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LOOK BACK IN REBELLION

Radical Transparency as Refusal of Surveillance

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the visuality of surveillance from a democratic perspective using the example of Extinction Rebellion (XR), a social movement advocating for environmental justice through civil disobedience. Building on the literature on recognition and the visuality of politics, I conceptualise democracy as a society where citizens are able to look at and recognise each other as equals, while surveillance involves one actor being able to look at all others and being opaque to their gaze back. In this context, I analyse XR's narratives surrounding democracy and surveillance, interpreting their emphasis on radical transparency and their overall strategy as a refusal of surveillance. I ask the question: to what extent and how is XR challenging political dynamics of visuality through their refusal of surveillance? I argue that, in visual terms, XR's refusal is a gaze back towards the state, which demands transparency and enforces the citizen's right to look back. I also argue that understanding both surveillance and democracy in visual terms makes evident the tension between the two and highlights the anti-democratic nature of surveillance.

INTRODUCTION

The risk that I am running is there, but if XR doesn't step up the plate and do this, well nobosy else is doing it and that mean we carry on with business as usual, and that means that many millions face early miserable deaths, and they don't die gentle... gentle death. Collapse of civilisation is rarely pleasant and now I think it won't be pleasant this time either. - Emily

The study of surveillance mostly focuses on the opposition between privacy and security. The challenge for anti-surveillance scholarship has been to conceptualise privacy in a critical way and to liberate it from the perceived trade-off with security within political discourse. Theoretically, Steeves (2009) achieves this conceptualisation, but practically, the scholarship is lacking an analysis of how counter-surveillance can adopt this conceptualisation of privacy and work without reinforcing the premises of surveillance or adding to the hierarchy of surveilling gazes. Lyon (2015), Huey *et al.* (2006) and Monahan (2015) provide analyses of how different counter-surveillance strategies, like *sousveillance* and hiding, actually play within the premises of surveillance and fail to achieve meaningful democratic resistance. In contrast, I analyse Extinction Rebellion's (XR) strategy of radical transparency and conceptualise it as an adequate refusal of surveillance: a radical resistance to its premises and political motivations.

I refer to the literature on recognition and the visibility of politics to frame my discussion of democracy, privacy, surveillance, and refusal in visual terms. In this context, I conceptualise politics as an apparition, a recognition of each other (Arendt, 1958). In a democratic system, citizens appear to each other on an equal plane, recognising each other as citizens and equals (Azoulay, 2008). Privacy constitutes the space necessary for citizens to reflect and conceptualise the self and the other, and is essential to be able to apply the subject position of citizen to both (Steeves, 2009). Surveillance, however, distorts the gaze of democracy by introducing an unequal gaze at the heart of politics: one in which one actor can look at all other actors and be opaque to their returning gaze (Mirzoeff, 2011; Monahan, 2015).

I argue that XR's strategy of radical transparency constitutes a refusal of surveillance and I investigate the question: to what extent and how is XR challenging political dynamics of visibility through their

refusal of surveillance? I interviewed members and organisers of XR about their attitudes and feelings towards democracy and surveillance, and I analysed the interviews with Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA). I argue that XR refuses to engage in the mechanisms of surveillance by confronting the state as citizens who assume responsibility for their actions and reject the social contract, on the basis of the government's failure to protect the citizenry from the climate crisis. The public nature of XR's actions, expressed through the willingness of activists to be arrested, associate their names to their beliefs and actions, and face the consequences, is rooted in the subject position of the citizen. As citizens, they take civil responsibility for their own actions, refusing to participate in the system that is perpetrating ecocide. XR rejects surveillance through its openness and transparency: by not hiding, they are maintaining their position of civic responsibility and denying legitimacy to the surveillance of democratic citizens and activities. In this sense, using the terminology provided by Mirzoeff's (2011) visual theory of power and resistance, XR's refusal constitutes a gaze back towards the state and functions as a push to re-establish the equality of the gaze necessary for democratic society. I also argue that understanding privacy and surveillance in visual terms, as exemplified by XR's refusal narratives, highlights the essential anti-democratic nature of surveillance and how privacy is necessary for an egalitarian democratic society.

In my interviews, I have also encountered counter-discourses, where members of XR might be more sensitive to surveillance: there is a shift happening towards obfuscation and away from transparency. I argue that this shift might be useful to the movement in practical terms, but it is shying away from transparency's radical potential for resistance.

The dissertation is organised in the following structure. In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of the relevant literature, including the logical path that brought me to my research question, and explain my conceptual framework. Chapter 3 is devoted to the methodological practices and details of my research. In Chapter 4, I analyse the interviews and present XR's discourse around democracy and surveillance. In Chapter 5, I discuss my findings, relating them to the literature on surveillance and visibility, and elaborate on my argument. I also analyse the counter-discourses I encountered and situate them in the economy of the gaze of politics. In the Conclusion, I summarise my findings and arguments and present possible avenues for future research.

PERVASIVE SURVEILLANCE

The site of enquiry of my dissertation is the impact of surveillance on democracy. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the literature on surveillance and the visibility of politics, focusing on the key concepts of privacy and refusal.

Democracy and surveillance: a chilling effect?

Scholars from numerous theoretical strands have examined the pervasive extents of targeted and mass surveillance from corporate and state actors, especially after the Snowden revelations in 2013. Lyon (2015) explores the emergence of mass surveillance patterns and their expansion after 9/11 to minimise the risk of terrorism. He also sketches potential avenues for analysing the relationship between surveillance and democracy, arguing that state surveillance has the potential to upend some of the democratic elements of society. Lyon refers to this as the 'chilling effect:' surveillance and its risks for individual citizens can discourage people from expressing their political opinion and taking up their democratic right to protest (2015: 106). In other words, it has a panopticon effect: if one knows she is being watched, one is less likely to take risks (Foucault, 1991). The literature, however, is not conclusive as to whether the chilling effect really does have an impact on democracy, since social movements and protests continue to exist, which makes it an intriguing site of investigation.

The consequences of surveillance for citizens can be extremely worrying, not only in autocratic states but also in liberal representative systems. Gandy (1993) was the first to analytically explore the large-scale collection of consumer data on the part of companies, who store, analyse and sell that data to advertise their products more efficiently. Since then, that data has been exploited in many other ways, including to build online reputations of people as reliable or unreliable customers, to calculate credit scores and school grades, to decide whether to grant mortgages, hire or fire people, etc. (Pasquale, 2015: 4). Since Edward Snowden revealed the amount of data the United States government (together with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK) was collecting about its citizens and people all over the world for intelligence and security reasons, it became clear that corporate and state surveillance were deeply intertwined, and that there was a substantial exchange of data between the two (Lyon, 2015). In this dissertation, I focus on the latter form of surveillance, namely the ways governments, police forces and security agencies track citizens' online presence and private messages

through their phones and computers to obtain information such as their location, who they are meeting, and what their interests and inclinations are.

To discuss the 'chilling effect' of surveillance on democracy, it is important to clarify my definition of democracy. Democracy is intended here in a normative sense, not as a practice but as an ideal and theoretical positioning. Drawing from theories of recognition and visibility, which I explore below, a society is democratic when all people encounter each other and see each other as equal, where no one's gaze has power over another's. Societies can thus be more democratic or less according to the degree of equality in their visual dynamics (Arendt, 1958; Azoulay, 2008). Within this conception of democracy, I argue that the public sphere is the site of encountering of citizens' gazes. I refer to Nancy Fraser's (1990) article *Rethinking the Public Sphere*, based on and critiquing Habermas's democratic theory (1992 [1962]). Habermas attributes a fundamental role to the 'public sphere,' the physical and virtual spaces where citizens can express and rework their opinions about their own governance, encounter one another as citizens and confront each other's views and opinions. I argue that this is an ideal site of investigation of the visual dynamics of politics and democracy, and I focus on the public sphere to explore the role that surveillance plays in the economy of the gaze.

