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Abstract

This article presents material from a small-scale ethnographic study of a community of windsurfers that use GPS (Global Positioning System) technology to monitor and share their performance online. Following recent debates within Surveillance Studies, these practices are categorised as a form of coveillance. The argument explores the subjectivity produced by the introduction of GPS technology and social media usage in the context of windsurfers. Suggesting that this form of coveillance is yielding a particular consumer culture among its members, the article explores how the GPS-social-media assemblage boosts the desire to consume.

Introduction

During the past decade, the field of Surveillance Studies has moved in new directions. The traditional focus on top-down surveillance has been complemented with ways of accounting for a society in which the ever-wider groups of actors are directing their gazes at others, and where the directions of such gazing are diversifying. Indeed, contemporary surveillance scholars are not solely interested in the surveillance practices of the mighty, but also in situations where the subjects of surveillance are “surveilling the surveillor” (Mann et al. 2003: 332). For Ganascia (2010), this implies that the “local surveillance societies” of the 19th and 20th centuries are being replaced by “a generalized sousveillance society”, which produces fundamental shifts in power. For instance, Bakir (2010) suggests that contemporary sousveillance has placed severe limits on the ability of states—notably their armed forces—to control how their conduct is communicated. For Mann et al., the notion of “sousveillance” is to be understood as a deliberate tactic directed at the powerful, inspired by Situationist International’s *détournement* (Debord and Wolman 2006).

As a parallel term to sousveillance, Mann et al. (2003: 338) introduce the notion of side-to-side “coveillance”, in which citizens willingly engage in peer-to-peer gazing. As they point out, such practices are generally less likely to generate objections from the people involved. Indeed, surveillance scholars have increasingly turned to the study of playful uses of the “lateral” gaze (Albrechtslund and Dubbeld 2005; Albrechtslund 2008; Andrejevic 2005; Whitson 2013). For instance, Albrechtslund (2008) seeks to reframe the debate on surveillance, arguing that studying the actual practices of everyday users of technologies associated with surveillance may lead scholars to explore themes such as play and identity-formation, rather than subjugation or control. Similarly, French (2014) suggests that the field of Surveillance Studies has spent too much time describing the “dangerous potentialities” of new

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surveillance technologies, tacitly accepting the “mythology” around them, while failing to do empirical studies that may point to the gaps, cracks and blind spots of these technological assemblages.

In line with these twin tendencies, this article presents an ethnographic study of playful uses of coveillance within a community of speedsurfers. This community was entered on the basis of an interest in the subjectivity produced by the technologies the speedsurfers employ: GPS (Global Positioning System) and social media. Again, this theme is features strongly within Surveillance Studies, partly in debt to Foucault (1977). For instance, Mann et al. (2003: 335) situate their argument on sousveillance in relation to how surveillance produces obedience. However, this is not the only form of subjectivity that may be produced by the above-mentioned technologies. For instance, the proposition that social media usage boosts narcissism been discussed within academia (Buffardi and Campbell 2008; Ryan and Xenos 2011) as well as in more popular accounts (Aboujaoude 2011; Silverman 2015). As we shall see, however, the contact with the field caused me to explore a somewhat different aspect of how coveillance is experienced, and what effects it produces.

This article is structured as follows. The next section discusses the particularities of the field, outlines my relation and access to it, and provides some specifics on method. Then, the argument moves on to a description of the field experiences, showing how I increasingly came to understand the coveillant community of speedsurfers in terms of consumer culture. This is followed by a more general discussion of the merits of understanding coveillance in relation to consumer culture. More specifically, the article will depart from classical critiques of consumer culture, and instead introduce the economic anthropology of Gabriel Tarde as a means to do justice to the accounts of the members of the coveillance community. The article ends with a short conclusion.

