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Styling the Surveillance Self in Fashion Media: Strategies of Sexualization and Sentimentality

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Résumé de l'article

The burgeoning market for wearable technologies with surveillance capabilities is reorienting our relationship with our bodies, privacy, and digital data. This expanding sector has prompted an exploration into how the surveillance of the individual body has been normalized more broadly in the fashion sphere through its visual communications practice. To this end, a multimodal critical discourse analysis following an adapted framework examined a series of photographic editorials and identified two overarching trends that characterize the representation of surveillance in female-focused fashion consumption contexts. Firstly, by adopting a visual style that uses analog aesthetics and obsolescent technology, contemporary surveillance's obtrusive and expansive reality is obscured and replaced with hauntological nostalgia. Secondly, by framing the act of self-surveillance via screen technologies as erotically charged and potentially empowering, the body's surveillance is celebrated rather than scrutinized. With close reference to two specific case studies, I demonstrate how these visual treatments can be interpreted as downplaying concerns about privacy and assisting in accelerating the collapse between public and private spheres. I argue that the fashion media's aesthetic softening of surveillance has culturally foreshadowed an expansion of surveillance capitalism manifesting in the current interest in, and demand for, fashionable wearables.

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Article

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Abstract

The burgeoning market for wearable technologies with surveillance capabilities is reorienting our relationship with our bodies, privacy, and digital data. This expanding sector has prompted an exploration into how the surveillance of the individual body has been normalized more broadly in the fashion sphere through its visual communications practice. To this end, a multimodal critical discourse analysis following an adapted framework examined a series of photographic editorials and identified two overarching trends that characterize the representation of surveillance in female-focused fashion consumption contexts. Firstly, by adopting a visual style that uses analog aesthetics and obsolescent technology, contemporary surveillance's obtrusive and expansive reality is obscured and replaced with hauntological nostalgia. Secondly, by framing the act of self-surveillance via screen technologies as erotically charged and potentially empowering, the body's surveillance is celebrated rather than scrutinized. With close reference to two specific case studies, I demonstrate how these visual treatments can be interpreted as downplaying concerns about privacy and assisting in accelerating the collapse between public and private spheres. I argue that the fashion media's aesthetic softening of surveillance has culturally foreshadowed an expansion of surveillance capitalism manifesting in the current interest in, and demand for, fashionable wearables.

Introduction

The growing market for wearable technologies with surveillance capabilities and their ensuing privacy complications is already reorienting our relationship with self-surveillance practices, personal data, and what is considered fashionable. This development has prompted scholarly explorations into the experiences, risks, and possible rewards of self-tracking (Canali, Schiaffonati, and Aliverti 2022; Feng et al. 2020; Hepworth 2019; Herron 2022), but fewer enquiries have contemplated how self-tracking became so culturally ubiquitous in the first instance. In this paper, I argue that fashion media have long celebrated the convergence of the body and surveillance technology in their editorial and advertorial outputs, presenting primarily voyeuristic or sentimental interpretations of surveillance. This precedent has subtly laid the groundwork for the public acceptance of wearable technology (henceforth wearables), defined as "devices that can be worn on our bodies and track several activities and parameters" (Canali, Schiaffonati, and Aliverti 2022: 1). Although these products have increasingly intrusive functionalities with complex privacy implications, they are continuously and often unquestionably welcomed into female-focused consumer contexts. This creep is most evident in the fashion press and consumer technology, where wearables are presented as exclusively helpful and empowering auto-optimization tools. Via this commercial proliferation of wearables, the individual body's surveillance has become habitual, unremarkable, and appealing as wearables are cast as instruments of self-improvement.

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I suggest that exploring the fashion media's perspective through the paradigm of Shoshanna Zuboff's (2015, 2019) surveillance capitalism allows us to uncover the specific symbolic strategies used to bolster favorable representations of surveillance. Although what Zuboff (2019: 15) terms "surveillance capitalism… is a logic, not a [specific] technology," wearables are one of its most tangible and accessible manifestations. Surveillance capitalism is defined as a "pervasive digital apparatus in which all human experience… is claimed as free raw material for behavioral modification and profit" (Power 2022: 2). This framework makes clear the risks of increased surveillance coupled with advances in technology, as all areas of life can be instrumentalized and commercialized. Zuboff (2019) describes how digital surveillance was being used to "instrumentalize… human behavior, for the purposes of modification and monetization" (Zuboff 2019: 260). She points to the expansive and unchecked growth of the surveillance capitalism phenomenon since the turn of the millennium. Far from prompting a moral panic about the new precedents this Silicon Valley model of "social ordering" (Zuboff 2019: 260) set, she argues that surveillance capitalism has steadily become the standard framework of modern daily life.

Wearables gather large amounts of personal data, but what these data are used for and who has access to them is often unknown to the end consumer, as outlined by Coldron et al. (2023). Increasingly trend-conscious designs further the appeal of these devices and position them as a covetable accessory like any other; one article promoting wearables as gifts uses the subtitle "[The] integration [of the body and technology] never looked so chic" (Phillips 2017). Where wearables were once restricted to a niche market for fitness tracking devices couched in the scientifically reassuring marketing language of the healthcare sector, recent collaborations between fashion brands and technology companies have encouraged their aspirational positioning and subsequent mass-market consumption (Coldron et al. 2023). Wearables now boast a functionality beyond the practical and can act as a conscious fashion statement. Moreover, these devices reward the "boundarylessness" (Zuboff 2019: 289) of consumers who wear them without considering, interrogating, or knowing the privacy implications associated with the hardware. The act of self-monitoring has a longstanding genealogy in the fashion sphere as it relates to womenswear, beauty, and wellness (Auty and Elliott 1998; Gibbings and Taylor 2010; Lennon, Davis, and Fairhurst 1988); however, its intensifying digitization with the proliferation of smart wearables raises questions about data privacy and even behavioral agency.