Fraser focuses on 'subaltern counterpublics': the places where citizens who experience oppression under the system can group separately and engage in protest (1990: 67–68). I argue that these counterpublics are the ideal site to investigate the impact of surveillance on democracy. According to Habermas's liberal theory, the mainstream public sphere is essential to democratic participation, but counterpublics, in a more radical and discursive understanding of society, are equally important. According to Fraser (1990: 67), counterpublics are essential to expand the discursive space, which allows society to fluctuate on a democratic spectrum, with the potential to retrocede but also to achieve a better democratic environment. My focus, then, is to investigate whether surveillance narrows the discursive space of counterpublics by deterring people from making their voice heard within these counterpublics or from speaking from the perspective of the counterpublics towards the state.

Within what can be considered counterpublics, I focus on social movement organisations (SMOs). They not only inhabit a counter-discursive space, but also have the declared intention to change the

status quo and current power relations, which makes them a natural target of surveillance. Citizens might be afraid of their names being linked to an organisation seeking change, because of the consequences this might have on their lives. When companies and states are tracking citizens, members of social movements can feasibly become 'undesirables' according to their data: people who undermine the legitimacy of the state by demanding change could be planning illegal activities, cause damage to property, etc. As 'undesirables', they might become vulnerable to all sorts of discriminatory mechanisms, have their applications for citizenship rejected if they are not nationals, have a loan or a mortgage rejected, have their credit score lowered, be fired from their jobs or be unable to find one, be evicted from their accommodation, etc. (Pasquale, 2015). These feasible consequences of surveillance are the drivers of the chilling effect, because big data and faster data processing allows data about the counterpublics to be more easily collected and processed (Lyon, 2015). Then again, the chilling effect can only affect SMOs up until a certain point, because, as it will become clear from my data collection and my discussion of XR, a significant number of citizens are not deterred from expressing their opinion and demanding change. Therefore, the starting questions of this dissertation are: does the presence of pervasive surveillance deter citizens from exercising their democratic freedoms to dissent and protest? If not, what does citizens' obduracy to surveillance mean for its resistance potential?

Privacy versus security

Lyon also discusses the concept of privacy. From a liberal perspective, the individual struggles with the collective for privacy in a contention for space: if the individual has privacy, the collective does not have access to parts of the individual, putting the collective at risk of attack (Cohen, 2013). However, Lyon refers to Steeves's (2009) critical conception of privacy: not as a liberal principle of information control but as a site of dialectic negotiation within society. Drawing on sociological and anthropological theory, Steeves presents a critical discussion of Westin's seminal text *Privacy and Freedom* (1967): 'If the individual's understanding of himself as a subject emerges through the recognition of the other and the self, privacy, as the boundary between the two, is placed at the centre of identity, because privacy is what allows the self to become reflexive' (Steeves, 2009: 204). She interprets privacy as a space we negotiate in societal dynamics with others, a space necessary for building a conception or representation of others and ourselves.

Together with defining the concept of privacy, I must also critique the claim to security, which is so often presented as the opposing and counterweighing value used to justify surveillance: (individual) privacy must be sacrificed for (collective) security (Lyon, 2015). The concept of security, however, is always presented in vague terms and not properly qualified: 'security' is used as a password, but its meaning and what counts as such are never specified (Steeves, 2009). Monahan (2006) has highlighted how the alleged trade-off between privacy and security is not a given, because there is no proof that surveillance corresponds to any augmented security. The privacy versus security discourse is part of what I am seeking to critique in this dissertation; as I will elaborate in Chapter 5, I argue that framing privacy in visual and democratic terms will inform the debate and pit security against democracy in normative terms.

Recognition and the visibility of politics

Having explored the field of surveillance studies, I turn to theories that can frame the discussion of surveillance, privacy, and democracy in a theoretically innovative way. The concept of recognition, based on Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958), constitutes a visual theory of politics: democracy is framed as seeing each other, and appearing to each other, on an equal field (Couldry & Kallinikos, 2017). In recognizing the other, we conceptualise ourselves (Steeves, 2009). Azoulay, in *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008), applies recognition to her theory of photography: she conceptualises photography as an encounter between photographed subject, photographer, camera and spectator, where everyone shares rights and responsibilities as citizens of the world of photography. Through this encounter, subjects can lay claims of emergency, which ask spectators to acknowledge their responsibility in witnessing emergency. This sharing of rights and responsibilities, however, only functions when the encounter happens on an equal field. Only in seeing each other as equals can a democratic process take place: the value of the other citizen must be *recognised* as equal to that of oneself. Instead of photographs, I focus on the public sphere as the site of encountering of citizens' gazes, to investigate how surveillance impacts the economy of the gaze towards or away from democracy.

Steeves argues that the interrelational role of privacy makes it a key part of democratic practices: 'Surveillance [...] is perceived to invade the private citizen's democratic space, even though the latter takes place in public. Accordingly, there is an inherent connection between autonomy, privacy and

democratic action' (2009: 207). The capacity to see and conceive of each other as equals is only afforded in an environment where the space of privacy exists, so that everyone's gaze has a right to exist, to provide a space *between* subjects to look and look back (Mirzoeff, 2011). Surveillance, on the contrary, negates this very foundation of political equality as it is founded on an unequal power of gazing: the surveiller is seeing citizens without being seen, building unequal power relations at the heart of society (Mirzoeff, 2011; Monahan, 2015; Steeves, 2009).

Looking at my original questions through the lens of recognition leaves us with the following theoretical point: if surveillance generates an unequal visibility at the core of political life, how can one conceptualise counter-surveillance in visual terms? How can citizens re-establish an equality of gaze?

Counter-surveillance

SMOs have adopted different strategies in response to surveillance. Dencik *et al.* (2016) give an overview through their interviews with SMOs in relation to the Snowden revelations. Their results mostly demonstrate SMOs' general disinterest in the risks of surveillance; however, some of them have turned to encryption to safeguard their communication from state surveillance. Others considered encryption too technical and therefore inaccessible; as Lyon (2015) also discusses, this disqualifies it as a viable method for citizens to safeguard their democratic practices, as it requires too much expertise.

Popular methods of resistance to surveillance also include *sousveillance*: the grassroots practice of filming surveillers (in many cases the police) to keep them accountable to the public (Mann *et al.*, 2003). Huey *et al.* (2006) critique this method, as it tends to increase the amount of surveillance in society, despite questioning it. Instead of equalising the gaze, it constitutes an additional level in the hierarchy of surveillance. It is also *itself* generally not accountable to the citizenry, as the SMOs that run *sousveillance* operations have not put such mechanisms in place; and ethically, it poses doubts as it pushes the police to enforce the law more strictly, though less violently (see Huey *et al.*, 2006: 156).

Another popular response to surveillance is hiding (encryption falls within this category). Champions of the 'right to hide' adopt different kinds of camouflage, such as the asymmetrical face makeup CV

Dazzle. Monahan (2015) provides a critical analysis of hiding strategies, pointing out that they encourage the further development of surveillance technology to 'catch' those in hiding more effectively, instead of undermining its premises or constituting a real response. From a democratic perspective, hiding does not work well with democracy and making democracy accessible, because it is difficult and inaccessible to most citizens. Finally, it does not achieve true equal political confrontation, as it denies any sort of gaze, any sort of recognition: people in hiding become invisible.

Consent, refusal, and agency

Lyon's, Huey *et al.*'s, and Monahan's analyses of different counter-surveillance methods highlight their limits in terms of resisting surveillance in visual and democratic terms. A radically different approach to counter-surveillance is refusal. The concept of refusal derives from indigenous theory (Simpson, 2017), where it is generally understood as the opposite and counterweight of consent. *Consent* is a central concept in the liberal tradition of the social contract, where citizens delegate responsibility to the government to protect and care for them (Williams, 2014). Citizens' consent is critical in justifying the government's power over them. In the wake of the civil rights and student movements of the 60s and 70s, Marcuse centred the concept of political refusal (Lamas *et al.*, 2017). In his theory, citizens can also *refuse* to participate in the social contract, if it becomes evident that the government is not respecting its side of the agreement. This constitutes part of XR's strategy, as I will demonstrate.

