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Performing encryption

SUSAN KOZEL

A political, performative and affective landscape is revealed in this chapter as a way of approaching the topic of performing the digital: from the macro of the upheaval caused by Edward Snowden's revelations of mass data surveillance to the micro of a phenomenological account of a crisis following an artistic performance using mobile media. "Performing Encryption" is a response to working as a dancer and philosopher with mobile networked digital media that can be read as a part of a larger narrative of transitioning from one state to another. The state of viewing the fine interweaving of mobile technologies in our lives as a positive expression of social choreographies gives way to a state where it is impossible to regard the potential for surveillance and capture of daily activities as anything but provocative, troubling or even threatening. The risk is not just the "capture all" aspects of dataveillance, but of increasing control over gestural and affective exchanges in urban life. In saying networked technologies, I point not just to mobile phones but also to the Cloud and the Internet-of-Things which, in combination, are potentially devastating from the perspective of embodied agency. This narrative of questioning and transition is typical of others arising at the beginning of a century, let alone a millennium. It is no longer possible to avoid asking what we have created. And how we can respond to the technological and cultural conditions of our world.

Throughout these reflections performance is defined as emergent bodily practices, in the context of mobile networked media. The linking of performativity with emergence emphasises the generative potential of performance – an ontological dimension of bringing something into being that was not there previously. Performance is a play between the escape and re-containment of movement or expression, the transformation of something that was previously virtual

into being.[1] Emphasising the emergent qualities of performance can seem wonderfully liberating and creative, but the reality is relational: we perform with digital media, at the same time as acts of watching and regulation are performed upon us by systems and by people. New expressive and relational ways of performing with and through the digital may emerge from the use of mobile media but simultaneously new forms of surveillance arrive. The Deleuzian term "luminosity" has been taken up by Angela McRobbie (2009) to replace surveillance, describing contemporary performances of gender within a wide range of technologies (from fertility manipulation to social media). She identifies how the "theatrical effect" of luminosity acts like "a moving spotlight", softening, dramatising and disguising "the regulative dynamics" of media and politics (McRobbie 2009: 54). Significantly, when one is in the luminous glow of such a moving spotlight, one sees and sees oneself as one is seen.[2] Mapping this term further into digital cultures luminosity resonates on many levels: from moving images or data suspended in digitally illuminated screens to the act of shedding light on what may have been obscured in shadow, it lends paradoxical qualities of both magic and pervasive watching to performance. Performances of encryption will be explained throughout this chapter, but for now it is possible to say that they are emergent counter practices for manipulating the degrees of luminosity, playing with focus and legibility, brightness and obscurity. Not confined to theatrical or dance practices, these are performances within digital cultures which intend to ambiguate or obfuscate bodily data that might otherwise be clearly transmitted by our devices.

THREE WHISPERS

Three whispers begin this chapter, three phenomena within digital cultures. Faithful to the affective qualities of the verb 'to whisper,' they circulate inner states or personal stories. These whispers radiate states of immanence and intimacy into political and social spheres.

1 For an extended discussion of performance defined in terms of emergence, see Kozel 2012.

2 This "seeing-seen" can be understood as a basic reflective loop or chiasm of phenomenology (Kozel 2007).

1. Whisper App (2012-2014)

The Whisper app surged in popularity and then exploded dramatically. An application running on mobile phones, it attached itself to the Twitter phenomenon by offering something its much bigger counterpart lacked: anonymity. It's app store entry loudly promised "If you have ever had something too intimate to share on traditional networks, simply share it on Whisper!"[3] Perhaps the shout should have been a clue to tensions between the poetics and politics of the app. Whisper asserted that the short messages, "sent by millions of people around the world and viewed by billions of people each month", were anonymous and private (Ball 2014). It was as if the opening of a protected space, a bubble for sharing but not owning intimate thoughts, met a need within users of social media.[4] People's postings were personal, poetic, funny and at times tormented; these were thoughts and "confessions" that would normally be self-censored prior to posting on social media platforms (cf. Lewis/Rushe 2014a). Intensely felt, translated into words, released into the cloud, then circulating separately from the bodies that generated them: Whisper messages might seem like perfect examples of autonomous wisps of affect, more autonomous than tweets because of their supposed anonymity. Did these affective states really circulate freely from the people who generated them? Sadly no, the affects and their bodies were soon reunited.