Given that wearables are a rapidly expanding sector, despite their moral complexities and regulatory dilemmas (Herron 2022), it seems timely to revisit how surveillance has been previously treated in the fashion sphere. Fashion images are semiotically rich and particularly well placed to illuminate connections between the body, gender, and technology (Kohrs 2021; Rogers 2024) as they often reflect broader cultural shifts in mood and custom. Although scholars have identified the potential of fashion garments as a countersurveillance intervention with varying degrees of success (Calvi 2023; Monahan 2015), the representation of surveillance in fashion imagery has tended to espouse less critical interpretations. A discussion of the convergences between the fashioned body and surveillance capitalism foregrounds the critical analysis of editorial and advertorial case studies sampled from fashion publications from 2000 to the present day.

Following a multimodal critical discourse analysis, this qualitative study identifies two dominant approaches to representing surveillance in contemporary fashion imagery. Firstly, surveillance is treated with sentimentality, defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) as a feeling "governed by… sensibility or emotional idealism." Whilst nostalgia refers to idealized sentimental feelings about the past, hauntology refers to "a [specific] sensibility… preoccupied with how technology materialize[s] memory" as well as a "fascination… with the sounds [and visual markers] of these technologies breaking down" or glitching (Whyman 2019: 211). Through a hauntological visual treatment, surveillance is represented as out of step with its current technological reality, and therefore privacy issues and risks of misuse are downplayed. Secondly, surveillance is sexualized by playing to the voyeuristic aspects of technologized surveillance, such as self, covert, and amateur capture. This sexualization of the theme contributes to discourses of

surveillance as erotically charged and "driven by [the] narcissistic objectification of [the] self" (Vanderwees 2019: 23). By understanding how fashion communicators have interpreted surveillance, I suggest the sector's representational tendencies have underpinned the popularity of wearables and conclude by emphasizing the need for continued criticality in the face of surveillance capitalism as it is absorbed into mainstream consumer contexts. Ultimately, this identification and critical analysis of visual techniques makes visible the role of surveillance and self-surveillance in daily life and creates an improved awareness of its implications.

Surveillance Capitalism Is in Style

The capitalist instrumentalization of surveillance is apparent across multiple aspects of the fashion sector. Belinda Johnson (2021: 330) explored surveillance dynamics in the private retail sector, assessing how "complicated dynamics of power infuse bodily practices of fashionable femininity" within a retail setting. She concludes that these spaces oscillate between fostering panoptic and confessional atmospheres based on the sustained surveillance of shopping environments and their employees. She notes an intimacy forged between retail workers and their customers as the private sphere is simulated in changing rooms and personal shopping suites (Johnson 2021). This complication of the public and the personal has clear ethical implications for how surveillance is enacted, as our experience and acceptance of surveillance is often context-dependent. Further paradoxes at the intersection of fashion and surveillance include the twin promises of bodily emancipation and control proposed by high-end yoga-wear branding (Mora and Berry 2021) and clothes and makeup that conceal identity to evade intelligent surveillance systems (Calvi 2023) clashing with countersurveillance proposals that often use extravagant and eye-catching designs to this same end. Torin Monahan (2015) has eloquently critiqued this necessary "masking of identity" through anonymity or dressing up to assert individual resistance through fashionable camouflage. Both Calvi (2023) and Monahan (2015) note that the dress modifications of celebrated countersurveillance designs are highly conspicuous, so although they may successfully evade surveillance technology, they are unlikely to go unnoticed by security agents on the ground. They, therefore, privilege certain bodies whose whiteness and status offer an inherent form of protection from the "discriminatory logics of surveillance societies" (Monahan 2015: 159). Fashion designers, communicators, and scholars have not hesitated to engage with the subject of surveillance, noting its often paradoxical and layered considerations.

There are clear connections between the fashion consumer sphere and surveillance practices and technologies. In retail settings, video management systems (VMS) are particularly pervasive and are used to track footfall, a process commonly called "retaillance" (Elnahla and Neilson 2021). In addition to recording customer numbers, VMS are employed as a form of predictive policing, a security measure against theft, an evidence-collection device, and even to monitor shop employees (Safeguard Systems 2020). VMS can also be used to inform business practice. For example, enhanced CCTV systems can track and predict customer behavior in-store (Collins 2023) and identify popular products through heat-mapping, directly influencing product development and visual merchandising strategies (*In Security Magazine* n.d.). Over one billion cameras are estimated to be used for video surveillance worldwide (Kwet 2020). With large swathes of the global population now operating under these highly monitored conditions, the ubiquity of these cameras has seen the aesthetics of video surveillance appear in new contexts. For example, CCTV-style footage has crept into fashion media, with promotional films, editorials, and lookbooks mimicking grainy footage, replete with timestamps and glitches (MacDonald 2018; NOWNESS 2018; SHOWStudio 2014). This visual style is at odds with established conventions in fashion branding and communication, which generally adopt high production value techniques and aim to conceal the visibility of image capture processes, focusing on a compelling and polished final shot that appears perfectly sharp and impeccably composed. This contradiction will be explored further as nostalgic visual approaches are identified in fashions' visual treatment of surveillance.

Figure 1: *Harvey Nichols (2015). Love freebies? Get them legally. Rewards by Harvey Nichols. YouTube.*

Fashion media also tends to lean into the seductive, forbidden, and fetishistic aspects of being watched. Luxury department store Harvey Nichols (2015) took the use of CCTV aesthetics a step further, using actual footage captured in-store of shoplifters for a controversial digital advertising campaign titled "Love freebies? Get them legally" (see Figure 1). This conflation of surveillance and fashion may be unsurprising as fashion communicators have long explored and exalted the "paranoid pleasure of being watched" (Vanderwees 2019). The exclusivity of luxury products and the criminal lengths one might go to in order to obtain them only reinforce their desirability. Fashions' flirtation with deviant themes such as voyeurism and criminality make visible aspects of the surveillance dynamic that generally remain private or hidden. These images also anchor these motifs to styled, gendered bodies, which make for helpful, if polysemous, units for analysis. The contradictions that define the intersection of surveillance and fashion are unlikely to be easily resolved. However, drawing attention to existing tensions can help cultivate criticality concerning surveillance practices as they are represented in the consumer sphere and ultimately build immunity to the allure of wearables within surveillance capitalisms' extractive paradigm.

Accordingly, in the following section, I outline my methodological approach to identifying and analyzing fashion images that deal with the theme of surveillance.