The Field, Access, and Method

The field that this article seeks to explore is a community of windsurfers that engage in speedsurfing—a form of windsurfing in which individual surfers compete with each other, all trying to reach the highest possible speed on the water. The argument has emerged at the intersection between my work-related interests, on the one hand, and my leisure time passion, on the other. As an STS-inspired sociologist with an interest in the field of Surveillance Studies, I have previously written about how an increasingly pervasive logging of everyday life feeds into the production of subjectivity (Palmås 2010, 2011) As someone who has been windsurfing since pre-adolescence, I have been curious about how such logging may influence the experience of windsurfing. I first came across the GPS Speedsurfing phenomenon in 2007, reading about it in an American windsurfing magazine. A few years later, I noticed that some of the locals at my local windsurfing spot, situated some 30 minutes south of Gothenburg on the west coast of Sweden, were wearing GPS trackers on their upper arm. As I read up on the phenomenon, studying the website used for sharing data, I realised that this community at my local spot was the most active one in Sweden, involving the top windsurfers within the discipline.

During early 2013, I decided to join this community, with a view to participate in one season of competitive speedsurfing events. Thus, I purchased a GPS tracker, registered an account at the [gps-speedsurfing.com](http://www.gps-speedsurfing.com) website,¹ and started following the Facebook page used for speed event announcements. During the periods of my life when I have windsurfed frequently, I have been a part of the surfing community positioned just below the threshold of competitive windsurfing. For this reason, I was curious to see how I would do as a competitive speedsurfer—especially as speedsurfing has traditionally been an elite activity. Prior to GPS Speedsurfing, this exclusivity was linked to both time and space. One could only compete in high profile speed events, often organised in relation to the extravagant world cup circuit. This, in turn, was due to the fact that such events were expensive to organise. Speeds were clocked over a

¹ <http://www.gps-speedsurfing.com/default.aspx?mnu=user&uid=5859>.

500-metre course, which necessitated a staff of timekeepers. Moreover, in order to hit the starting line at full speed, the course needed to be up to one kilometre long. This meant that speedsurfing required special conditions, which were only to be found in very select locations. Hence, for most sailors, speedsurfing was a spectacular form of windsurfing that one read about in magazines, but never actually tried.

This exclusivity was shattered by the widespread use of GPS trackers. Today, a windsurfer can engage in speedsurfing by strapping a doppler-aided GPS device on the upper arm. The data is then uploaded to the website gps-speedsurfing.com, which stores information from 170,000 surf sessions, registered by 6,000 members from 59 nationalities. This allows you to compare your own speed data with that of other sailors. The website launched in 2004, registering 800 sessions, and by 2007 it had over 1,000 members in 30 countries. Since the conception of this phenomenon, it has been hailed as a democratisation of the sport. For instance, in 2007, former world champion and windsurfing legend Robby Naish stated:

The GPS has opened up the world so that everyone is on the same playing field. It is easy to test your gear, even all alone, and see speed gains. You can go riding and have tangible measurement and goals. You can go online to gps-speedsurfing.com and see how you compare to the rest of the world, be it [top sailor] Finian Maynard or a friend from the other side of the country. I think it's the best thing to happen to our sport in a long time.

(Windsurf Magazine June 2007)

This preoccupation with democratisation bears a special significance within windsurfing. It is no coincidence that Naish's comment appears at that particular time in the history of windsurfing. The sport emerged in the early 1970s, and the nascent windsurfing industry thrived during the subsequent boom years of the late 1970s and 1980s. The heightened interest in the sport fuelled a lavish world cup circuit, which in many ways resembled that of Formula One motor racing—sponsored by big tobacco, and providing a test ground for the research and development activities of the windsurfing equipment manufacturers. As opposed to traditional sailboat racing, there were no class rules, which meant that the industry was free to innovate, speeding up the development of new equipment. However, this had the result that by the late 1990s, the sport became an increasingly specialised and expensive affair. New equipment was developed for world cup sailors, not the plain Jane or average Joe who lacked the funding and physique of the professionals. In the 2000s, there was a clear recognition within the industry that the recruitment into the sport was waning, and several actors called for efforts to democratise the sport and lower the threshold for competitive windsurfing.

