who always practice moral agency, applying moral resources to judge themselves and others.**

The literature usually ignores the dimension of collectively generated ethics, adopting instead Foucault's tendency to reduce norms to normalization by disciplinary power (Yar 2003:261). A rare exception is Ling (2009)'s study of teenagers, who apply permissive norms to dissemination of embarrassing/sensitive documentation within the friends-group, but much stricter norms when outsiders are involved as either photography's objects or audiences.

The development of local moral norms is also affected by the relatively symmetrical power-relation. Frosh (2001) rightfully suggests that photography is always 'a performance of the bestowal,
exercise and revocation of social power'. He views photography as a site of social conflict, a drama of power-relations concerning visibility and representation. Frosh indicates the often-conflicting 'assumptions held by the photographed and the photographer regarding the image’s potential audience and their “right” to see' that represent differential power relations (2001:44). However, photography is no longer monopolized by well-defined groups of camera-holders (professionals, amateurs, tourists, new parents): young people are constantly both photographers and photographed in potentia, alternately switching between these roles. Photographers are still in a position of power, as Frosh suggests, yet they may turn into photography-objects within seconds. This balance of power may influence negotiation, as told by one interviewee (F,15): 'If they photograph me in a pose I don't like and threaten to upload it to [an Israeli SNS], I photograph them too [in a way they don't like as a counter-threat]'. Alongside threats, this symmetry encourages normative regulation.

The norms I've found are not legalistic rules, but rather relatively flexible schemes of moral appraisal and sensitivities (a sense of what is legitimate and fair); as-well-as discursive resources which may be strategically engaged in order to justify one's position in a conflict over the appropriateness of actions. I definitely don't claim that consensus over what may be photographed or published exists within any single group, but rather that people share moral resources, morally judging each other's (and their own) adherence to some moral principles and loose local norms concerning which behaviours are morally reasonable, what most people would do or may be expected to do. I'd like to concretize this with examples from the interviews- and survey-data.

In some situations, photography is altogether illegitimate. Time and again I've been told that documentation of quarrels and fights is illegitimate unless the acts may be interpreted in a friendly, humorous sense. M., 15-year-old boy, told me: 'Someone fights with, like, jokingly, with someone—you photograph it', but 'if it's not jokingly it won't be [photographed]'. Serious fights 'don't amuse

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1 This is an obviously vague domain, as the parties may hold conflicting interpretations. However, some quarrels are unanimously viewed as 'real', e.g. between people who aren't friends, or when conflict is serious/consequential.
me’, he stressed: ‘what am I, a little child’? Mischievous as this ardent documenter was, his self-worth relied on his moral sense. His sensibilities proved similar to other teenagers. Photography is also considered unacceptable whenever people are expected to help a (sick or attacked) friend or the collective (e.g. while cleaning), and whenever it endangers those photographed (documentation of illegal behaviour), ridicule/embarrass them, or show them in a vulnerable situation (e.g. sleeping, drunk, crying, unconscious). Yet, photography may still be justified when its entertainment/documentary value is considered weightier than its harm. Those who nevertheless document such events may feel guilt and face social sanctions, rebukes/hostility, demands to delete materials, and even Facebook groups personally denouncing unrestrained documenters.

Once Photographed, people may demand deletion of offensive/unwelcome photos from the camera's memory-card, thanks to the almost universally acknowledged right of those photographed to instantly view their photos. Thus, blunders may be photographed, but deleted if provoking anger rather than laughter. The success of deletion demands depends on local norms, power-relations, and the specific photographic content: in some cases a hint will do, in others even a resolute demand won't help. Even when those photographed fail to obtain deletion, they're often successful in restraining the unpredictability of the materials' social biography, by barring their online publication. Whereas the right to demand deletion is conditioned, consensus prevails concerning the unconditioned right to bar online publication.

Negotiation is not necessarily verbal: in some milieus someone may simply snap the camera and

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2 Propriety rules are often very local: one interviewee said nobody in his social circle would photograph drunken friends acting silly or doing things they'll regret later, whereas in other groups such photos are source of amusement rather than embarrassment.