Methodology

Fashion media can help us understand how surveillance has been culturally framed for several reasons. Firstly, fashion images almost always involve portraying bodies as surveillance subjects, making power dynamics explicit and visible despite intensifying digitization and abstraction. These representations illuminate dynamics and raise considerations that may otherwise go unnoticed by subjects now habituated to the highly securitized conditions of daily life. Secondly, these representations are gendered, racialized, styled, and posed, suggesting specific interpretations of the surveillance dynamic that can be scrutinized. Andersen and Moller (2013: 217) have previously used a visual studies approach to analyze photographs, which reveal the "representational codes dominant in the visualization of security policy and surveillance."

They conclude that by operating outside genre boundaries, imagery can "avoid… involuntary incorporation into... [the dominant] regime" by drawing viewer attention to "structures and institutions" rather than individual subjects (Andersen and Moller 2013: 217). However, their choice to examine landscape photographs devoid of humans left crucial connections between gender, the body, and surveillance unexplored. Because wearables embrace, rather than evade, surveillance practices by drawing them closer to the physical body, focusing on bodily representations is an appropriate avenue for inquiry.

I identified case studies by conducting a keyword search across magazine archives and online databases to identify fashion imagery associated with surveillance dating back to 2000 (when CCTV first became commercially viable). A mixture of editorials and adverts were identified in the sample. Fashion editorials are narrative-led image series that incorporate commercial elements without falling under the banner of traditional advertising. They are promotional images but have not been paid for by any brand and must reflect the tone of the magazine they appear in. Advertising campaigns are conceived by a single brand and placed in selected magazines by purchasing advertising space. Both photographic formats aim to resonate with the zeitgeist and set the tone for aspirational cultural ideals (De Perthuis 2020). Therefore, their analysis can identify topics of cultural interest that may echo, reinforce, or creatively reimagine the contents of mainstream discourse.

I employed a critical multimodal analysis adapting Kress and Van Leeuwens' (2006) proposed framework for a theory of visual grammar to analyze the sample. Multimodal analysis offers an adaptable model that considers the visuals and textual interplay of modern communicative practices that previous methods have overlooked. For example, scholars have noted the tendency to miss analytical steps in semiotic methodologies, stating that more consideration should be given to denotative processes (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2004). David Machin and Andrea Mayr (2012) remind us that it would be bizarre if most texts explicitly stated the suggestible information conveyed by images. This subtlety is particularly instrumental in fashion contexts, where the seductive power of the visuals tends to be created through appeals to emotion rather than instructional texts (Shinkle 2013).

The analysis first identifies an images' representational narrative and interpersonal metafunctions. Narrative metafunctions synthesize the actions within an image and their possible meanings. The interpersonal metafunction is split into a discussion of gaze and social distance. Images either "demand" to meet our gaze with the subjects making eye contact with the camera or "offer" us something to look at voyeuristically. The social distances of an image establish the degree of intimacy or detachment between the subject and the viewer. These steps are summarized in the table below (see Table 1).

Metafunctions	**Realizations in Images**
Representational meanings	Narrative: Images that involve actions.
Interpersonal meanings	Gaze: Direct and indirect gaze of participants in the image. "Demand" or "Offer" Social Distance: The social distance of an image establishes the relationship of the subject to the viewer, ranging from the intimate/vulnerable (offering up the subject for scrutiny) to the confident (demanding the attention of the viewer).

Table 1: *Framework for analyzing the metafunctions of an image adapted by Rogers (2024) from Kress and Van Leeuwens (2006).*

The narrative metafunctions are further broken down in the Table 2 into participants, actors, goals, and interaction vectors that direct action between different elements in an image. This framework prioritizes attaining a "context-bound veracity" (Barker and Galasiński 2001: 32) before engaging in further analysis and contextualization of the imagery to help counteract the issue of subjectivity. Narrative metafunctions frame the degree of agency and power of the subjects within an image.

Concept	Description
Narrative	Narrative structures in an image
Participants	People, objects, things, and places that represent the subject matter of an image
Actor	A participant that is the active part in an interaction between participants
Goal	A participant that is the receiving part in an interaction between participants
Interaction vector	An implicit or explicit visual structure representing an interaction between an actor and a goal

Table 2: *Narrative structures (Hove 2007).*

My sampling strategy identified thirteen photoshoots dealing with surveillance for in-depth critical analysis. With close reference to two examples, *Hell is Here* (2016) shot by Alice Rosati for *The Ingenue* magazine and Atte Tanner's *Border Control* (2020), I will discuss two overarching themes representative of the sample. Both editorials capture the sentimental treatment and sexualization of surveillance recurrent across the sample. The results are discussed thematically in the following sections to contextualize them in relation to surveillance studies. Ultimately, the analysis demonstrates how surveillance practices have been aestheticized and celebrated in the fashion sphere, foregrounding the widespread acceptance of wearables despite persistent moral and privacy concerns.

The Hauntological Appeal of the Analogue

Firstly, I argue that surveillance practices have been repeatedly sentimentalized through hauntological visual treatments in fashion media. This is epitomized by a nostalgic revisitation of analog aesthetics, including outdated technology and videotape-inspired post-production. Surveillance capitalism was able to expand unchecked during a time of intense but nebulous national anxiety following the 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers (Foster and McChesney 2014; Zuboff 2019). Top-down, security-focused impositions of surveillance capitalism, such as airport screening, biometric capture, and wiretapping, represented a salve to create certainty, restore order, and reassure via visible security infrastructure and technological interventions. The imitation of videotape technology across the sample employs analog aesthetics as comfortingly familiar motifs, bolstering the sense that technology is making threats tangible, manageable, and avoidable through sophisticated preemption and monitoring processes. This aesthetic approach can be characterized as hauntological. Although the term was coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida (1994), Mark Fisher (2012) has more recently applied the concept of hauntology to popular culture texts to define a specific brand of nostalgia.