Consent and refusal are also being applied to the technological realm by Benjamin (2016). Giving theoretical weight and legitimacy to refusal, she promotes an agentic perspective on resistance, arguing that citizens and users have agency in whether and how they engage with technology and systems of domination. Gangadharan (2020) also focuses on the agentic perspective of refusal, which highlights that while some people are forcefully excluded from technology, many may actually choose to exclude themselves, thus refusing the systems of data exploitation and systemic algorithmic inequality described by Eubanks (2017). Gangadharan also mentions the alternative platforms communities may build on their own terms, refusing to adopt those provided by states or multinational corporations.

Refusal recognises and centres the agentic possibilities of citizens, inherently recognising the possibility for resistance. In this sense, it is aligned with a Foucauldian understanding of power, which always contains the potential for resistance (Krips, 1990). In this dissertation, I use the concept of refusal not as a practice but as a theoretical positioning useful to understand SMOs' attitudes towards surveillance. Refusal puts power and meaning in the purposeful lack of action, which can still be resistant to power. Withdrawing consent, withdrawing from one's responsibilities under the terms and conditions of surveillance, can be recognised as a powerful act of resistance. However, refusal does not mean denial. It does not negate the existence of the problem; indeed, I will also frame XR's attitude to surveillance as acknowledging and accepting its existence. However, they refuse to play by its rules, to engage with a system that needs radical change. They refute its premises; they refuse to participate in its mechanisms.

The task is then to analyse the refusal of surveillance in visual terms. I have previously presented surveillance as a form of unequal visual dynamics at the heart of politics, which undermines the possibility of democracy as the ability of citizens to encounter and look at each other on an equal plane. In *The Right to Look* (2011), Mirzoeff provides a comprehensive analysis of power and politics through visual categories and argues that power in modernity has been exercised visually and aesthetically. Allowing for a fluid conception of power, however, he also analyses the ways subaltern movements of resistance and liberation have *looked back at power* and exercised their right to be *subjects of the gaze*, their *right to look* at themselves, other citizens, and the state. I argue that the refusal of surveillance can be conceptualised as confronting the surveiller with a *gaze back*, as re-establishing the equal apparition to each other necessary for democratic life. It could be what Mirzoeff calls 'the right to look back' (2011: 6).

Extinction Rebellion

Following my analysis and my research angle across the two disciplines of surveillance studies and visibility of politics, I focus on an SMO that adopts a strategy of refusal and a politics of strengthening the democratic site of equal apparition to each other as citizens. XR was founded in 2018 as a decentralised, grassroots and democratic movement declaring rebellion against the UK government

for ignoring the political and economic changes necessary to tackle the climate crisis (Extinction Rebellion, 2019: 10). Although XR is very prominently against the interests of the state, its members do not hide or shy away from confrontation: indeed, they demand that the state confronts its citizens democratically. They have three demands:

- *Tell the truth*: they ask that the government acknowledge and recognise the climate crisis by declaring an emergency and communicating to other institutions about the urgency for change;
- *Act now*: they demand that the government act immediately to 'halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions to net zero by 2025' (Extinction Rebellion, 2019: 11); and
- *Create a Citizens' Assembly*: which must lead the way in the transition towards climate justice.

The Citizens' Assembly is a model of democratic participation that could, in the XR narrative, complement or even substitute liberal representative democracy. A Citizens' Assembly would congregate around a specific topic, and the members would be chosen through sortition, i.e. at random within the citizenry, with quotas to represent the population appropriately in terms of gender, race, and class (Extinction Rebellion Citizens' Assemblies Working Group, 2019: 8). They would then be exposed to presentations and conferences with experts for a few days before deliberating. The decisions of the Citizens' Assembly could in some models be given directly to the government for implementation, in others to parliamentary committees to be elaborated. In any case, the technical details of the Citizens' Assembly are not a focus for XR, because they do not present themselves as avant-gardists: they are pushing for systemic change and more democratic participation, rather than specific policies: it will be the democratic citizenry that decides the best way forward. With a decentralised, post-consensus mode of action, there is no official XR line apart from the three demands and the 'XR principles' (see Extinction Rebellion, n.d.). The movement does not present any solution to the climate crisis, nor does it take sides in debates around it: it simply points towards the biggest issue currently facing society. It calls for the Citizens' Assembly as a way of taking legitimate and unbiased decisions in this regard. The discourses I analyse in Chapter 4 are not an official nor unofficial policy: they are simply the narratives close to the founders, which new members

might have been attracted to. In Chapter 5, I will also discuss some counter-narratives I have encountered in my interviews.

From XR's demands, and their collection of essays *This is Not a Drill* (2019), it is clear that XR holds democracy dear. Their strategy involves creating disruption for the state and the current economic system while prefiguring the democratic, non-violent, and civically responsible system they propose. They are a good fit for this empirical study because they perform resistance to power in real life and refuse to bend to the demands of surveillance: they refuse to hide. Many XR activists have indeed offered themselves up for arrest for their disruptive activities, to make a public statement, permanently associated to their name, that they are 'standing up for something infinitely bigger and more important than [them]' (Extinction Rebellion, 2019: 96). XR refers to this attitude as *radical transparency*: in an effort towards democracy and civic responsibility, XR members are called to be transparent in their actions and their activism. I will argue that this trait positions them in radical opposition to the visual dynamics of surveillance, and that it constitutes a refusal of surveillance.

My research question is thus: **to what extent and how is Extinction Rebellion challenging political dynamics of visibility through their refusal of surveillance?**

I am not claiming that XR's transparent resistance to surveillance is the only way forward, or that it is superior to other models. However, I argue that it is useful in challenging visual dynamics of surveillance, and I provide an analysis of how that functions discursively within the XR narrative.

Conceptual framework

My conceptual framework merges the study of counter-surveillance with a focus on visibility and understands politics, democracy, and surveillance in visual terms. I investigate the impact of surveillance on democracy, concentrating on the public sphere and its corollary counterpublics as the sites where democracy and politics are enacted, practiced, and developed through the visual encounter between citizens. I analyse this site through the visual lens of the politics of recognition, analysing the power dynamics of the gaze of politics in relation to surveillance. In Foucauldian terms, I focus on the way different discursive positionings in the economy of surveillance are organised in terms of gazing at each other, and what that means for power and resistance in the context of surveillance. I choose to analyse these visual political dynamics within XR, as a movement that is

targeted by surveillance and promotes radical transparency and direct confrontation with the state. In the next chapter, I will present my methods of research, including the interviews I conducted with members of XR and the FDA of the transcripts.

FOUCAULDIAN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Understanding visibility, power, resistance, and refusal in Foucauldian terms, I selected FDA as the most appropriate methodology for seeking an answer to my research question. FDA belongs to the wider field of discourse analysis, derived from Foucault, who theorised the construction of reality through discourse, defining it as a group of statements that through repetition, acceptance and truth-making, form the rules for how knowledge about the world is constructed, what is taken for true, and what is expected from reality (Willig, 2008: 112). Discourse frames our understanding of the world and ourselves, by forming subject positions from which we understand the world. Looking at mechanisms of meaning-making in language helps to understand how certain kinds of knowledge become to be considered true and how others get pushed towards the periphery or the fringes of truth (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002: 15). Most important to understand discourse is the fact that the mechanism is cyclical and has material effects on reality: discourse affects the way subjects can see and understand the world, and therefore affects their actions, which affect the material reality of the world (Willig, 2008: 116–117). In this sense, even for the most realist among discourse analysts, discourse is material in that it creates the way we understand similarities and differences between material realities.