3 The exceptions being photographers with quasi-artistic pretensions, who try to distinguish themselves from vernacular/documentary photography by denying the photos' social role and refusing to share authorship with those photographed.
delete her photos/videos herself, without it being considered a breach of conduct: after all, people are believed to have rights over their representations. Hence, interviewees who avoid online publication without the consent of those photographed explained it by what they called 'copyright'. The semantics here deserves attention: justifications for restraining dissemination are not based on human dignity, but on the much-newer neoliberal discourse of 'intellectual property' and 'publicity rights'. Local senses of right and wrong are thus informed by wider hegemonic moral languages. Some people also claim rights over the representations of others. Thus, teenage girls may forbid other girls to photograph their boyfriends; whereas one Palestinian-Israeli father sacrificed his life in a confrontation with a young man who photographed his daughter. In both cases, photography is interpreted as expressing romantic interest or even symbolic ownership.

In some communities, an explicit consent of those documented is considered necessary before publication ('opt in' method), while others adopted an 'opt-out' method (materials are first published, then may be removed by request). 'Opt-out' method represents the normalcy of online publications: many young people assume that all documentation is published unless agreed otherwise. However, as many YouTube-videos attest, publication is often explicitly discussed/negotiated in realtime, being itself filmed.

Unlike surveillance scholars, teenagers are more concerned with their appearance than with their privacy, and more often oppose publication of 'bad' photos, not embarrassing/sensitive ones. Refusals to requests to remove photos/videos from the internet are rare and usually supported with strong justifications. According to the data, these cases include: (a.) photos which are actually flattering (here deletion-requests are interpreted as merely indirect requests for compliments to one's appearance); (b.) materials ascribed with extremely great (memento/entertainment) value for the group; (c.) the petitioner is not the only person shown. In this case, instead of removing the photo altogether, petitioners are often 'censored' by having their faces painted over with editing programs. However, there are also reasons to refrain from requesting deletion from the outset:
according to interviewees, some friends-groups expect members to take humour at their expense in good spirit, without externalizing their uneasiness. In other cases, removal requests are (mis)interpreted as insults (as refusals to publicly recognize the relationship with the other photographed person).

The norms discussed above apply more within a community than between strangers. Yet, the vast majority of vernacular photography is produced and disseminated within networks of friends and friends-of-friends. Complete strangers must do something newsworthy indeed to get themselves documented.

Undoubtedly, there are still minor transgressions and even major ones, in which documentation is used violently. One respondent mentioned a friend who had been photographed by classmates while fighting, and became notorious as 'the girl who had a fight', after her removal request was ignored. Other girls were photographed during sex and had to change schools. However, these acts are perceived as exceptional, immoral/criminal acts of aggression. They don't seem to discipline.

Whereas some everyday-moments are perpetuated and published online, subjected to replication and accessible to wide audiences, this cannot be compared with raw information flowing from surveillance cameras. It is the product of discrete agentic acts, subjected to complicated social and moral negotiation within groups, whose members usually have some trust in each other. Teenagers don't avoid tomfoolery, sex, drinking or smoking just because others may betray them by documenting and publishing their secrets (as shown below, some secrets and misdeeds are even deliberately documented). The panoptic dystopia, alas, refuses to appear. Being decentralized and incomplete, photography doesn't reduce leeway for agentic action. The next section explores arenas in which it even broadens repertoires of resistance.

**Subversive documentation**

*I didn't have much to do there. So me and three other [soldiers in similar roles] we bought alcohol*
and just drank a lot. At room. Which is actually forbidden, and we've also photographed it. With a regular camera. It was like just for spiting, doing something bad, forbidden'. (K., 22, ex-IDF-soldier)

As we've seen, the decentralized new means of surveillance and documentation don't necessarily subjugate individuals and reinforce oppressive social policing. I further claim that in some contexts, these very means offer people new instruments for coping with power and resisting it, broadening existing repertoires of contention. Foucault never explored in depth the role visual experience may play in resisting control (Jay 1994:415-416). It may be fruitful to explore it empirically.

Mann et al. (2003) offer the polar opposite of Andrejevic's dystopic vision. They contend that personal technologies, which decentralize and democratize documentation, may counter top-down surveillance by enabling 'sousveillance', the documentation of the powerful (including institutional surveillers) by common people: an empowering, performative resistance strategy which may 'restore the balance' that prevailed prior to Bentham's panopticon.

This emancipation thesis has some snags: most people don't want to resist surveillance but rather identify with surveilling establishments (as Mann et al. revealed). Furthermore, as they conceded, widespread sousveillance 'may support the power structures' by creating a totally transparent 'coveillance society'. I wish to add a third qualification: the meaning and impacts of photography depend not merely on who photograph whom, but no less on its assumed future uses and audiences. The sousveillance thesis must be contextualized.