Hauntology has been accused of encouraging representational stasis in which a "return to familiar aesthetic and cultural forms" (Fisher 2012:18) obstructs the conception, visualization, and exploration of alternative futures. This critique is relevant to the sample as this aesthetic treatment of surveillance neutralizes and beautifies it. Instead of exploring what a world that rejects the surveillance of the body might look like, in these editorials, the interpretation of surveillance is creatively adapted and reframed through the analog, which reinforces a sense of control and risk minimization. Hauntology necessitates a "complete inability to

imagine a future different from today" (Reardon and Goulios 2022) and effectuates a sentimentalized surrender to the motifs and markers of the past. As such, the analog becomes a visual representation of this resistive futility. As Zuboff (2019: 11–31) points out, the "unprecedented asymmetries in… power" that define surveillance capitalism "aim to reverse, subdue, impede and even destroy the individual urge toward… self-determination." The unilateral claim on data made by surveillance capitalism makes clear the chasm between the mass capture capabilities of its logic and the near impossibility of individuals to opt-out. Existing outside of the surveillance apparatus appears to be an unimaginable task without sacrificing most of the rights of the contemporary neoliberal subject, including (but not limited to) mobility, economic agency, access to healthcare, and education. A world outside of surveillance capitalism is difficult or perhaps impossible to envision. Subjects represented in the sample are either oblivious or helpless to their monitoring—as in Tanner's (2020) interpretation—or must consciously reverse the imaging process—as in Rosati's (2016) images—to turn the cameras back on themselves in a deliberately provocative act and regain a sense of power when faced with the surveillance apparatus.

The specific case of closed-circuit television (CCTV) forms is worth further exploration as its recurring adoption in fashion media shows a tendency towards analog aesthetics. CCTV is one of the most materially obvious and culturally accepted forms of surveillance technology, and its introduction in the Global North in the mid-to-late 1990s occurred parallel to the transition from analog to digital photographic forms. Because of this and an accompanying moral panic about urban crime (Hier 2004) and terrorism (Lawson and Stedmon 2017), critiques of CCTV were arguably subsumed by a broader metamorphosis in imaging practice from the primarily personal to the socially engaged, digitized, and networked. CCTV systems now enjoy ubiquity and assume cultural legitimacy in public and domestic contexts. While they remain widely used, videotapes are now rarely used to collect and store footage, and systems generally operate digitally. Although CCTV camera systems do not appear explicitly in any of the sampled images, the visual markers of the format are used as a nostalgic stylistic choice, including grainy footage, timestamps in the corner, and a blue tint.

These hauntological motifs reinforce a sense of control as surveillance is materially represented and made visible in anachronistic but familiar, everyday devices. In *Hell is Here* (Rosati 2016), the participants of the image are the model subject, the outdated television screen, the chrome mid-century modern inspired leather office chair, and her handheld video camcorder. The props are functionally obsolete for the mid-2010s, and a subtle sepia color tint suggests vintage image capture. In addition to *Hell is Here* (Rosati 2016), several photoshoots within the sample have been edited to resemble videotape formats, while others include old-fashioned, bulky screen monitors showing video footage. Using analog aesthetics and props rather than sleek, digitalized ones represents the revival of the video format in outdated appliances. In Rosati's (2016) images, the television is outdated, using technology out of step with contemporary standards to reinforce the disjunction between the model and her repeating screen image. This anachronism emphasizes how the "direct link between the object and the representation of the object is disrupted and obscured" (Ferris 2003: 52). Although we understand fashion images to be intrinsically artificial, the videotape aesthetic further removes the viewer from immediate reality, distancing them from naturalistic imagery in favor of a more impressionistic rendering.

Figure 2: *Alice Rosati,* Hell is Here*, 2016. Digital photograph. The Ingenue. Image courtesy of the artist.*

The model is the active participant as she uses the props to broadcast her image on-screen in a neutral setting. The goal of the image is the television screen as it receives Peyton's image, shown literally with an abundance of connective wires. The vector of interaction occurs between the model subject and camcorder to define what is displayed on-screen, drawing our attention to multiple representations occurring within a single shot. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) remind us that the degree to which images present themselves as authentic has implications for their meaning, so the taped elements explicitly stress the artificiality of the surveyed screen self. This second order of separation echoes the transformation of human bodies into abstracted data—referred to by Irma Van der Ploeg (2012) as "Datafication"—a severing process intrinsic to intelligent surveillance systems. The datafication of the body separates the physical from the digital, turning embodied subjects into information that can be transmitted electronically. This impressionistic style of videotape footage is used evocatively, drawing on its sensual and textural qualities. The blurry footage contrasts with impeccably styled models throughout the sample, thereby lessening the intimidation of their put-together glamour and suggestive poses. This type of tape is "subbroadcast quality" (West 2005: 83) and defies the conventions of fashion editorial as a polished, high-production value medium. Having said this, low-quality video footage could be seen (somewhat paradoxically) as a logical visual style for fashion photography, which generally aims to capture the sensual qualities of clothing, such as texture, movement, and color tonality.

Figure 3: *Alice Rosati,* Hell is Here*, 2016. Digital photograph. The Ingenue. Image courtesy of the artist.*

The charm of analog formats rejects the sweeping data-processing abstractions of the contemporary surveillance apparatus and instead represents discrete and outdated videotape technology. Although some case studies could appear to challenge the aggressive digitization of surveillance by returning its mechanisms to an outdated technological form, it could be argued that they are instead glamorizing it by "initiat[ing] a nostalgic politics of return" to simpler times (Lafleur 2012: 90). While today's surveillance sector is defined by the "desire to bring systems together… with such combinations providing for exponential increases in… surveillance capacity" (Haggerty and Ericson 2000: 610), analog techniques are manageable, singular, and therefore conceived as more innocuous. While videotape is a distinct, linear unit of information that can be more easily controlled and traced, contemporary surveillance mechanisms are layered and "combine… cumulative knowledge" across technological and spatial strata (Haggerty and Ericson 2000: 611).