Applying FDA to my research question can bring rich results: I aim to highlight how power flows in the visibility of surveillance, uncovering the subject positions that construct the surveiller, the surveilled, the citizen and the agent of the state. I am investigating how resistance to surveillance is constructed in XR, how it is justified and in which capacity it is understood. FDA does not focus specifically on actors: discourses are social and construct the social independently of individual actors, who are more accurately described as being produced by the discourse (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002: 11). For this reason, it is particularly apt to analyse groups and social movements independently of individual members. Discourse is also malleable: Foucault situates himself at the centre of the

debate between structure and agency, attributing importance to both. Indeed, agency is fundamental to the theories that frame my research, and discourse is a good way to understand it, as it allows for power to flow (though unequally) in different directions: power is always capable of being appropriated by oppressed subjects, who can construct discourse in their favour (Krips, 1990).

Interviews

I interviewed members of XR to understand their views on surveillance and democracy. Interviews provide a window into people's worldview and their subject position within society (Berger, 1998). I chose interviewing over other methods of data collection because it was the most apt for my question: I needed to analyse XR's narratives, uncover how they were mobilising refusal, and how this was affecting the visibility of surveillance. Analysing material XR published would not bring rich results: an overview of it revealed no exploration of the topic of surveillance nor of counter-surveillance. A survey, on the other hand, might have allowed a bird's eye view of the movement, but not the in-depth analysis necessary to explore my question. Semi-structured interviews were ideal because they allowed flexibility to explore participants' answers in detail.

Interviews have the methodological flaw of heavily involving the interviewer, who co-constructs the results of the data collection with the participants. I acknowledge the bias of this first-person involvement, while keeping in mind that a Foucauldian perspective investigates the subjectivities that discourses create, rather than aspiring to objectivity. The interviews generated the data I co-produced, and my subjectivity is a caveat that I make clear to the reader. I also included and highlighted the counter-discourses I encountered in my interviews and that did not fall under my hypotheses.

I interviewed eight members of XR. Some of them are closer to the founding group while others are more recent joiners. All of them will be referred to by pseudonyms. I conducted semi-structured interviews online, developing my question guide as I went along, and focused my questions on the relationship between democracy and transparency in XR, their attitudes towards surveillance, and their relationship with the police and the state. The question guide is available in the Appendix.

Research ethics

XR is a civil disobedience movement positioning itself in antagonism with the state. I asked participants questions about surveillance and organising; therefore, I had to be particularly mindful of ethical concerns. Some XR activities have been illegal, and some of their members have been arrested, including most of the participants in my research; some of them even have court cases pending. It is important that the identity of my participants remains confidential from state officials and from other members of XR. I developed my ethical framework in collaboration with my supervisor and the LSE Research Ethics Committee (REC), to guarantee the safety of my participants as much as possible.

Recruitment

I reached the subjects through a contact of mine in the movement, who provided me with their phone numbers. I messaged people on the securely end-to-end encrypted app Signal. Once they had agreed to participate in the interview, subjects were provided with an Informed Consent Information Sheet. I relied purely on a snowball sample, to protect the information of the participants (as opposed to emailing them or reaching them on social media, where data could easily be captured by third parties).

Informed consent

Interviewees were fully informed of their rights and of the risks of participating in my research through the Information Sheet (available in the Appendix). This states all the information contained in this Research Ethics section, including their right to withdraw their data at any point before submission and their right to read the transcript of the interviews and the final dissertation. The Information Sheet was not signed by participants, to avoid leaving a paper trail that could identify them. Their consent was instead given verbally at the beginning of their interviews and recorded.

Confidentiality

All interview transcripts were pseudonymised, and the pseudonyms were used at all stages of the data collections and analysis (file names, analysis files, this dissertation). Any other people and places mentioned in the interviews have also been replaced with fictional names, and any information pertaining to participants' illegal activities or court cases has been deleted or amended, from the

transcripts through storage, analysis and written dissertation copies. Following Stefania Milan's (2013, 2014) example, I have taken care to protect the organisation from outside scrutiny by ensuring that size, structure, and action organising of the movement are not transcribed or discussed.

Security

I may have to breach the confidentiality of the data if there is a legal obligation to do so. Participants have been informed of this risk in the Information Sheet. I have deleted all my material (recordings, transcripts any analysis files) after submission of this dissertation, and I will resist any eventual collaboration requested by the police, where legally possible (Milan, 2014: 10).

I organised interview calls on the securely end-to-end encrypted video-call software Jitsi. I transcribed the interviews under pseudonyms, and a key to the pseudonyms (whom each pseudonym refers to) was stored on paper, with no digital copy, in my personal files locked away with a key, until the submission of this dissertation, when it was destroyed (Ayling & Mewse, 2009). Recordings have been destroyed after transcription (Mukungu, 2017). Recordings, transcripts, and all analysis files have been stored on the LSE H space and backed up on an external hard drive isolated from the internet (Ayling & Mewse, 2009). All data and transcripts have been destroyed after the submission of this dissertation (Mukungu, 2017).

Reporting

In Chapter 4 and 5, I use quotes from individual interviews to conduct my analysis. I always refer to the subject in question by their pseudonym. I am not including any transcripts in the Appendix, because, in discussion with the Department and the REC, we agreed that it could potentially lead to the identification of subjects. I am only including one annotated page from one of the transcripts, to provide an example of my FDA. I submitted the quotes I intended to use to each participant, making sure they approved of their phrasing and use.

Dissemination

I sought consent from participants to publish the dissertation in case the occasion arises.

XR is the object of my research because it is an open and transparent movement, which puts it in a perfect position to discuss its policies in relation to democracy and surveillance. Some of its members,

including almost all the participants of my research, are openly trying to get arrested and are exercising their right as citizens to protest in an open and transparent manner. They are fully aware of the risks they incur by putting themselves out in the open, and in the interest of participatory research, my ethics measures exceeded participants' expectations.

Interview analysis

The analysis of the interview transcripts constituted an iterative, inductive, and grounded process. I followed Willig's (2008) six-step template, keeping in mind that Foucault's methods are unsuited to strict methodological rules and encourage the researcher to interrogate her subject position and feelings, where they come from and how they are constructed (Gill, 1996). In reading and re-reading the texts, I paid attention to what was taken for granted, looking at the familiar from a distance to make it strange, and questioning assumptions, links and mechanisms of meaning-making to uncover how they come to constitute knowledge and how they create subject positions.

Willig's (2008) stage one consists of selecting all passages in the text that refer to a discursive construction: it is similar to a thematic analysis. I highlighted patterns in the text and relevant sections that used analytical concepts useful to my analysis (democracy & inclusion, problems with the system, responsibility, civil disobedience, surveillance, sacrifice, consent, and so on; an example of an annotated transcript page is included in the Appendix). I compiled a spreadsheet with the most relevant quotes for each participant, divided by topic, taking care to include discourses and counter-discourses, to be able to see all of my material on the page (available in the Appendix; quotes have been blurred to protect the identity of the participants). I also highlighted the most eloquent and useful quotes to facilitate the writing stage. Stage two involves uncovering the discourses that the subject is appealing to, to justify their statements. The discourses I identified are reflected in the sections of Chapter 4: they are the narratives that surround each particular topic of interest in my research, which, taken together, form the overall narrative around democracy and surveillance in XR.

The following stages constitute the analysis proper and form my guide for developing the analysis of the discourses included in Chapter 4. Stage three is action orientation, which means asking what purposes the discourses serve in the subject's worldview. Stage four consists of uncovering the subject positionings that the discourses allow: it means asking how the subject connects their identity to the

discourse they talk about. Stage five includes asking what kinds of practices stem out of the discourses or form part of the discourses, in a sense, how the discourse leads to the reality it purports to describe. Stage six asks the researcher to interrogate the subjectivities the discourse creates, and the feelings, meanings and truth claims it invites in the subjects.

Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity is essential to FDA (Gill, 1996: 147). As a researcher, I had an important role in constructing the data by asking the questions, prompting the participants to reflect on the topics of democracy and surveillance and what they meant to them personally, to their movement, and to other social movements. In this sense, the analysis that I provide does not and cannot constitute objective knowledge, which, in a Foucauldian sense, does not exist. I am producing a discourse about a discourse; in other words, one possible reading of the discursive rhetoric and practices of XR and their meaning in the general economy of discourses around surveillance, democracy, and social movements. I am part of the demographic and radical left-wing landscape that XR appeals to, despite not being personally a member of XR or ever having been involved. I care deeply about the environment, fear the changing climate, and am anti-surveillance. It is necessary to know these features of my personality and identity to situate this dissertation in its subjective framework. Within the subjective nature of my research and of FDA, some aspects of my subjectivity counter-balance the inclinations I have just examined: instinctively, I do not subscribe to the discourses and practices of XR; indeed, I find it hard to believe in the agency of social movements to create significant change in a context of surveillance. In part, this project was an effort to change my own mind. For this reason, my discursive subject position is perhaps more malleable than it could have been, and thus invites more scrutiny, but also has more potential for discursive validity. I suggest reading this work critically and considering how I am constructing knowledge and what subject position my research creates for the writer and the readers.

STRATEGIES OF REBELLION

The XR narrative surrounding surveillance is complex and multi-faceted, with discourses closer to founding members of XR different from those of less central members. My results are based on a small interview sample and cannot provide an overview of the whole movement. However, they do reflect some important trends, which have been confirmed by all participants. In this chapter, I will analyse the discourses that my participants have appealed to in their interviews when asked about XR's relationships with democracy, civil disobedience, surveillance and the police; in the next chapter, I will discuss its significance in relation to the literature around surveillance, democracy and resistance.

Democracy and civil responsibility

I have already touched on how vital democracy is to the XR philosophy and their demands. It is also essential to understanding their discourses around surveillance.

Extinction Rebellion is often seen as a climate movement, but I see it as a democracy movement, you know we've got the three demands, but the first two are both sort of: 'Hey, these would be nice things,' and the third one is the Citizens Assembly, that's the demand that says: 'This is solidly what we want to do, we want the Citizens Assembly,' we're saying that the first two are necessary, but we want the Citizens Assembly to decide, because we don't have the legitimacy and neither does Parliament. [...] I'm involved in a democracy movement, trying to upgrade democracy or create democracy where there isn't one. – Rafael

Rafael argues that democracy, manifested through the Citizens Assembly, is XR's only concrete aim, while environmental concerns are more accurately described as their motivation for advocating change. The call for a radical, participatory model of democracy derives from the perceived failure of the current liberal representative system, considered not sufficiently democratic: according to XR, the skews in the system are evidenced by the fact that the climate crisis still hasn't been acted upon, despite its urgency. For XR, 'systemic change' is thus the only way survival will be possible.

The emphasis on democracy sets the discourse on a defined line: it adopts the subject position of *the citizen*. The rebellious citizen is thus constructing her environment through a civic lens: her

interlocutor is the government, the object of contention is her relationship to it, which the threat of extinction has put into question. It also centres a sense of *civic responsibility*, to take care of what is public and to consider other citizens as equals. When XR refutes the state as illegitimate on the grounds of not protecting its citizens, XR creates a sense of responsibility to advocate for others, to try to make them equal when they are not yet seen as such. It is framing the relationship between people in civic terms.

Consent and civil disobedience

Intrinsic to the idea of civic responsibility is that of consent. Interrogating the relationship between citizens and government, XR has taken up democratic theories of a social contract between citizens and the state, as first emerged in the liberal thinkers of the Enlightenment, most prominently Hobbes, Rousseau and Kant (see Williams, 2014). The social contract is considered broken by the failure of the state to protect its citizens against the climate crisis (Extinction Rebellion, 2019: 2). Therefore, the members of XR *withdraw their consent*, as citizens, to participate in the social contract: they refuse for the exploitation of the environment to be carried out in their name, and they take responsibility for their own actions:

If you believe your government is behaving in a way that it no longer protects you, then the social contract you have with the government, which is 'you protect us, okay? And we will obey your laws,' that contract is broken, [...] because our government is not acting in our best interest and therefore [...] we're no longer obliged under the contract to obey the laws of our government. – Emily

If the government is not upholding its end of the contract, the contract is broken, because citizens no longer consent to it. Therefore, they are no longer obliged under the contract to uphold their end of it: they no longer have to obey the law, because the law has lost legitimacy.

The withdrawal of consent flows directly into civil disobedience, the practice of breaking the law to draw attention to the illegitimacy of the law itself. Activism is thus framed as disobedience against the state, as citizens: actively breaking the law to highlight the state having broken its own contract. *This is not a Drill* describes how the UK government has failed its citizens: for example, being the

biggest fossil-fuel subsidiser in the EU (2019: 22), pursuing a capitalism based on perpetual growth (146-154), and prioritising profit over the survival of the Earth as an environment humans are able to live in (2).

Responsibility and radical transparency

The subject position of a citizen performing civil disobedience to highlight injustice in the system involves actively taking responsibility for one's actions. Indeed, XR argues, if the social contract between the state and the citizen is broken, citizens can no longer trust the government or delegate responsibility for their actions to it: they need to take full responsibility for their own actions.

Within our society we are trained into thinking that somewhere out there there is somebody that is more clever or intelligent or whatever, who has come up with this idea of what's right, and as long as we play along with the rules set, then we'll all be okay and we'll all be good and fine, and when you start to realise that that isn't the case [...], then what other recourse do you have, other than to disobey those concepts and say 'I don't agree with this, I haven't consented to this, I'm not down with the way that this is happening'? – Jane

Taking responsibility for one's own actions, in the XR narrative, also means being transparent about them:

You can't do an act of conscience anonymously. That's one of the key things behind XR, you know, that we don't mask up [...]. Always around XR actions, they've always been 100% accountable, you know, we take absolutely full responsibility, you know, for what... for what we've done, so it's kind of... it's not to establish a kind of a moral high ground, it's to maintain ethics, and [...] in the society we want to see, everybody has to essentially take responsibility for their actions. – Peter

Putting one's face and name to one's actions is essential to exercise one's right as a citizen to dissent to the actions the state is taking in one's name. It directly flows from taking full responsibility of one's actions because one can no longer trust that the state is taking care of protecting them and other citizens.

If you deeply think about that, then really could you... sign off the deep water rise drilling platforms and stuff, if you know what potential outcomes there are. Loads of people are saying: 'oh I'm just following orders, [...]' and it allows them to compartmentalise and ignore the true harms and the hidden violence of what they do. – Peter

Not taking responsibility for one's actions is, in the XR narrative, what got the planet in this situation, because the great majority of the population is trusting that someone else will solve the problem, that someone else is taking care of the environment, and that it will all work itself out in the grand scheme of things, and this allows people to shrug off the harm that they do individually, as employees of big polluting companies, state officials or simply as consumers.

This emphasis on responsibility makes XR an open movement, which its members define as 'radically transparent.' This means that its members and organisers are transparent about their involvement with XR, they take ownership of their actions, they stay to face the consequences, be it arrest or a fine, and they are happy to have their name stated plainly next to their beliefs and actions.

I would say that Extinction Rebellion is maybe not unique but different from the generality, in that it's written into the founding DNA to be open [...]. I was always a very private person before getting involved, like I said no social media, just for example, and I've become much less private as a result of being in Extinction Rebellion, and actually I see that as part of it. Yeah so you know there are photographs of me getting arrested, which will have been in the press for example, and so on. And I accept that as part of it. – Matt

Radical transparency is not limited to civil disobedience but extends to all aspects of the movement. Its meetings are open to all, its documents and meeting minutes are publicly available online, and anyone can find out who is currently holding what position in the movement and which 'circles' (the XR terminology for committees) are responsible for which task or area of the movement. It also means that XR is keeping an open channel of communication with the police, to prepare them for mass civil disobedience actions: they do not hide their identities and their actions.