Organized documentation by members of dominated groups as a political project (e.g. Witness Project: Dennis 2008) has proven efficacious. In Israel/Palestine, local Palestinians, human right activists and demonstrators all film soldiers, policemen and settlers in order to prevent violence, help prosecute offenders, and raise public awareness, either spontaneously or as an institutionally-organized political action. But these are the usual suspects. No less interesting is lay usage of photography inside hierarchic organizations.
Mann's experiments indicate that institutions and officials involved in surveillance and control are those most prone to oppose sousveillance. However, I found that in Israeli hierarchical organizations like schools and army units, documentation by students and low-rank soldiers is extremely common (though usually illicit). Most documentation is not subversive, yet four patterns of using documentation to cope with oppressive power may be discerned.

1. **Hidden sousveillance.** Pupils often photograph hated teachers, especially while angrily shouting at pupils, or making fools of themselves. Documented acts of punishing and disciplining may also be re-framed as entertainment. Videos are shared with classmates after class, and published on blogs and *YouTube*, occasionally after post-production manipulations such as sarcastic subtitles. Such materials obviously constitute part of the group's lore, creating and enhancing a collective sense of camaraderie.

However, occasionally they do more than transforming unpleasant behaviour of the authorities into empowering sources of unity and amusement. Sousveillance supplies pupils with evidence while trying to pit one authority against the other: in some (although not all) cases, videos of teachers' violence and unrestrained behaviour led to involvement of parents, school-managements, mainstream media, or even the Ministry of Education's CEO.

However, it must be noticed that this sousveillance is clandestine, against the institutions' rules. Hence, although it may result in punishment of aggressors, it wouldn't deter or discipline, unless those in power believe they are constantly photographed in secret.

2. **Documentation of rule-breaking.** A common pattern among soldiers (and pupils) is demonstrative documentation of illicit behaviour (as in K.'s case above): drinking alcohol, burning ammunition, slumbering or acting silly during guarding shifts (and also skipping or falling asleep in class). These acts are to remain secret, and their documentation is shared with other soldiers, but not with the commanders, who may punish those photographed. These collective secrets, the keeping of
which depends on mutual trust, reinforce the comradeship among soldiers, who consider each documented rule-breaking a demonstration of bravery (boldly boasting/bragging of 'fucking the system') that publicly reveals the limits of the total institution.

Indeed, lateral documentation may strengthen vertical control when materials fall into the wrong hands: one interviewee reported having been expelled from schools after 'teachers claimed I've been photographed breaking things', and another respondent had a schoolmate interrogated by the police after being photographed doing graffiti. However, digital photography does not usually deter people from rule-breaking as the panoptic model would predict. Instead, perpetrators have to choose whether to bar photography (interviewees reported that fights and acts of vandalism are often not photographed at the perpetrators' request, for fear of school/police authorities) or to take a calculated risk and allow, or even initiate documentation. Just as documentation of rule-breaking may strengthen the authorities' control, it may rebel against it. Non-agentic control is replaced by agentic risk-management considerations.

3. Explicit subversive performances: Performative acts, occasionally of surrealistic/absurd nature, aimed at ridiculing both those in power (commanders/teachers) and the situations in which hierarchical power-relations operate. Subversive performances of this kind don't necessarily require a camera, yet the camera's presence encourages them by framing the event as a 'candid camera' television production, and by making the prank much more productive (not merely amusing those present, but creating an entertainment artefact for later consumption, possibly by larger audiences). Thus, thousands of Israeli pupils watched a video published online, showing a boy asking for permission to have a fruit in class, then calmly taking out a watermelon, slicing it peacefully with a long knife and innocent countenance. This video was so popular, that it was followed by multiple imitations and variations in other schools, including among my respondents: online publication resulted in mimetic homogenization of symbolic resistance repertoires across country. In another case, military trainees in a formation shouted together 'computer' instead of the like-sounding
Hebrew word for 'attention'. These are open challenges to the situation's framing (as a lesson, or a formation) and the rules of conduct assumed by this framing. However, their power often derives from their absurd, exaggerated nature, which produces a surrealistic effect, comparable with art-performances or ethnomethodological experiments, making even teachers collapse in laughter.