Two stages of deception enacted by Whisper were reported by journalists writing for *The Guardian*. The first was that despite claims to anonymity, the messages and their metadata (such as date, time, GPS coordinates, language) were recorded and stored indefinitely by the service provider. The metadata held by Whisper revealed geolocation within a "fuzzed" zone of approximately 500 hundred metres which, when stored over time, tells a lot about the person using the app. Whisper also circumvented users who disabled their geolocation services by extracting their approximate location information from IP data (cf. Lewis/Rushe 2014a). The second level of deception should not come as a surprise, but it did because many social media users continue to separate the social applications they live with on a daily basis from the corporate ownership of these apps. Whisper adopted a standard Silicon Valley business model for digital start ups which is to "collect and package user data in the pursuit of more venture capital funding, with an eye to a multibillion-dollar exit" (Ball 2014). Soon after learning that their privacy abuses would be published, Whisper quietly changed its privacy terms of services to say that location can fairly easily be determined

3 Cf. https://whisper.sh/

4 Other confessional apps include Secret and Yik Yak.

and they might reveal this to others based on the law, safety, technical reasons and research studies and corporate transactions (cf. Lewis/Rushe 2014b).[5]

A performance perspective on the Whisper phenomenon reveals a clash between expression and monetisation: a growing desire to translate inner states ('secrets') into images and texts, and to circulate these via mobile networked devices, collides with the political reality of apps and platforms provided by multinational corporations that value the mass accumulation of such information.[6] On a discrete level, post by post, such expressions may seem like intimate ephemera but once affective expression meets big data there can be massive implications for bodily, affective and social freedom. Jaron Lanier, in his book *Who Owns the Future*? (2014) asks us why we are surprised. What did we expect when multinational corporations offered us services for free? (Gmail, Google, facebook, Twitter, Whisper, etc).

"The NSA forced its way into those private computers in secret, but why did anyone think that near unanimous consumer support of a titanic surveillance industry would not eventually morph into a surveillance state?" (Lanier 2014: xiii)

2. The Whisper(s) Wearables Project (2002)

The second whisper involves a little time travel. Just back to 2002, but the shifts in political and corporate practices relating to user generated digital media in the decade between these whispers was seismic, leaving embodied expression compressed and vulnerable. The *Whisper(s)* garments were embedded with biometric sensors and haptic outputs to facilitate the exchange of non-verbal communication.[7] In 2003, at an installation open to public participation, one participant expressed a concern that she did not want to have her heartbeat recorded because she feared what might be done with the data.[8] At first I did not understand what she meant – "done" with the data? Then she explained: "if it reveals that I have a

5 There is some disagreement over exactly when the revised terms were drafted, prior to or after Rushe and Lewis threatened to publish. Whisper insists it was drafted a few months prior. See: http://whisper.sh/privacy

6 SnapChat is another example of an app acting as a conduit for extraordinary amounts of intimate bodily communication, particularly amongst teenagers. See: http://www.snapchat.com

7 See: http://whisper.iat.sfu.ca

8 This was mentioned briefly in *Closer* in a chapter devoted to discussing wearables and the *Whisper(s)* research project (Kozel 2007: 304).

health defect and you record it, it might it end up in the hands of an insurance company and I might be denied coverage." This seemed to me to be a fabric woven of quite a few "what ifs?": if we recorded it (we did not); if the data was legible and intelligible (it was not); if it was stored (it was streamed live and never archived); if the storage was in the Cloud (we had no link to any Cloud); and if the data could be accessed by someone else (how could it?). I calmed her by assuring that we did not store data, and even if we did it would be meaningless because we poeticised it, transposed the bio data into visuals or haptic output, we amplified and remapped, in effect, we distorted and obscured the truthful biodata.