The threat of surveillance

These strategies of rebellion, framed through democracy and citizenship, flowing into revoking consent, civilly disobeying, taking responsibility, and making oneself radically transparent, offer the movement up for surveillance. Numerous participants have recounted their experiences with police officers recognising them or intercepting their communications. The movement is open to anyone, and information is often shared freely among members, which makes it disproportionately vulnerable to infiltration, in comparison to other SMOs (see Extinction Rebellion, 2019: 41). The way activists choose to react to this reality is by embracing and cultivating the openness of the movement. As I will elaborate in Chapter 5, this attitude can be conceptualised as *refusal of surveillance*. Indeed, although XR members acknowledge the possibility and reality of surveillance, they also rely on transparency and responsibility to overcome the surveillance ‘paranoia.’

There is a very aware acknowledgment of how surveillance works psychologically, as Foucault himself theorised:

The whole Policy Exchange² thing is just to lay it on really thick, that you know, ‘we know who you are,’ but they *need* to, cause that’s normally how it works: it’s that they rely on people being afraid, you know, afraid of being kind of named... – Peter

Surveillance relies on people being afraid of it, and its power rests in the effect it has on people to stop them from doing what they want to do. By not playing into the feelings that surveillance generates, a lot of its power is taken away. Paranoia is often mentioned as the effect of surveillance, and being even more damaging than surveillance itself:

I think it’s almost the threat of surveillance, even if it doesn’t exist, cause this goes on in the activist community: loads of people get really paranoid, and then, it’s almost like in the olden days, in mediaeval days calling someone a witch, you know, now people will say, if they’ve fallen out with someone, they’ll say ‘you’re a cop.’ I’ve seen that happen and it’s just

² Peter is referencing the *Extremism Rebellion* report, published by the think tank Policy Exchange (Wilson & Walton, 2019).

the kind of fact that there might be cops, that... even if they're totally ineffective, it's more what people do to themselves. – Peter

Surveillance affects the movement by spreading paranoia among its members and creating an environment of distrust that inhibits effective action. Paranoia also has harmful effects on new members:

As soon as you start going down that track with using certain messaging apps and like other electronics that are encrypted, as soon as you go down the track of like suspecting people for being police informants or other things like that, you also create this atmosphere which is not the most welcoming for new people, [...] so you know so like in order to create a kind of group culture or atmosphere which would allow for a large amount of people to feel welcome, like feel like they can show up and get engaged and participate in it, then it would also be really counterproductive to try to keep things secret, because I think [...] that kind of feels like there's so much paranoia or like security fears or like anxieties. – Michael

Different surveillance strategies, such as encryption and cross-referencing, create an unwelcoming environment for people outside the movement, which would make the movement closed off to new recruits and would thus harm its inclusivity, in direct contrast to its emphasis on democracy and civic responsibility, on making sure everyone is valued and welcome in the new system which they are prefiguring.

Making the effort to make all communications and organising secure from infiltration and interception from the police also raises the issue of time and resources, which also harms inclusivity:

Essentially we've always been completely open, [...] this is one of the reasons why XR could scale so fast, because if you only do it with people who've been cross-referenced by three others and everything else, and you take you know three years to induct them before you even think about trusting them with an email address or something, you know, then you're only ever going to be a group of ten people and you can't scale. And of course, that saves you massive energy expense that you're not wasting on kind of paranoia and this fake security. – Peter

Transparency will save the movement time and energy that can be spent towards furthering the cause. The fact that Peter calls security 'fake' is also important: the XR discourse deems surveillance inevitable and invincible, because it will always be one step ahead:

Okay, like we know we will never be able to plan any like massive disobedience action in secret from the police or surveillance, so we might as well just inform them of what we're doing, partly just to like help keep people safe. – Michael

Therefore, their efforts would not only be costly, but also worthless. Lastly, when asked whether the existence of surveillance makes all other activism harder, and therefore whether it should be one of the first things to campaign against or act against, Peter said:

But where things need to change, you know, we can only start where we are today, you know, and I'm in the UK, and that's where I am, and that's... that's the environment, and it's just one of those things you just have to accept and get used to, because if you start down the process of 'we're going to try and change that first,' then, you know, nothing else will get done, and we're on a... we're sliding down a taper with the ecological crisis and everything else. And yeah, there's loads of things that need fixing [...]. At some point you just have to kinda just go for it and hope for the best, that that is the right thing. – Peter

There is no right thing that needs to be 'fixed' first: it all depends on subjective views. However, the environmental issue is extremely urgent, and thus it is the one XR focuses on, because if they stopped and tried to change one or another thing first, they would never progress; therefore, they just have to press on. This narrative really highlights how XR is focused on democracy and system change even more than it is focused on the environmental cause, because the climate crisis is simply the proof that humanity needs urgent systemic change, and it cannot wait until surveillance is eliminated.

For these reasons, XR's strategy towards surveillance is to refuse to spend any energy on it, accept that it exists, and still protest, accepting the personal damage that will come from it and *refusing to attribute legitimacy to it*. Refusal does not mean denial: acknowledging that surveillance exists and that there might be personal consequences for breaking the law in an environment of surveillance is necessary to adopt an attitude of refusal and carry on.

The way that you actually work with [surveillance] is by openly acknowledging it, [...] and then people can make their own choices based on good information and understanding, rather than trying to create... rather than having some kind of atmosphere of mistrust. – Jane

The strategy is again rooted in the principle of responsibility, of empowering each citizen to make their own choice regarding the risks they take. This is not only related to breaking the law but also to exposing themselves to the risks of openly being part of a civil disobedience movement, even while not having broken the law. In the end, Emily argues, and most of the participants agree, that the threat of surveillance does not deter people from practicing their right to speak and protest, in other words, that the 'chilling effect' does not affect XR:

It doesn't seem to stop people taking to the streets. [...] It's possibly one of those things that people think will deter people? But the end of the day if you're prepared to take to the streets and not go home until the police arrest you, then maybe you... you've got to that point where the surveillance does not matter. – Emily

Publicly practicing democracy, civilly disobeying, and taking responsibility for one's own actions create a subjectivity that is beyond surveillance and thus in radical antagonism to it. The thought that surveillance might actually cause harm to a citizen that is acting in a public way and for public benefit, XR argues, is ridiculous, because it means that the surveiller would be crossing a line that right now, in a country like the UK that considers itself democratic, irrevocably marks a slide into autocracy and is therefore uncrossable. Surveillance, in short, does not scare and cannot scare the citizen that is pursuing democracy.

VISUALITIES OF COUNTER-SURVEILLANCE

XR's attitude towards surveillance can bring an interesting new angle to surveillance studies, the literature on technological refusal, and the visualities of surveillance. In this chapter, I argue that XR's radical transparency can be conceptualised as a refusal of surveillance and that this refusal can enrich surveillance studies when analysed visually, and provide an empirical example of 'looking back' in Mirzoeff's (2011) theory of the visibility of power.

Refusal of surveillance

I have conceptualised XR's radical transparency to surveillance as refusal. In XR's discourse, the concept of refusal is widely applied: there is refusal in withdrawing consent from the social contract, in civil disobedience, and in purposefully refusing to engage in the game of surveillance, in the psychological relation between surveiller and surveilled.

It depends on individual psychology as well, but almost you kinda have to press on regardless. But it relies on the fact essentially that all people are selfish and self-motivated, [...] [The police] couldn't get their head around the idea that we're doing this cause we think, you know, some of this shit is wrong. It was just like 'what's in it in self-interest for you?' It's kinda circumventing that type of psychology. – Peter

Being radically transparent means circumventing the capitalist logic of surveillance, of people acting purely out of self-interest. It means refusing the climate of paranoia and purposefully creating a space of inclusion, based on civil responsibility, consent and democracy.