At this point, it is worth comparing the GPS Speedsurfing phenomenon with the widespread use of data logging in relation to other activities. On a general level, it can be related to the popular interest in the notion of the Quantified Self, or QS for short, in which users log and quantify all kinds of behaviours (see for instance Cohen 2014.) On a more specific level, GPS Speedsurfing can be related to GPS-assisted measurement of other sports activities. For instance, some aspects of the windsurfing industry's effort to democratise the sport may be found within running. Indeed, running apps such as RunKeeper and Nike+, which allow leisure users to log their performance and share it with others, have proven exceptionally popular—both for users and for companies selling running equipment. One difference, however, is the scale of the phenomenon: RunKeeper claims that 26 million people use the service. Another, and arguably more profound, difference relates to the type of sport that is rendered quantified. While running, and more generally track-and-field activities, represent the archetypal performance sport, surfing-related sports practitioners have generally shunned from various kinds of quantification.

Being one of the so-called “alternative” (Thorpe and Rinehart 2010), “lifestyle” (Wheaton 2004), “fun” and “whiz” (Midol 1993) sports, windsurfing is an activity that possesses an uneasy relationship with numbers. This is due to the fact that the sports that emerge from the lineage of surfing bear strong connotations to certain ideas of authenticity and soulfulness. The ideal of “the soul surfer”, Wheaton and

Beal (2003) write, is “appropriated from the surfing culture to describe the type of windsurfing (usually wave sailing) that pitted an individual against the environment, not other people” (2003: 164). This ideal is clearly recognisable in pop cultural renderings of surfing culture, which tend to portray the surfer as a spiritual and outer-worldly character. This is reflected in the classic surf film genre (Rutsky 1999), as well as in more contemporary productions like *Point Break* (Palmås 2009).

These conceptions of what it means to be a surfer is also codified in the descriptions of surfing that sport scholars have provided. Thus, in an early article, Kent Pearson (1979) distinguishes “play-sport” from “athletic-sport”. Surfing, being a play-sport, is characterised by a lack of rationalised “techniques geared to the achievement of precisely specifiable performance outcomes”, and an “emphasis on the qualitative aspects of performance, including value place on the ‘flow’ experience” (1979: 52). Similarly, Defrance and Pociello (1993) explore different societal functions performed by different sports. For instance, track-and-field athletics perform an “educational function”, with connotations to work, compulsion and evaluation of progress. Surfing-related sports perform the “play function”, related to recreation and “removal of institutional constraints” (1993: 13). Given these conceptions of surfing, propagated both within popular culture and within social science, it is no wonder that the surfer has become an emblematic figure of creativity and transgression within contemporary capitalism (Žižek 2004: 184; Palmås 2014).

These accounts suggest that soulfulness is key to what it means to be a (wind)surfer. Steering clear from quantitative measurement of the experience may thus be a means to prevent a perceived loss of authenticity. To some degree, this applies to my own personal feelings towards windsurfing; I am one of those who cherish the authentic and soulful aspects of the sport. However, the thematic of a supposed loss of authenticity is also a concern to me as a sociologist. Thus, my work-related interest and leisure time passions intersect on this very issue. For this reason, I entered the fieldwork with a view to study some aspect of this problematic. The early phase of my inquiry was led by one provisional question: What subjectivity is produced when windsurfing with a GPS tracker strapped to your arm? In thinking about this, notions of discipline, narcissism and inauthenticity did feature as possible analytic references. Having said that, I also endeavoured to remain true to “the ‘radical empiricism’ of ethnography”, and thus stay “open to the unexpected results of fieldwork” (Slater and Miller 2007: 9).