3. The Whisperers, Interactive Installation (2013)

The third whisper acts to ground the performance of intimate communication unequivocally within a social and political context. An installation called *The Whisperers* created by designer Christopher Koelsch (based on historian Orlando Figes book by the same name) delves into the devastating impact of wide scale surveillance in Stalinist Russia. While some of this was electronic, a large swathe of the snooping was done by people watching, listening to, and recording the actions and words of others. Often family members informed on each other, and neighbours could not be trusted. Koelsch designed and built a structure, roughly 4mX4m, resembling a mid 20th century Soviet tenement building with exposed pipes, windows, and vents. Set in a gallery space, when a visitor whispered into any part of the structure they received information about those who dwelled inside. The visitor could not enter into the private space of the imaginary inhabitants of the building but was able to speak and listen. Sensors and electronic recordings of sounds were used to animate the installation, giving the sense that "walls can have ears, the vents in your floor can have eyes, and the pipes in your bathroom are dark tunnels snaking through an atmosphere of conspiracy".[9] Viewing this installation from the perspective of performing encryption, attention shifts from those who listen to those who know they are being surveilled. What did they do? They whispered, played the radio, ran the tap, avoided having conversations near doors or windows, or refrained from talking at all. Linguistic, gestural and affective expression became subtle plays of ambi-

9 See: http://christopherkoelsch.com/whisperers.html

guity and distortion, with the dismaying predominance of somatic[10] and performative practices of self-censorship.

What can we extract from these three disparate but similarly named materialisations of digital culture? From the *Whisper* app it is possible to read a large-scale breach of trust and the need to protect ourselves without completely censoring our digitally mediated expression. From *whisper(s)* the wearables project, we see how the poeticising of bio-data to obscure actual physiological information is a play of ambiguity: this was a first glimpse of what I am now calling performing encryption. And from *The Whisperers* we see a picture of a society forced to rely almost exclusively on analogue, physical, verbal and somatic performances of encryption. This last whisper is the cautionary tale: the desperate repression that can result from pervasive systemic surveillance. Together these three cultural events act as a prologue to this chapter, grounding the dilemma of how performers and researchers into performativity can preserve digital expression while maintaining affective privacy. In more politically straightforward terms, the dilemma is how to facilitate a cultural shift away from passive acceptance of dataveillance (data surveillance) in order to reclaim agency over our bodies and digital traces. This is ontological because it goes beyond ways of acting or thinking, it relates to new materialisations that may take the form of human actions, political constructs or technological configurations. This is the terrain for performing encryption.

A POLITICAL ONTOLOGY

This is not a manifesto or a call to action – at least not yet. It is too simple to identify a difficult political situation and point to solutions from the world of performance. It is important first to deepen and, in fact, to trouble the task a little further by revealing one of the most worrying and at the same time hopeful dimensions: how bodies performing with mobile media (assemblages of technologies and flesh) are both complicit in politically suspect digital practices and able to produce counter-practices. This can be understood if we look to the political ontology of dance proposed by Andre Lepecki in *Exhausting Dance* (2006), and

10 Somatic in this instance refers to internal bodily reactions, not to formalised systems of somatic therapies. A somatic level of knowledge and reaction is deeply embedded in the body, it is frequently pre-reflective and pre-conscious, and makes itself known in a range of ways that are difficult to clarify in words or standard medical mesurements (cf. Kozel 2013).

then transpose his argument into performances, both artistic and social, with digital networked devices.

Lepecki constructs a two-layered argument by describing how dance is not only related to politics but can be ontologically and politically embedded in the formation of repressive political events. In terms that are relevant to performing encryption, he witnesses rearrangements and refigurations of dance in relation to politics. "[R]earrangements of the very notion of dance" refer not only to "the position of dance in relation to politics, but of the ontological and political role of movement in the formation of those disturbing events" (Lepecki 2006: 16). Experimental self-critique in dance can act as a performative critique of wider political regimes, in particular the dancer's "participation in the general economy of mobility that informs, supports and reproduces the ideological formations of late capitalist modernity" (ibid.). Mobility in Lepecki's argument refers to an interpretation of modernism as based on kinetic motion to the exclusion of stillness. I expand his argument from theatrical stage dance to a wider set of participatory and performative practices, but also render it more specific by transposing it into a set of digital cultural practices: mobile networked media and the unavoidable dark side of surveillance that underpins their use for artistic or personal expression. No longer dealing with the late capitalist modernity of Lepecki's argument, we are squarely in what can be called neoliberal "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff 2015: 75). The implication is that choreographic or performative experimentation with mobile media does not just document, critique or analyse the ideological and economic formation of the times, but also participates in its construction. The result is an unavoidable loss of innocence but also a potential upsurge in political agency.