In summary, I suggest that the return to the analog identified across these images downplays the threat of intrusive technologies (Coldron et al. 2023) as they are increasingly integrated into our daily experience. As Amy West (2005: 83) rightly points out, videotape implies "an amateur (thus innocent) recording medium." The sample images combine a faux authenticity with "a reassuring [visual] rhetoric that counteracts the anxiety of the new" (Olivier 2011: 134) and the opaque. This appropriation of analog CCTV-inspired visual styles in the context of high fashion's perpetual present blends an evidential, documentary approach with hauntology. The resulting images deny the growing reach of surveillance systems and dampen fears about the intensifying interoperability of AI-enabled apparatuses with analytic and predictive abilities. In imitating the visual style of videotapes, the images offer video surveillance a sentimental second life in fashion texts, contributing to defining what is desirable and aspirational (De Perthuis 2020). The videotape medium's obsolescence and conception as a discrete material unit imbue it with an anachronistic charm well suited to fashion photography's remit to appeal to emotions such as nostalgia. Through the hauntological appeal of

the analog, I propose that these representations sidestep the reality of the sophisticated and interoperable contemporary surveillance apparatus.

Sexualizing the Surveillance Dynamic

Secondly, I argue that, in the contemporary fashion mediascape, the surveillance of the body is celebrated and sexualized rather than scrutinized despite the inherently alienating nature of the surveillance dynamic and the issue of gendered power imbalances. Derrick Jensen and George Draffan (2004: 26) describe a necessarily oppositional dualism between the watcher and the watched. They draw a symbolic parallel between this and the gendered voyeuristic gaze as it mimics the same "dyad of unchanged subject gazing at an object to be explored at an emotional distance" (Jensen and Draffan 2004: 26). They remind us that "[authentic] relationships do not exist in the atomistic, mechanistic… split-off, virtual world of the panopticon" (Jensen and Draffan: 66). Therefore, bodies viewed onscreen, from a distance, or both fall under an "anti-social and isolating" gaze (Russo 2010: 139). In this sense, the surveillance dynamic has an inherently objectifying quality that could be easily mapped onto the passive or disempowered representations of women recurrent in fashion media (Bright 2012; Ruggerone 2006). However, in these images this negative interpretation is less evident and replaced by a positive reclamation or acceptance of the surveillance gaze.

Figure 4: *Alice Rosati,* Hell is Here. *Digital photograph. The Ingenue. Image courtesy of the artist.*

In *Hell is Here* (Rosati 2016), surveillance is repositioned as a personal and playful act. In these images, the fashion space attempts to reorient the surveillance gaze and to represent the model as willing and complicit in its repossession. Acting as a reclamation of screen-based recording technologies by collapsing the videographer and subject into one, the images imply that self-surveillance can be celebratory and

exhibitionistic. This reflects how fashion images generally incubate aspirational models of femininity that embrace the scrutiny of the body and invite "incursion into undefended space" rather than question it (Zuboff 2019: 138–139). In these photographs, the self-possessed model plays with a handheld video camera to capture and watch real-time footage of herself. West (2005: 85) describes how the "handheld [camera] is the embodiment of human point-of-view image capture… in contrast [to] the mechanical unblinking eye of the wall-mounted surveillance camera." This first-person capture has longstanding associations with the handheld camcorder, which suggests heightened authenticity and intimacy. In this example, the videographer is also the subject, capturing her perspective and erasing the opacity between the watcher and the watched. Because lack of transparency is a "crucial dimension for maintaining power" in surveillance scenarios (Koskela 2002: 270), practices of self-scrutiny disrupt the assumption that maintaining a surveillance society relies on the separation of subjects from the mechanisms used to monitor them. The act of self-surveillance is framed here as not only acceptable but also enjoyable.

In Rosati's (2016) editorial, the subject is pictured as having agency over the recording technology used as a prop within the photographs. Television screens and video cameras are included explicitly within the frame, the opposite of covert surveillance technologies that carry negative connotations of non-consensual capture or espionage. The subject flirts with the sexually exploitative potential of video surveillance without appearing fearful or uncomfortable. Because the explicit physical presence of these technologies generally prescribes appropriate behavior (Hall, Monahan, and Reeves 2016), her sexually charged poses confront this expectation as she refuses to act modestly or politely. The conventional performative response to the awareness of surveillance is discarded in favor of confident, suggestive posturing. The multiple screens fragmenting the model's body introduce video surveillance as "not only a technology of control… [but also as a] medi[um] of self-reflection and self-awareness" (Crandall and Armitage 2005: 33). Because the footage is in full view of the model's gaze, it suggests a self-conscious enjoyment of being filmed. Surveillance is remodeled as a "technology of the self" (Giroux 2008: 291) rather than the state, blurring the boundaries between the public/panoramic and the private/personal.

The proxemics of *Hell is Here* (Rosati 2016) fluctuate between a demanding and offering gaze, displaying a range of social distances from the detached to intimate close-ups. The viewer's gaze is met directly by the model in some shots or secondhand via the in-frame screen in others. This variation of social distances and orientations of gaze blur the lines between an intimate portrait and a detached, if real-time, screen image. The viewer is left uncertain of their relationship with the model, simulating an atomizing and alienating effect. This objectifying dynamic hints at the fetishist opportunities that accompany self-surveillance practices. Peter Weibel (2002: 208) notes that "the pleasure principle of the voyeur… and the exhibitionist… have shifted from private drives to public norms," evidencing how the expansion of surveillance has helped to legitimate and destigmatize modes of covert watching and self-exposure. By eroticizing this dynamic, the relationship between the watcher and the watched shifts to one better characterized as the voyeur and the exhibitionist. Interestingly, the motifs of the voyeur and the exhibitionist are heavily gendered in popular culture tropes, epitomized by the recurring motif of the peeping Tom and the sexually frustrated exhibitionist housewife undressing in full view of her younger male neighbor (Feasey 2012; Wise 2016). While the stereotype of the male peeping Tom is pathetic, furtive, and cringe-inducing, the exhibitionist woman is empowered, unapologetic, and self-celebratory. Echoing this cultural archetype, the inviting way the models turn the cameras back on themselves throughout the sample becomes a celebration of surveillance that goes far beyond its "quiescent acceptance" (Goold, Loader, and Thumala 2013: 986). Accepting that surveillance technologies foster a "sense of inevitability" (Zuboff 2019: 10) implies that embracing them as empowering self-imaging tools is the only logical option. Reclamation thereby becomes a substitute for rejection or resistance.