4. *Unintentionally subversive documentation*. Surprisingly, sometimes the mere presence of a camera renders social role-playing impossible. Thus, a commander who tried to demonstrate toughness in front of recruits burst with laughter upon noticing that another staff member (whom I interviewed) was filming him. Initially he could play the 'tough commander' role in front of the recruits who had no reason not to identify him with this idealized character. However, the camera raised the commander's awareness to the gap between his on-stage role and backstage character: it represented the different gaze of the video's intended audience (his fellow staff members), who would probably be amused by this gap. Goffman termed this phenomenon 'upkeying': the shift from serious role-playing into a playful behaviour register or laughter attack, which often occurs when individuals are obliged to enact a role they think is intrinsically not themselves, especially one felt to be too formal (Goffman 1974:352, 366-369).

The camera's external gaze also disenchanted the situation for the recruits, who reportedly began smiling upon noticing it. By introducing an outside perspective, any act of photography may challenge the situation's framing and its consequent power-relations. Another interviewee told me that as a recruit he took 30 photos a day on average, in almost any possible situation (including formations). He reported that it created an *anything-goes atmosphere*: the camera's external perspective helped the recruits view the situation from the outside, take distance and experience it as more amusing than threatening. The basic training's discipline relies on the capacity for make-believe, which is contingent upon the situation's boundaries. These boundaries may collapse while encountering the gazes of imagined audiences represented by the camera. In spite of the personnel's reservations, the informant kept photographing, without being stopped. The only photos he was
compelled to delete were those of personnel: commanders couldn't tolerate this reversal of power hierarchies (as a rule, recruits photograph personnel only rarely and surreptitiously. Even beyond basic training, soldiers rarely photograph high commanders. According to an interviewee, overtly photographing the battalion commander is simply 'out of place', as he's 'a formidable guy'). Unlike subversive performances, here the re-keying and re-framing of the situation are caused unintentionally by the very presence of the camera, not by any performance acted in front of it.

To conclude: although cameras are not intrinsically subversive, their presence and usage, which become ever common even within 'total' institutions, may redefine power-relations. Surreptitious photography in particular may be used creatively and strategically by those lacking power within a given situation.

Visibility as fame and an object of struggle

So far, the discussion accepted the common Foucauldian assumption that the camera's gaze subjugates those photographed (even in sousveillance that resists power-structures). No doubt, some gazes exert power and control. But are all gazes purely subjugating and violent? Following Jay (1994) and Yar (2003), I see no reason to a-priori accept this common presupposition. Foucault himself mentions a different functionality of the gaze, the pre-modern visibility economy, in which sovereigns produced power not by watching citizens, but rather by being watched by the people, exercising its power in a spectacular manner. Back then, visibility conferred power rather than subjugated. But has spectacle completely ceased to operate as a source of power with the coming of modernity?

As demonstrated by the cooperation between celebrities and paparazzi (Levin & Arluke 1985:83), being a surveillance-target indicates fame: though it may annoy and restrain celebrities, surveillance is also indexical of their privileged status and rank (Frosh 2001:44). It acquired this role in the era of centralized media, which by its very nature could grant exposure only to the few, turning media-
exposure into a good in demand. Blogs, SNS-profiles and online photo-albums enable people to enjoy the same luxury (media-exposure of their private life), though not necessarily to large audiences: the barrier is no longer publication itself (accessible to all), but rather the ability to attract wide public attention within an 'attention economy (Goldhaber 1997).

Publicity may enhance social capital: in SNSs, self-documentation is required for the formation of social ties and social status (Schwarz 2010). A main reason for photographing mundane events is having them published online as commodities offered to regular/occasional viewers (bloggers and SNS-users discuss this fact openly). Many young people no longer try to avoid visibility but rather ask for it because of the affective pleasures and benefits associated with it: tying bonds of friendship and love (Lasèn and Gómez-Cruz 2009). Albrechtslund (2007, 2008) suggested that in SNSs, supplying information about yourself isn't a 'price' paid for participation, but rather voluntary sharing, a source of sociability and exhibitionist pleasure. However, the pleasantness of exposure presupposes a culture where audiences are a good in demand, competed for in sundry arenas. Thus, unlike Albrechtslund, I'd like to emphasise that exposure to the gaze is not autotelic, but a stake within a certain social game, an illusio specific to the field in Bourdieus terms (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:98-9,115-117). Interviewees believe that 'everyone wants to be famous': they use documentation for self-publicity, and gauge their rating/attention as an index for self-value. When they seemingly subject themselves to non-agential power in the Foucauldian sense, they trade it for agentic power in the Bourdeuvian sense of power-qua-capital.