To conclude this section, a short note on method: During the period of June to September 2013, I participated in five speed events and recorded twelve sessions, and did a fair bit of hanging around—both at the spot in question, chatting with surfers while waiting for the weather conditions to improve, as well as on the gps-speedsurfing.com and Facebook websites. Notes were taken continually. Coding and provisional writing up ensued during the subsequent autumn and winter, with an early draft of the material presented at the subsequent 6th Biannual International *Surveillance & Society* conference in April 2014.

The Experience of GPS Speedsurfing

On entering the field, my key concern is whether GPS logging introduces elements of discipline, narcissism, or lack of authenticity in the windsurfing experience. Does it affect my own experience of the sport? During my first session with the tracker strapped onto my arm, I cannot help being exceptionally attentive to such sensations. And yes—the knowledge that the device delivered a continual, high-resolution speed measurement, registering a hundredth of a knot, does indeed push me to try harder. I know that literally every move is being metred, so there is a constant focus on spotless demeanour. Here, one could speak of a disciplining effect, inasmuch as the device reminds the user not to lapse into sloppy sailing, and not to rest for too long between runs. Secondly, as I add one run after another, I cannot help envisioning myself in front of the computer at home, checking the resulting data. This longing for the computer at home is, of course, the very thing that the critics put forward when they claim that the GPS obstructs the experience of windsurfing. More technically speaking, it is also the very definition of narcissism: The term does not so much designate “self-love” as the wish to observe yourself from the

outside, and the subsequent inability to live your life from “within yourself”. This tendency is, of course, particularly absurd when windsurfing. Instead of enjoying the fresh air and sense of speed, one’s mind is on the numbers that quantify the activity.

However, the key question is whether and how members of the coveillance community negotiate this issue? During the early phases of the fieldwork, I attempt to query the GPS speedsurfers on how they see the numbers that they present to the world, and whether they contemplate any loss of the qualitative experience of windsurfing. As it turns out, I cannot find one single member of the community that thinks in those terms. During the full 2013 season, I only run into one windsurfer who makes the “soul surfer” argument against the use of GPS. This person, however, is someone I bump into when windsurfing at a different spot, and not a member of the GPS Speedsurfing community in question.

Nevertheless, the issue of self-representation does seem to matter for the members of the GPS Speedsurfing community. To a certain extent, they do strategise around the presentation of one’s performance. Having spoken to some of them, there seems to be a sense of embarrassment in posting data from less successful sessions. As one speedsurfer laments, “once you have uploaded, it is there for everyone to see”. Indeed, the gps-speedsurfing.com website provides ample information on the windsurfing sessions of the users. Beyond the vital stats—top 2-second speed, average speeds, distance travelled—it also presents where the top speeds were reached. One strategy adopted to cope with such unwanted transparency is to provide a comment on the session posted on gps-speedsurfing.com, pointing to various causes of the poor performance: The wind was too gusty, the water too choppy, the equipment not in order, and so on. In fact, a majority of the session comments on gps-speedsurfing.com seem to involve one or two reasons for why the windsurfer did not perform at their best. This goes for the members of “my” particular community of speedsurfers, as well as for other users of the site. Indeed, the only sessions where the average speedsurfer tends to not make such excuses are the ones where s/he has posted a personal record.

The comments that I post in relation to my windsurfing sessions follow the same pattern, partly due to the fact that I too feel I should be faster than the numbers show. As I went into the 2013 season of speed events, I was confident that I could get by with using my freeriding equipment. Being somewhat arrogant, I figured that I should be able to keep pace with most of the other—in my opinion, lesser—windsurfers, even though they use specialised racing equipment. As the season goes on, and one event passes after another, I realise that I might have been wrong, and that there is a mercilessness in the numbers generated by the GPS device. Before using the tracker, I had a feeling that I was one of the faster windsurfers in my local spot. However, having strapped the unit onto my arm, I find myself being ranked as one of the slowest people on the water. This feeling is, as it turns out, shared by others. One speedsurfer exasperatedly tells me:

I can sail right beside someone, but then [when comparing my data at gps-speedsurfing.com] I realise that I am 3 knots slower than that person.