Surveillance is in direct contradiction to democracy. And I say that because surveillance is a form of authoritarian control and mistrust, and it's covert, um and it doesn't say what its intention is, and what that information might be used for, especially if it's being collected and stored, could be changed... so there is no consent, whereas democracy [...] is overt and works with explicit powers that are consented to. – Jane

Jane – and, to some extent, Rose – also acknowledge that playing into surveillance would be directly at odds with the value XR attributes to democracy, conceptualised as a social contract based on

consent. Surveillance is used to protect the state, not the citizens, and is thus an abuse of power within the democratic state, whose obligation is to facilitate the democratic right of its citizens, even when they go against the state's own interest. When democratic participation is based on consent, rebellion means not consenting, i.e. refusing. XR refuses to hide because hiding plays into surveillance. The actions and organising performed by XR members are by their own nature public, enacted as part of their democratic right in the civic realm and rooted in a responsibility to protect the citizenry from climate disaster, when the government is not doing so, despite it being its responsibility. The public nature of their actions gives XR legitimacy. Hiding would deny this legitimacy and attribute it to surveillance instead. Hiding would acknowledge the state's right to surveil; refusing puts this right into question.

Looking back at the state

In this section, I am discussing my results in relation to my research question:

To what extent and how is XR challenging political dynamics of visibility through their refusal of surveillance?

I conceptualise XR's refusal of surveillance in terms of visibility, applying political theories of recognition and contributing to Mirzoeff's (2011) theory of the gaze of surveillance. While surveillance consists of one actor (the state) being able to look at everyone else and being opaque to the gaze of everyone towards them, democracy on the other hand requires all citizens, as equal, to be able to look at each other on an equal plane. Surveillance requires transparency in the citizenry, opacity in the state; democracy requires transparency on all sides. Refusal weaponizes citizen transparency and constitutes a *gaze back*, rooted in democracy, demanding transparency in the state. It demands the gaze of politics to be equal to enact real democracy. It demands the state to look at itself and step up to its democratic responsibility.

We're starting by looking at the state, because we're kind of calling out what it is that the state isn't doing, and so then if the state's response is 'oh we're going to covertly watch you to see what you are doing' and then our response is 'well we're not hiding anything, we're telling you exactly what it is that we're doing quite openly, and we're telling *people* quite openly what it is that we're doing and telling people what it is that *you* are doing in response to that as well.' – Jane

I argue that transparent refusal thus becomes a democratic tool to re-establish an equilibrium of the gaze between state and citizens, to put the ball in the state's court, to start repairing the broken social contract and act to protect citizens from the climate emergency.

Democracy versus security

This argument, in my opinion, can contribute to the debate between privacy and security, analysing it from a democratic perspective. If, as Steeves (2009) argues, we conceptualise ourselves in relation to others, and we need privacy as the space necessary to separate ourselves from others and thus form our conception of ourselves, then privacy is in visual terms the space that makes it possible to look at each other and to look back at the state.

Democracy does not mean that everyone is transparent and there is no privacy: on the contrary, the absence of surveillance gives citizens privacy to be able to choose transparency. A democratic society should thus be able to balance privacy and transparency, which are not mutually exclusive but should exist at the same time. Privacy is essential to be radically transparent in agentic terms. Being transparent to the state because of surveillance, indeed, is not enough to be *radically* transparent: one can only be radical when one is exercising her agency and choice. In other words, a citizen must have privacy (the privacy we already reserve to the voting booth, for example; Steeves, 2009: 207) in order to choose to be transparent, in order to externalise their words, their opinions, and demonstrate for what they believe in with responsibility and civic sense. Privacy is necessary as a safety measure to be able to exercise democratic rights. Privacy is essential to civic responsibility, as there is no responsibility when others are choosing what to know about one, instead of what one chooses to let them know. Security, on the other hand, is antithetic to civic responsibility, as it is delegating responsibility to opaque state organs. Security obscures privacy as the space of recognition essential to democracy and is thus essentially anti-democratic.

Critiques

The radical transparency approach poses problems of inclusion. The subject position of *citizen* is privileged, has a history of violence and exclusion, and is not accessible to all sorts of people (Fraser, 1990). Civic responsibility towards amplifying their voices is noble but can be perceived as

patronising. Not everyone can afford to have a criminal record or pay a fine: all participants in my interviews identified as 'white and middle class,' and most of them acknowledged the privileged social composition of the movement. To widen participation, action dynamics allow for members who are less comfortable with danger to still participate: instead of committing illegal acts, they can simply make up part of the crowd. Informing the police of the nature and turnout of events in advance is itself a strategy of inclusion towards members who are less confident in the possibility of confrontation with the police: if the police is more prepared in the face of actions, they will also be more calm, as opposed to surprised, nervous, and prone to retaliation. Certain strata of the population, however, are not comfortable around the police under any circumstances, as the recent Black Lives Matter demonstrations have exposed.

A shift towards obfuscation

Even in my small sample of interviews, I encountered counter-discourses, and disagreements, especially in members who were not as close to the founding circle. I identified two themes in these counter-discourses: legitimate surveillance and a shift towards obfuscation.

Emily argues that some state surveillance is legitimate because it is necessary to police who is breaking the law. She is especially worried about far-right groups escaping surveillance.

I think there is a legitimacy for the state to pick up or what Extinction Rebellion is doing ... because Extinction Rebellion has set themselves up as a group, right, although non-violent, that says 'we're going to break the law' so it's like, [...] it's like of course it has to be legitimate, isn't it, for the state to take interest in a group like that. - Emily

More moderate stances regarding surveillance thus have space to exist within XR, possibly being rooted in a refusal of consent that is not total, and a practical, reformist approach.

Another counter-discourse disagrees with the practical applications of radical transparency: staying after civil disobedience actions to get arrested or pay a fine is a costly practice in terms of energy and money that does not *need* to be carried out. This is a more anarchist view of civil disobedience, not so deeply rooted in democratic theory.

If you're doing those kind of higher stakes actions where you end up doing serious criminal damage or something along those lines, I think you just do... you have to be more careful, otherwise you end up crippled and I don't have enough money to pay huge fines, and I don't... yeah I just think it's... you can be smart about it, you don't just have to stand up and take whatever is given to you, if you know that in the future it's going to mean that you can't join in on other stuff. – Rose

Again, it is a more inclusive perspective that considers that not everyone can afford to face any sort of consequence the state might use to punish dissent. Although Rose is happy to put her name to her opinions, she does not want to suffer consequences for illegal actions and organising. Otherwise, she is fully involved in the cause and is happy to perform the actions. According to other participants, this is for now a marginal perspective in XR, but as the movement progresses and younger people get closer to the centre, it could be the direction the movement might follow.

I think [transparency] was useful at a time when we were trying to say 'we are just good people trying really hard to fix something and this is the necessary end point'... like if you want to do something, if you want to achieve something, and the thing that you need to do to achieve it is illegal, then you should stay around and like face the consequences, but I just think we've got to a point now where that shouldn't be necessary anymore. Like I think people should be able to work within this movement and not have to face huge fine and legal consequences that really cripple people. – Rose

The narrative seems to be that the movement is now sufficiently established, and that it has a good enough reputation and aims that it is no longer necessary to be radically transparent, but it is more important to survive, as a movement and as activists, from the retaliation of the state, rather than to convince people of XR's integrity.

For these reasons, change is underway within the movement regarding the practice of informing the police. I argue that there is a disconnect between the theory of the democracy that XR would like to achieve and the reality of society as it stands now in the UK: although citizens *should* be able to protest and express their opinions with minimal consequences, this right is often stratified by class, race and gender. Perhaps not all activism can be prefigurative, and some of it needs to consider the reality of

the starting point. However, as I have argued in this chapter, I do think that radical transparency serves an important purpose to subvert the narratives, psychology and visibility of surveillance. In the practice of activism and inclusion, it might not be as viable long-term as it has been so far.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the XR narrative, organised around the subject position of the citizen and centred around a radical participatory model of democracy, leads to radical transparency rooted in a sense of civic responsibility that makes XR activists bare to the consequences of surveillance. This is, on their part, a conscious choice: they are exercising their agency to refuse the premise of surveillance and to refuse to participate in or give it legitimacy in any way. I have conceptualised this refusal in visual terms as what Mirzoeff (2011) refers to as exercising the right to look back at power and as an effort to re-establish the equality of the gaze necessary for democracy.