However, not all images that fetishize the surveillance dynamic do so in this way. *Border Control* (Tanner 2020) emphasizes a vulnerable dimension to surveillance subjects but maintains a sexualized dimension through fragmented snapshots of the model's exposed body. In *Border Control* (Tanner 2020), the

participants are the model and the technological infrastructure she is surrounded by. The model is shown unflinchingly complying with the technology that acts upon her, presenting her as a disempowered recipient. The wires act as an interaction vector to draw the viewer's eye to the model, and the screens in the center of the images converge the line of sight onto the model's fractured digital representation more than her whole physical person. The shoot's title invokes the space of the border and the will to control. This connotes the highly securitized nature of international travel, the role of impersonal smart facial recognition software in defining mobility, and the clinical, intimidating atmosphere that these processes create as we move through them as detached subjects. This is reinforced by the model's wide-eyed facial expression and the shoot's styling in sheer or military-style khaki clothing. Biometric technologies represent a "migration of surveillance capitalism from the online environment to the real world" (Zuboff 2019: 19), as their use by border forces and law enforcement agencies physically blocks or allows the movement of people across territories. This emphasizes the highly technologized nature of global travel and the dehumanizing effect of screen-imaging processes. Across the photo shoot, the subject is variously screened and digitally stripped, drawing attention to her fragility. There is no reclamation of the surveillance technologies here; it is just a quiet submission to them.

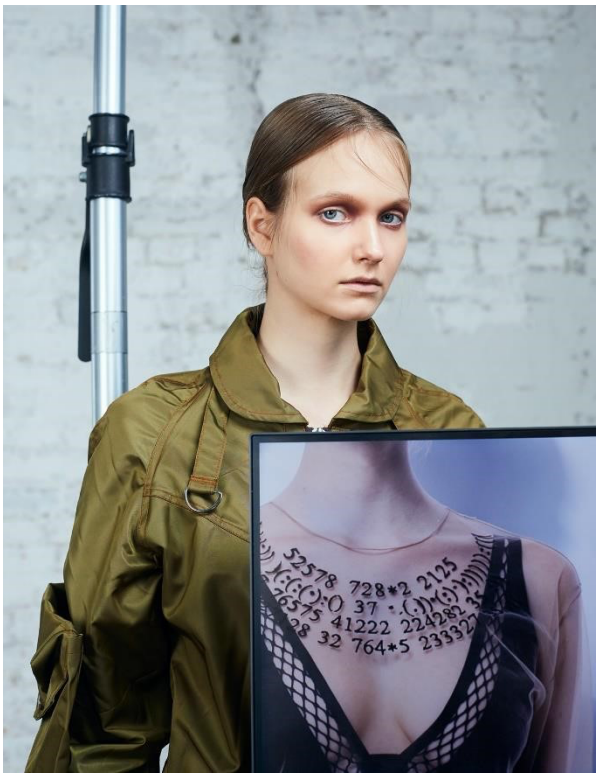

Figure 5: *Atte Tanner,* Border Control*, 2020. Digital photograph. Prime Magazine. Image courtesy of the artist.*

The orientation of gaze remains consistent across the shoot; the model makes direct eye contact with the camera lens, not only directly but also in the screened representations around her. Her gaze is expressionless and unconfrontational but does seem to ask the viewer to engage emotionally as she undergoes this unspecified testing, establishing an empathetic relationship between the viewer and the subject. Here, her vulnerability reflects the body as an "individuated container [of data]" (French and Smith 2016: 11) to offer up to the expansive and operationally opaque technology for scrutiny and sorting. In one shot, the model's styling in a nude-colored sheer top embroidered with a series of black numbers and symbols reinforces the datafication intrinsic to biometric technologies as they interpret human bodies numerically. In *Border Control* (Tanner 2020) we are voyeuristically invited to view what lies beneath the model's simple, practical

styling. The shoots' social distances range from the intimate (although arguably the intimacy of this specific frame is mitigated by its styling as a passport photograph or even a mugshot) to the far, in which we see the model's body from head-to-toe as it is scanned. The assumed boundary of the clothed body is no longer inviolable, with screens exposing what is under the model's utilitarian military-style jumpsuit. *Border Control* (Tanner 2020) reflects our powerlessness in relation to surveillance capitalism. We are aware of these technologies, but we rarely know how, where, for whom, and whether we can deem them a worthy intervention as informed citizens. This individual powerlessness is captured in the lone female subjects' vulnerability. Still, the images maintain a sexualized dimension as she is stripped and exposed on-screen for the viewer. This staging calls to mind controversies regarding back-scatter airport scanning machines that were criticized as invasive and unnecessarily revealing (Transport Security International 2023; Vij 2024).

The fragmentation of the body in Tanner's (2020) interpretation represents the disjunction between embodied experience and the after-effects of surveillance technology on our biometric data underpinned by semantic segmentation. Semantic segmentation refers to the digital process of categorizing individual pixels within an image into groups from which categorical labels can be established, for example, to recognize a group of pixels as a human face. The etymology of "segment" stems from the Latin "segmentum," meaning to cut, and the aggressive connotations of the word point to a certain finality. Once the imaged body is severed from its physical self, it is abstracted into data and sent somewhere to be submitted to opaque sorting processes. This body and data double can only be reconstituted by rejoining it with identifying markers of its originating individual. The visualized fragmentation of the body in *Border Control* (Tanner 2020) emphasizes the alienating processes of this mass-data capture. Several other photoshoots in the sample reflect this atomizing effect of datafication as "human experience [is claimed] as free raw material" for mostly unknown purposes (Zuboff 2019: 8). Tanner's (2020) technically skilled, brightly lit, high resolution images are hyperreal and unemotional. Unlike the previously discussed pictures that use analog aesthetics, Tanner's photographs make the digitized surveillance apparatus visible. The photographs do not, however, offer contextualization. A lack of localizing context clues within the studio space and the missing emblems on the subject's military-style uniform are ambiguous and do not communicate a context that might assist in justifying surveillance.