Without the GPS, one can live in a bubble of arrogance, thinking that one is faster than this other person that one sails next to. In my early field notes, I find myself complaining about “how cold and precise the numbers are”. This preciseness does however cut in two ways: On the one hand, it shows that you are usually slower than you think, on the other, this fine-calibration makes it easier to detect your own actual improvements. The combination of these twin realisations are potent drivers for pushing people to improve their results. As the season progresses, I gradually realise that the precise measurements of the GPS tracker is also an effective means of generating a desire for new equipment. Thus, during the fieldwork, I get less preoccupied with exploring notions of discipline, narcissism and inauthenticity, and instead think about why I suddenly feel that I have to buy new equipment. “Watch out for the bandwagon”, one speedsurfer warns, suggesting that getting hooked on GPS Speedsurfing causes you to

get carried away in a board-buying bonanza. Another member of the community tells me that windsurfing “has become a lot more expensive since [he] got the GPS”. Rather than discipline or narcissism, GPS speedsurfing seems to produce urge to consume the latest—and supposedly fastest—equipment.

In order for this impulse to emerge, members must believe that the latest gear is the fastest. Such beliefs are established in the conversations within the community. Hanging out among the members of the community, online and offline, I am struck with how much of the conversation that revolves around equipment. Alongside the never-ending discussion of wind and weather conditions, there is a never-ending discussion of boards, rigs and fins. Though GPS Speedsailing may have democratised competitive windsurfing, it nevertheless cements a stratification among windsurfers. The top sailors are sponsored and thus use the latest gear, whereas the mid-tier sailors have to spend their own money to keep up this arms race. The new equipment of the top surfers acts as the key points of discussion within the community, be it on the beach or on Facebook. For instance, the members use the Facebook page to post pictures of new equipment, and these pictures tend to prompt discussions on how to set it up, when to use it and so forth. The gps-speedsurfing.com website generates a similar effect, as it clearly shows what equipment the fastest sailors are using. Moreover, the session comments of the top speedsurfers often highlight the benefits of the new gear they are using, effectively turning the site into a billboard that speaks in a personal tone. This generates a hand-me-down logic in the exchange of equipment; the mid-tier sailors usually end up buying the gear that the top sailors have either developed, or are not using anymore.

Coveillance as Consumer Culture

The experience of participating in the community of speedsurfers points to a link between GPS-assisted coveillance practices and consumer culture. That is not to say that the link between GPS and consumption has not been explored before. For instance, as proposed by Michael and Clarke (2013), location-based services may feed into the “überveillance” that emerges as a “sum total” and “deliberate integration” (Michael and Michael 2010: 9-10) of different forms of surveillance. Michael and Clarke do however focus on how location-based services may present privacy-related “risks to citizens and consumers” (2013: 220), rather than on any links between playful uses of GPS, on the one hand, and consumer culture, on the other.

Moreover, consumer culture has been largely absent in previous work on *sousveillance* and *coveillance*. Thus, though Mann et al. (2003) discuss *sousveillance* in relation to consumerist society and conspicuous consumption, their consumption-related interest lies primarily in presenting *sousveillance* technologies as standard consumer items. This, in turn, is a part of the *détournement* of traditional, top-down surveillance. In other words, their treatment of *sousveillance* or *coveillance* does not deal with how such technopractices may resonate with contemporary consumer culture. Similarly, though Ganascia suggests that “a generalized *sousveillance* society” may lead companies to become more responsive to consumers’ complaints (2010: 495), he does not relate it to broader notions of consumer culture. For Bakir (2010), “*sousveillance* cultures” are primarily understood in relation to (military-led) statecraft—or resistance towards such statecraft—and not in relation to modes of consumption.