Indeed, in order to gain attention people do all sorts of things: act silly, expose their bodies, share private moments, etc. These public performances have a price, but one that some people are willing to pay, since visibility is simultaneously price and reward. Turning yourself and your life-events into commodities in the attention-market is indeed a clear case of self-objectification (Hearn 2008), but not of false consciousness (Schwarz 2010). People are not duped when they increasingly experience visibility as an object of struggle, an indicator and instrument of status rather than an
oppressive force. It may be rightly contended, that those who profit most from this visibility are sites' operators, who capitalize on user-generated content (Hearn 2008); and that teenagers may pay high prices for their self-exposure, e.g. when joining the job-market (Albrechtslund 2007). But even if critics are right that 'visibility for attention' is a bad deal, it's still a rational attempt of social actors to use their resources for achieving their goals (e.g. celebritiness-status). This voluntary exposure to unpredictable audiences is a strategy distinctly different from modern bourgeois privacy, yet it's a choice, an active performance of self-presentation rather than a loss of privacy and control (Lasén and Gómez-Cruz 2009). In effect, this strategy is extremely rational: by photographing everyday events for online publication, teenagers rationally exploit every single entertaining/intriguing moment in their lives in order to extract capital—not the economic capital collected by sites' operators, but rather social capital for themselves.

Attempting to analyse the economy of visibility without referring to the desirability of attention is necessarily partial, biased and condescending. If visibility is a path for achieving desirable attention, status and social ties, then saying that it only weakens and subjugates those photographed is highly problematic, no better than an anthropologist who would claim that shells are worthless, and natives only waste their time and effort while engaging in their collection and exchange. Whereas visibility may restrict people's opportunities, it may also be manipulated to create new opportunities and even turn into a stake in its own right.

**From Panopticism to Performativity**

Having declined the panoptic framework, we must still recognize that the gaze of the potential audiences embodied in the camera influences the behaviours of those photographed. While being documented, people often try to behave as they would like to be seen by an imaginary audience, according to their assumptions concerning the video's future viewers and usage. However, this influence should be regarded as performativity, not to be confused with totalizing discipline.
Thus, according to my interviewees, filming fights encourages more macho behaviour among participants. Minor physical or verbal assaults may turn into public humiliations once filmed, inviting an appropriate response. Similar developments are evident in body-piercing and tattooing. These take place in private spaces, with only the body-artist, the client, and occasionally 1-2 escorts. In recent years, the act is often filmed by an escort. Videos are shared with friends, and occasionally published online and viewed by hundreds of viewers. Three interviewees told me that boys also compare their videos and their documented reactions, laughing at each other's facial expressions, screams, pain reactions, etc. The rules of this coming-of-age ritual have thus changed: one's courage is no longer tested merely in one's readiness to get tattooed or pierced, but also in one's tranquillity during the act. The ritual gains a strongly performative aspect: it actually takes place in front of one's whole community, plus an unpredictable number of strangers. Like the tattoo itself, the impression made by one's behaviour is not forgotten, but outlives the act in an objectified form.

Since performativity is always conducted for an (imagined) audience, the photographer's identity often determines the impact on behaviour: according to interviewees, the same camera pulled out by a simple soldier or a minor commander sent by the battalion's commander would encourage shifting into amused behaviour register or a formal/heroic one, respectively.

**Conclusions**

The convergence of the camera, the mobile phone and the internet has led to the development of a new techno-social regime of visibility. This new regime informs power relations, especially among young people who use these technologies intensively, yet this impact cannot be subsumed under the reductive notion of 'discipline'. Indeed, the objectification of many events into highly-credible lasting and reproducible data-objects, accessible to absent parties, poses some difficulties (avoiding information-leakage across life-spheres) and dilemmas (the will to document sensitive moments,
share them and brag, versus the risk of materials being exposed to undesired audiences) for those involved. Yet, this does not amount to non-agentic flow of indiscriminate information. People choose what they document and whether to share it, and have a say over when others may document them and what may be done with these materials. The camera-phone is not a faceless totalizing machine. People are cognizant not of its panoptic power, but rather of the moral judgement by themselves and others. Photography is subjected to collective regulation: negotiation in which different actors bolster their conflicting claims with moral justifications and with their social standing within the peer-group. The moral schemes people apply in negotiation rely on humanist/liberal concepts of possessive individualism, hence they usually defend people's right for at least a certain degree of control over information concerning their lives. As total transparency is still nearly-unanimously perceived as disastrous, regulation is a social tool for neutralising much of the camera-phone's dystopic potential.