In the political debate between privacy and security, a visual understanding of democracy and surveillance clearly establishes that surveillance is anti-democratic, because it is based on a fundamental imbalance of the gaze and of recognition. Instead, democracy is founded on the equal apparition of every citizen on the plane of politics. Privacy emerges as the space necessary to conceptualise the self and the other in order to appear to each other and recognise each other as citizens and equals. Thus, privacy clearly becomes a guardian for democracy, while surveillance becomes directly at odds with it.

Future research can benefit from analysing XR's attitudes towards surveillance and the state, monitoring its shift towards obfuscation and to what extent this will undermine their potential for resistance to surveillance. Researchers may also compare XR UK to its international chapters, where surveillance may be different, to investigate whether refusal might be applied in other contexts.

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APPENDIXES

Transcripts are not included in this Appendix to protect the identity of the participants. A single page has been included as an example of FDA annotated text, after careful consideration that it would not put the identity of the participant at risk.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

- Introducing myself.
- Introducing my research, its context and dissemination.
- Presenting risks, ethical issues, and what has been done to ensure safety.
- Explaining that I will use pseudonyms, unless they choose otherwise. Proposing a pseudonym, discussing if it is a safe choice and agreeing on a final pseudonym.
- Make sure recording is in place and working.
- Verbally asking for consent based on the Informed Consent Information Sheet.

Personal experience/Ice breaker

- How did you become involved in XR?
- What do you do in the movement?

Understanding of democracy

- Why are you involved in XR? What does it mean for you to be involved in this group?
- How does your involvement in XR play into your understanding of your civic responsibility?
- What does being a citizen mean to you? What does democracy mean to you? How important is it to you? What is your ideal democracy?

Behaviour in relation to the state

- How do you understand and practice civil disobedience in relation to democracy and the state? Do you think it is right to break the law? Why? How does that relate to your idea of democracy?
- Could you tell me more about the rationale behind your concerns with public safety while you are demonstrating? In terms of keeping the police up to date with your protests.

Surveillance

- Did you ever have any legal problems or other kind of personal problems with the state as a member of XR? Has the information the state had about you ever put you in a difficult position? Can you talk to me about it?
- Tell me about a time when you felt the state was surveilling your activities as a XR activist.
- How safe do you feel safe using online software in your personal life? Do you worry about the state having access to your data, as a member of XR?

Counter-surveillance

- XR promotes itself as a very open organisation, run by grassroots volunteers. What mechanisms do you put in place to make sure that the wrong people don't have access to your material, for example in an attempt to sabotage you, or as spy cops? Or is that not a concern?

Opinion

- How important do you think privacy is for movements such as XR?
- How much do you think democracy can be threatened by surveillance, if at all?

Conclusion

- Is there anything else you would like to add, or that I might have missed?
- Thank you so much for putting forward your views.
- I'm always available for questions via email or message, would you be okay with me emailing or messaging you if I have any additional questions? Would you be willing to speak again in video format?
- Do you have any suggestions for who else I can interview for my project?
- Thank you so much again. Please expect an email from me for the purpose of checking the transcription of correct quotes.

EXAMPLE OF ANALYSED TRANSCRIPT PAGE

8

you and undermine you, you know, Doreen Lawrence was a victim, she lost her son, and they had someone in their kind of... in their group as undercover, because the police had not fully... appear not to be a fully accountable body. On the street now, after Ian Tomlinson they're extremely careful not... well at least they are with us, there's no risk you're going to die, or harm yourself in custody and everything else. I imagine it was different before then. At higher levels there's something else entirely going on, and I don't think just because there's been that inquiry that it will have stopped, because essentially it's merging into kind of state intelligence.

I: I guess what's the way to undermine their legitimacy? Because, um... the way I think about it is: sure, if they use the information they have, then they revealed that they have it, and they'll expose their mechanism of surveillance, and people may or may not become angry about it. So, on what basis do you get them not only to know, but also to get angry about it, on what basis do you undermine the legitimacy of the police to collect such massive amounts of information off innocent citizens?

can't stop at all the little things, you'll never do anything

P: I almost think it's kinda just a fact of life, you know, that that is kind of what modern nation states do. It is Orwellian, and it's kind of why things need to change on a systemic level, and you know, if you to change it to fix the carbon dioxide problem, it will not essentially stop more things like this happening, and you know like around and wars and everything else. And all these things are linked ultimately. But you know, originally when we started, people said, you know: "this is just crazy, it's unwinnable, it's too big," but essentially it's what needs doing, because always... I think a lot of the imprints in the the green movement, the social justice movement, is: "let's concentrate on something small that's winnable, you know, let's concentrate on closing down one fracking plant, or you know one really toxic abattoir or something like that," but actually they're all just symptomatic, and as long as everybody says "the big thing is too big to challenge," you know... so maybe that... you know, it may be futile, and it may be impossible, but it's what needs doing, and to get back to it, it's what love requires of you, and one of the things it does require is not to stand by, as Dr King said, if you... or was it Nelson Mandela, this idea that, you know, if you're neutral, you're on the side of the oppressor, you're not with... not with the oppressed unless you're with the oppressed, and when you find out just how many people... and there's voices outside... it's always outside of Western Europe, that are victims of kind of the war machine, you know, the fossil... fossil fuel industry, and they're basically one and the same thing, as they say, America is an oil company with an army, you know it just beholds us to do this, regardless of whether it's winnable or not, and actually by doing that, quite a lot of other people have said, by no means everybody, but a lot of people have said "yeah that's how we see it." And it may just fizzle out and come to nothing, but is this like: what do I want to say to my children in twenty years' time? We all know now what food shortages look like after the last few weeks and stuff, you know, when the six million people sat up behind the fence in Calais and stuff, you know, to be able live with myself, what can I do, but within my extremely limited means, and the first thing is to not worry about what the state think of it. And obviously, you know, our names are nailed to the mast with this now and there's always been this discussion around Conspiracy. A couple of times when we've been in the police station and stuff, they've alluded to Conspiracy and "oh they're gonna come and take everyone's phones" and "well we might do you for Conspiracy," and they've always backed off, and that's partly the dilemma thing, so you just have to have faith that it's enough of a protective, but equally it may not be, and we're always experimenting with that boundary. At some point they might decide "actually you are too much trouble" or "you are too close to power" or something like that and really pushed back hard, and it won't be our choice if and when they do. That's the kind of... the risk that we're taking, I think but then again someone has to take it.

I: Can you explain the Conspiracy part again? Sorry, I couldn't hear well. They take your phones at the police station?

P: I can hear you're working in a second language by the sound of it, are you?

I: I'm Italian, yeah.

FDA STAGE 1 (THEMATIC ANALYSIS) GRID

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Participant	Democracy/Inclusion	problems with the system	responsibility	breaking the law/police	surveillance	sacrifice	consent	Total	Highlighted
2	Emilio									
3										
4									5	1
5	Rafael									
6										
7									10	3
8	Peter									
9										
10										
11										
12										
13										
14										
15									19	9
16	Michael									
17										
18									8	2
19	Matt									
20									6	4
21	Jane									
22										
23									10	9
24	Emily									
25										
26										
27									11	7
28	Rose									
29										
30										
31										
32									15	5
33	Total	25	3	13		7	29	3	4	84
34	8									
35	Highlighted	13	1	8		3	10	1	4	40

Quotes have been blurred to protect the identity of the participants.

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