Contrary to these previous accounts of *sousveillance* and *coveillance*, construed as forms of resistance to military or corporate power, the material presented above focuses on more mundane, everyday examples of *coveillance*. As such, it fits within the tradition of ethnographic accounts of consumer culture, which follows Raymond Williams’ (1988) dictum that “culture is ordinary” (Slater and Miller 2007: 7). Still, this raises at least two questions: How can we make sense of the consumer culture exhibited in relation to the playful *coveillance* of the GPS Speedsurfing community? To what extent can we abstract from this particular case of *coveillance*?

One peculiar aspect of GPS Speedsurfing lies in the following fact: The windsurfer may well know that there are diminishing speed returns to her or his investment in new gear, but the precise measurement ensures that this limit is never reached. Given that your speed is measured by hundredths of a knot, there is a near-infinite possibility to perform better, and the key performance-enhancer is readily available at your nearest windsurfing dealer. A critical perspective on this fine-calibre measurement would lead the analyst to conclude that this preciseness serves to secure the insatiability of consumer desires. As Slater (1997) points out, the issue of how to prevent under-consumption crises from occurring has been a long-standing concern in the history of theorising consumption. The case of GPS Speedsurfing stands out as a successful example of how the windsurfing industry has solved this problem. Thus, the GPS-aided “democratising” of the competitive aspects of the sport has not only expanded the market for top-of-the-line racing equipment; it has also served the purpose of generating a new, near-insatiable desire. This interpretation is in line with Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of desire, in which desire does not emerge from lack, but from new assemblages; “there is no desire but assembling, assembled, desire” (1988: 399). Such a relational conception of desire is adopted in Natasha Dow Schüll’s (2014) ethnography of gambling in Las Vegas, and indeed, it is tempting to compare the desire instilled in speedsurfers using the GPS-social-media assemblage with that of the Schüll’s gamblers using electronic slot machines. Though the latter are deliberately designed to generate addiction, and the GPS-social-media is not, both are examples of how contraptions that compress time may act as desire-generating prostheses.

The same logic may well apply to other leisure activities that have become subject to similar modes of life-logging and coveillance. If so, we may abstract from the speedsurfing case, and see these practices as yet another mutation in the present form of consumer culture. The classical critique of consumer culture would present such practices as yet another fad that promises to replace the values taken away from us by modernity, but ultimately fails to do so. From this critical perspective, Slater writes, consumer culture “floods modernity with a torrent of values, meanings, selves and others, both filling in the cultural deficits of the modern world and constantly intensifying and exploiting them” (1997: 99).

From such a critical perspective, the themes of narcissism and inauthenticity are reintroduced, inasmuch as they feature heavily within the general critique of consumer culture. However, as discussed above, such accounts are incompatible with the accounts of the members of the speedsurfing community. An ethnography-driven radical empiricism—one in which the concepts and worldviews of the actors are stronger than those of the analysts (Latour 2005: 30)—forces us to search for alternative theoretical resources that do justice to the worldviews of the members. One such alternative resource for the analysis of the consumption patterns discussed above is the work of Gabriel Tarde, whose social theory is based upon the imitation of habits. Tarde posits that the imitation of habits—including habits of consumption—proceed through “imitation *ab interioribus ad exteriora*” (Tarde 1903[1890]: 207). This implies that “imitation of ends precedes imitation of means”. For example, in the case of GPS Speedsurfing, it is not the “means” in the form a certain board or sail that constitutes the contagious desire. Rather, it is the ultimate “ends”—that is, the speediness itself—that generates the imitation. In Tarde’s words:

Only these new ends, these needs for novel kinds of consumption, take hold of us and propagate themselves in us much more readily and rapidly than the aforesaid means or expressions.