It is not my intention to suggest that documentation doesn't influence behaviour—it undoubtedly imbue events with performativity, yet its impact is not uniform: sometimes documentation invites compliance, and sometimes defiance, sometimes serenity and sometimes amusement, since the camera is a delegation of the agency of the documentation's imagined audiences assumed by those photographed.

The empirical data gathered in this study are clear enough to compel us to reconsider some of our theoretical assumptions on power and technologies-of-visibility. This study is exploratory in nature: it offers a typology of different ways in which photography and power interact, but no quantitative data on their distribution. Large-scale research is needed, for example, to reveal whether different (class/life-style/age) groups have distinct moral norms (e.g. opt-in vs. opt-out), or tend towards distinct justifications (e.g. intellectual property vs. dignity).

One highly-promising direction for further research is social networks analysis (SNA). Above I
demonstrated that online sociability makes it harder to present different personae to different segments of the egocentric social network by sharing different information items with each. The full meaning of this tendency may be explored in future research in the SNA tradition, which views power differentials as the effect of structural positions and differential accessibility to resources (including information). Power is thus concentrated in positions of exclusive brokerage over structural holes (i.e. control over the single path between two sub-networks: Burt 2005). Whereas in pre-internet urban societies people were often the only bridge between their different social circles, Facebook and Flickr create non-human bridges, taking from users their privileged position of brokerage between these sub-networks. SNA thus offers a framework for understanding the new visibility beyond the panoptic paradigm, which deserves further research. Seen from the SNA perspective, online publication of photographic documentary materials may function as an equalizer. My data indicate that some social information formerly circulated unevenly, only among trusted friends or gossip-networks, can now be accessed online by everyone: a party can't remain secret from those not invited; and when bloggers publish daily photos of friends they meet in the afternoons, changes in social-relationships become highly transparent to the whole community. This is not a panopticon, as documentation is partial, strategic and lacks any disciplining effect—but if indeed future research shows it bypasses structural bridges, depriving popular and well-connected people of exclusive brokerage, and democratizing social information, this development does have effect on power structures within teenage societies.

Based on my findings, two popular theses cannot be maintained: the 'participatory panopticon' model (claiming that transparency strengthens social control, reduces leeway for individuals, and influences their actions in a predestined direction); and the 'sousveillance' model\(^4\) (claiming that the democratization of photography facilitates democratization of power structures). In order to better

\(^4\) A thesis propagated not only by Mann and his collaborators but also by contemporary Deleuzian internet scholars, and large segments of the citizen-journalism literature.
understand how photography-related socio-technological practices remould power relations, we need a more complex and pragmatic perspective, which takes into consideration that documentation is partial, strategic, and may be creatively integrated in new practices of symbolic and actual resistance to institutional power, just as it may be wielded by quasi-governmental agents to strengthen social control. Furthermore, both the participatory panopticon and the sousveillance models assume that power is applied on those photographed (although not necessarily by those photographing). But visibility it is not always and not merely a trap. It may also be a gift or an object of desire. In some social games, being the object of surveillance amounts to winning, and social scientists should not dismiss these facts as 'false consciousness'.

Foucault maintained that in modernity, governmental power no longer lies in the spectacular gaze of the many at the few, but rather in the gaze of the few at the many. If it was ever an adequate description, it is no longer so: in blogs and SNSs, individuals are simultaneously viewers and objects of viewing, as well as moral subjects who regulate visibility. This visibility doesn't turn people into mere objects. This is subjectual visibility, rather than objectual one. The gaze controls subjects, but is also controlled by them, exerts power on those watched—but also confers them with power, and is always restricted and negotiated. The economy of visibility has transformed, and above I shed some light on a few of its major transformations, but it still remains an economy: a field of human action, which produces objects of desire and tools for struggling over them, strategies and counter-strategies; a new game, but still a game for humans to play.

References