Figure 6: *Atte Tanner,* Border Control*, 2020. Digital photograph. Prime Magazine. Image courtesy of the artist.*

Finally, it is notable across the sample of images that surveillance is carried out with the subject's reluctant consent or active desire, presenting surveillance as inevitable or desirable. Firstly, suggestive styling and posture promote self-surveillance as a liberating project, pitching the lack of traceability and transparency of modern-day surveillance technologies as deepening the fetishistic aspects of watching and being watched. Self-surveillance is recast as a thrilling undertaking that offers opportunities for empowerment. While this reclamation of surveillance does not reject the requirement to survey altogether, it replaces the obsession with controlling the bodies of others with the pleasurable experience of capturing oneself on-screen. This reframes surveillance as a personal undertaking with potentially emancipatory results. It aligns with a neoliberal agenda of self-regulation in which self-surveillance is framed as ordinary, liberating, and even self-actualizing, a discourse with many precedents in fashion and consumer technology branding (Coldron et al. 2023). Secondly, by presenting fragmented bodies on-screen, the processes of abstraction and orders of removal intrinsic to datafication are conveyed via visual metaphor. Although these representations can be read as more critical, they reluctantly accept submission to an alienating dynamic through neutral, decontextualized sets. These images also expose the vulnerability of individual subjects as they are stripped, scanned, and screened by the anonymous and omnipotent surveillance apparatus.

Interrogating Stylish Wearables

Given the prior sympathetic visual treatment of surveillance observable in the fashion sphere over the past two decades, it is essential to consider how this seductive visual lexicon has helped to normalize surveillance practices, particularly where wearables are concerned. This is a crucial task due to their rapidly improving technological capabilities as these products are further integrated with the body. These representations have foreshadowed and helped to ease the popular demand for wearables. As identified in my analysis, the hauntological use of analog aesthetics denies the present reality and sophistication of these smart systems and their potential privacy implications. Adopting obsolescent visuals and props presents surveillance as individualized and manageable. I also propose that the incorporation of sexualized styling, posture, and expressions further collapses the body and surveillance technology into one another, framing this hybridization as both enjoyable and empowering. I have previously argued that fashion media is particularly well-positioned to articulate cultural expectations as the relationship between the human body and technology evolves (Rogers 2024).

These representations of surveillance have anticipated and assisted in normalizing the acts of data capture, screening, and monitoring, which are now promoted as useful features of wearables. The wearables industry has continued to grow despite controversies (Overfelt 2015; Torchinsky 2022), and the sector is projected to reach a market capitalization of $265 billion by 2026 (Markets and Markets 2021). Wearables circumvent the issue of opacity and privacy by adopting the marketing messaging of bespoke experiences and personalization. The fashion sector has always championed this type of customer experience to make consumers feel listened to and valued (and justify higher prices). So, while state surveillance systems tend toward the abstraction of data and depersonalization processes, consumer wearables offer a refreshing, seemingly transparent approach. They produce and display accessible visualizations of complex data, resulting in a highly individualized experience for their owners. The semantics of mass behavior modification sound manipulative, threatening, and totalitarian, but the language of hyper-customization that is commercially tied to wearables is conveniently attuned to the neoliberal emphasis on individual desires, accountability, and the semblance of personal control. As Monahan (2015) notes, resistance to surveillance has been aestheticized in line with the logic of personal responsibility in the form of attractive and increasingly accessible commodified solutions. Monitoring has long been promoted in the fashion sphere via trend consciousness, retaillance, and now through wearables promising wellness and fitness benefits. Now, wearables are adopting the markers of fashionable, designer items to consolidate surveillance and style definitively.

Wearables are also marketed as covetable fashion items through high-profile collaborations between technology companies and designers. Although wearables arguably date to the invention of spectacles, this technology was mainstreamed commercially in the early 2010s. The release of Google Glass in 2014 was advertised "as a fashion-forward futurism" (Zuboff 2019: 155). *Vogue*'s celebrated September issue even included a twelve-page editorial spread of models wearing these glasses alongside expensive designer items (Madrigal 2013). Classic American womenswear brand Diane Von Furstenberg formed an uncharacteristically innovative partnership with Google for the "Made for Glass" collection to market the accessory in line with their 2014/15 range (O'Kane 2014). Google's frames were criticized for their unflattering design and persistent system bugs. The eyewear did initially incur a widespread backlash—in part due to privacy concerns—and its conspicuousness made wearers (unaffectionately branded "Glassholes") a clear target for objectors. The range was ultimately discontinued and, based on popular response and press coverage of the product's commercial trajectory, its lack of aesthetic appeal was largely responsible for its market failure. However, this did not indicate the sector's future, as designs were iterated on and functionality has improved. Specifically, wearables with subtler appearances and a trend for miniaturization have helped these devices to proliferate and be adopted *en masse.*

These new and improved wearables not only look stylish but also collect visual and biometric data more effectively and inconspicuously with every new product release (Nguyen et al. 2021), raising questions about the limits of privacy and personhood. Wearables are often explicitly marketed at women for wellness, menstrual, and fetal monitoring purposes (Mishra and Suresh 2021; Ometov et al. 2021). The data these devices collect are often personal and highly sensitive. Accordingly, concerns have been raised about period-tracking applications in states outlawing abortion (Masunaga 2022), as well as insurance companies using reidentification processes to de-anonymize collected health data (The Lancet Digital Health 2023). This justifies building concerns regarding the increased integration of wearables with the body and underlines how contemporary surveillance can no longer be localized in terms of physical scope or data storage. Nor can it be entirely consented to by individual subjects because there is so little transparency about how data are collected, stored, shared, and used (Zuboff 2019).

Border Control (Tanner 2020) reimagines the regulated space of the border. It emphasizes the vulnerability of the lone subject when faced with multiple technological processes whose functions remain mainly unknown to the individual citizen. However, it is the normalization of surveillance technologies beyond highly securitized environments that have allowed them to become deeply embedded in everyday life. As Zuboff (2019) notes, the boundarylessness encouraged and promoted in consumers by surveillance capitalism is often first introduced in state contexts (such as at national borders or prisons) but soon becomes conditional to participation in more mundane spaces and activities. The newfound ordinariness of these tools has been eased by the commodification of selective aspects of their functionality as they are dressed up in the semantics of self-improvement, personalization, and convenience. For example, wearables marketed in the fitness sector collect biometric data and claim to promote well-being through facilitated self-monitoring. Smart thermostats now adapt to our schedule and anticipate our movements to regulate temperatures and improve energy efficiency. The closeness of wearables to the human body and the often sensitive and highly personal nature of the data gathered make them an essential object of critique. Wearables replicate state surveillance technologies' opacity and biometric capture capabilities in accessible, consumer-friendly forms. They represent an evolutionary arm of surveillance capitalism that distances them from negative, totalitarian connotations of monitoring. Their commodification positions them as desirable consumer products and furthers the need to interrogate the trade-offs inherent to their use as items that necessitate "privacy intrusive" processes (Coldron et al. 2023).