(Tarde 1903[1890]: 207)

What the GPS device does is that it captures and stabilises this speediness: It provides a secure hold on a quality that is desirable. In the terminology of Tarde, it is a matter of belief and desire, which “are the two psychological quantities which are found at the bottom of all the sensational qualities” (Tarde 1903[1890]: 145-146). In other words, human subjectivity emerges in the dance between desire and belief. The twin character of the GPS data mentioned above is a case in point: The GPS device stabilises a belief in the actual speed of yourself, as well as for the people around you. As discussed above, this may be lower than

one would otherwise expect. This belief in the robustness of the numbers, provided by the GPS device, is combined with an intensified desire for higher speed. All in all, the GPS-social-media assemblage increases the passions of the members of the community.

As suggested in the previous section, the fieldwork led me towards an understanding of the GPS Speedsurfing case that does not pit it against “authentic” soul surfing—even though such tendencies were on my mind when going into the fieldwork. For one, the members fully recognise that the numbers on the website do not say everything about the members of the community. There seems to be a wide agreement that the best guy on the water is not necessarily the person with the highest speed average; the GPS speedsurfing community is not a “total” numbers culture, there is room for other modes of valorising the windsurfing experience. Or, to paraphrase French (2014), there are gaps in the coveillance gaze. Secondly, as discussed above, my initial inquiry into a purported narcissism or a perceived loss of authenticity was simply not consonant with the worldviews of the members of the community. For them, rather, the very activity of GPS speedsurfing *starts from* the technology. The relation to GPS satellites and web servers is just as important as the relation to moving masses of air. The device on their arm is just another piece of equipment, on the same level as the sail and the board.

Here too, it seems apt to relate the material from the fieldwork to the theories of Tarde. For him, the modern world does not imply that “all that is solid melts into air” (Berman 1988), nor is it the rise of a culture of abstraction (Toscano 2008). For Tarde, the modern world is one in which the networks of imitation and contamination are extended and reconnected. He saw in technologies—in his time, the telephone and the telegraph—something that amplified the modes of social interaction. In our time, we would add satellites and the internet to this list of amplifying technologies. As Bruno Latour and Vincent Lépinay (2009) write in their book about Tarde’s economic anthropology:

We move from the past to the present through a greater intertwining of distances, through a greater interlacing, through a more intricate involvement of the new techniques in innovation, production, commercialization and communication.

(2009: 60)

This also implies a mathematisation of the world, but this does not chain it to cold abstraction. The advent of these new technologies instead provokes a heightening of the temperature of society. “Nowhere,” Tarde states,

do I perceive traces of a refrigerating transformation of man in a less and less passionate and more and more rational direction.

(Tarde [1902], cited and translated in Latour and Lépinay 2009: 23-24)

In other words, the pervasiveness of technological devices and increased calculation does not necessarily imply that the modern world is rendered cold and rational. Instead, Tarde argues that the opposite is true: The increased interconnectedness, and the increased intermingling between the human and the technological may equally be a recipe for more intensely felt desires. There is a parallel here between this alternative account of modern techno-calculation, on the one hand, and the efforts of Albrechtslund (2008) to reframe the debate on surveillance, on the other. The case presented in this article is another example of how surveillance technologies may be studied in ways that do not point towards pure control purposes.

Conclusions

This article has endeavoured to contribute to the field Surveillance Studies in two ways. First, it has added to the debate on emergent forms of coveillance. Secondly, it seeks to contribute to the shift towards empirical studies of actual, everyday practices of surveillance.

Though originally set up as an exploration of how GPS technology and social media may undermine the authentic character for windsurfing, this ethnographic study suggests that coveillance ought to be explored through the lens of consumer culture. Indeed, the original question of the study—What subjectivity is produced when windsurfing with a GPS tracker strapped to your arm?—may lead surveillance scholars to expect that the answer is “obedience” or “discipline”. As it turns out, the study suggests that the main sensation generated by the coveillance is a propensity to consume. Given the reference to the consumer culture literature, one may also expect such surveillance-generated consumer appetites to be tainted by inauthenticity. However, the article posits that this move towards quantification does not necessarily render activities such as windsurfing more soul-less and cold. On the contrary, the article has pointed to the ways in which the speedsurfing experience is intensified by the aid of GPS technology.

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