The fashion media's tendency to present sexualized or sentimental interpretations of surveillance has foreshadowed the popularity of wearables and created a precedent for the cultural acceptance of increased surveillance. Presenting wearables as desirable and positioning them as a necessary purchase for wellness-conscious individuals has already nudged them "from the relatively niche fitness sector to mass

consumption" (Coldron et al. 2023). This growing ubiquity does little to reduce the risks tied to surveillance capitalism, as outlined extensively by Zuboff (2019), who warned of "a new economic order that claims human experience… for hidden practices of extraction, prediction, and sales." The pushback against these privacy infractions epitomized by the wearable monitoring device has thus far struggled to provide meaningful contestation. This might be partly due to the corporate monopolization of data, the institutional adoption of tracking practices as industry-standard, and the unwieldiness of legislative responses such as GDPR in Europe. While pockets of resistance to this extractive paradigm have cropped up in the fashion sector in the form of countersurveillance design and makeup to varying degrees of disruptive success, its mainstream editorial imagery of the past two decades betrays an ongoing alignment to established discourse celebrating or accepting the new "art of self-tracking" (Feng et al. 2020).

Conclusion

Although I am not suggesting that these fashion photographs were created with the conscious or explicit aim to neutralize or exalt surveillance, engaging with these themes as they appear in the representational sphere of consumer culture, such as fashion media, is an important task. The very existence of these images is productive for creating a greater awareness of surveillance practices in explicitly non-political contexts. Monahan (2015: 167) acknowledges this visibility as a significant first step in alerting populations to the "extent to which data are severed from the context of their production and acted upon in other spaces and times." This cultivation of informed critique and contestation will become increasingly urgent as wearables integrate more seamlessly with the body, further eroding the borders between the private and personal spheres.

I have shown that the representation of surveillance in fashion media as nostalgic or desirable has foreshadowed the commercial popularity of wearables, which have been swiftly beautified and packaged for widespread adoption (Coldron et al. 2023). My analysis of relevant fashion texts has identified two overarching themes in their treatment of surveillance: sentimentalization and sexualization. In the first instance, the photographs embrace analog technology as a hauntological catalyst for nostalgia in viewers. Fashion communicators play with distortions, glitchiness, and CCTV footage, ignoring more realistic and detailed forms of bodily representation and denying contemporary surveillance's expansive and interoperable capacities. By employing analog visual styles, these images offer a naïve and technologically inaccurate alternative representation of surveillance as rudimentary. Outdated props and analog-inspired photographic post-production techniques soften the reality of current video surveillance capabilities, which boast an assortment of wide-ranging, multiscalar technological processes and procedures (Haggerty and Ericson 2000). Ultimately, this strategy casts surveillance as contained and non-threatening as it sidesteps digital technology's lack of materiality through anachronism.

The second theme of sexualization stages the models as provocative or vulnerable to emphasize the erotic dimensions of the surveillance dynamic. These risqué images celebrate self-imaging in shots where the surveyed body is turned into an assertive subject through an exhibitionistic framing recalling amateur video capture. These representations also segment the model into erogenous snapshots of disparate body parts, echoing the split from the body into numerical data strands during digital screening and biometric analysis. In these images, self-surveillance is recast as empowering and exciting, evidencing how implicitly these eroticized "logics of control have entered the field of representation" (Crandall and Armitage 2005: 19). Both approaches neutralize or displace concerns about asymmetrical power dynamics and privacy implications tied to contemporary surveillance.

These contemporary fashion visuals soften the notion of surveillance and have foreshadowed the continuing growth of the wearables market. It is therefore worth asking to what extent these "visualizations [of surveillance practices]… encourage individual self-regulation" or benign external regulation "as part of an extended neoliberal system of governance" (Hepworth 2019: 324)? Despite ongoing artistic interventions

in styling to evade biometric software (Valenti 2020) or clothing designed to confuse intelligent CCTV systems (Vainilavičius 2023), these interventions do not necessarily challenge surveillance capitalism as a framework. Instead, they conveniently slot into a "neoliberal vision and its reversion to market metrics" (Zuboff 2019: 39) where the assumption of personal responsibility through consumption is the only way to resist. The risk of wearables' growing ubiquity is that it accelerates a slide into a "programmed world governed by engineered determinism" (Frischman and Selinger 2018: 256), which remains broadly immune to public critique or persists in spite of it. Zuboff (2019: 3) reminds us that "each generation must assert its will and imagination… to retry the case [of privacy rights] in every age." With this in mind, I suggest that it is crucial to cultivate a heightened criticality concerning how surveillance is visually represented, particularly within accessible but aspirational forms of consumer culture such as fashion media and advertising.

I have demonstrated that fashion communicators who have explored the theme of surveillance have created imagery that tends to frame the surveillance experience as self-indulgent or unavoidable, intentionally or not. However, because fashion photographs can act as a litmus test of acceptability, they function as "a powerful sign of [the current] culture" (De Perthuis 2020: 254). By understanding the representational strategies recurring in surveillance-themed fashion photographs, we can more effectively identify surveillance dynamics, critique any idealizations, and add nuance to oversimplifications. Fashion visuals offer an accessible and compelling starting point for understanding the risks and rewards of surveillance practices, which will only become more salient as commercial, trend-conscious wearables become more widespread and influential. As an economic sector that must innovate and iterate to grow, fashion will inevitably continue to sell us on this calculated form of claustrophobia and promote the acceptance of intensifying surveillance. However, we can still resist this "makeover" (Coldron et al. 2023) by critically interrogating surveillance representations as they are served up to us and stylized in the seductive consumer sphere. This awareness and deepened understanding will be crucial to anticipating and resisting the next frontier of surveillance capitalism as wearables seek closer integration with the body—and do so with style.

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