This shift in agency, still emerging, is contingent upon transformed attitudes toward performative experiments with technology, and toward mobility in general. I have called this a shift from "closer to closure", referring to my own stance in *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology* (2007) which was much more optimistic regarding the potentials for corporeal expression and transformation when bodies became "close" to technologies.[11] This is not to say that the premise of this book was apolitical or naive, but that the performative experiments in the 1990s and early 2000s upon which the philosophical discussion was based were enacted in a far more utopian sense of the digital world. The affective cloud in which we lived at that time was still coloured by the feeling that digital connectivity was inherently democratic and inclusive. The minia-

11 The shift from closer to closure is the premise my forthcoming book, *Social Choreographies* (expected 2017).

turisation and wearability of technologies were, in particular, seen to be both fascinating and liberating, impacting not just communication or entertainment, but mobile modes of being. This is reflected in sociologist John Urry's writing from that period in which he recasts the social sciences by developing the new mobilities paradigm. There are unavoidable performative or choreographic qualities to his description of the convergence between mobile technologies and physical travel:

> "Physical changes appear to be 'de-materializing' connections, as people, machines, images, information, power, money, ideas and dangers are 'on the move', making and remaking connections at often rapid speed around the world." (Urry 2007: 5-6)

The rapid play between materialization and de-materialisation, communication and connection, provided by mobile technologies in his writing is mostly "a positive category" with the exception of his critiques of hypermobility (ibid.: 7).

Other notable instances of transformed attitudes towards digital cultures include Sherry Turkle, who describes her own turning point in her book *Alone Together* (2011) and Jaron Lanier who refers to his own reversal of position, from being a of web pioneer to saying he was, in effect, mistaken and it has turned out quite differently from the heady utopian ideals of the 1970s (cf. Lanier 2014: xiv-xv). In an adjacent but related field, Angela McRobbie's presents a "self-critique" to her earlier stance that feminist subversive strategies could exist within neoliberal consumer culture. With a strong emphasis on media production in the form of micro-publishing, she asks "Just how oppositional were these seemingly subversive practices?" (McRobbie 2009: 2-3). These shifts reveal not just political transformations but are imbued with ontological dimensions captured by Lanier's characterization of the time in which we now live as a moment where "humanity is deciding *how to be* as our technological abilities increase" (Lanier 2014: xviii; emphasis added). *How to be* is a fundamentally ontological category because it pertains to being, *how to perform* is the dynamic mode within such an ontological state. The political ontology shaped by performative practices with networked technologies spans the thin membrane between artistic performance and the mobile choreographies of daily life, and will gain a greater degree of urgency with the expansion of the Internet-of-Things (IoT), promising 25 billion connected devices by the year 2020 (or more, depending on which authoritative prediction you choose to read). Ontologies are not fixed, of necessity they transform. The rest of this chapter is devoted to charting such a transformation.

AFFEXITY: PASSAGES & TUNNELS

The artistic research that generated the ideas in this chapter is *AffeXity*, part of a larger research project addressing contemporary archiving practices called Living Archives.[12] A collaboration initiated by screen dance artist Jeannette Ginslov and myself in 2010, *AffeXity* began with a convergence of three questions: one political, one technological and one from dance. The dance question we set ourselves was whether it is possible to improvise (with bodies and cameras) by attending to affective sensibility rather than emotional states or formal patterns. The technological question was whether Augmented Reality (AR) browsers running on devices such as mobile phones and iPads could support the visual, affective, kinaesthetic and participatory qualities we desired. The political question was how to respond to the warning that we ignore affective manipulations in our cities "at our peril".[13] A beta version of a performance/installation, *AffeXity: Passages & Tunnels,* premiered in 2013 at the Re:New Festival in Copenhagen.[14]

We used the AR browser Aurasma because it was at least free and very user friendly if not open source, and it used visual triggers to download media.[15] The visual images (acting as QR codes) were frames from the video material, thus creating a play across stillness and motion because the video was suspended in the display of the device as a transparent layer through which the static trigger image could be viewed. These trigger images of various sizes and shapes were attached to the damp brick outside walls of the Nikolaj Kunsthal, formerly a church built in the 19th century but now a Contemporary Art Center in Copenhagen. When visitors held mobile devices up to the images, archival video imagery was downloaded onto their devices. This produced a multi-layered choreography across the still images, the video and the multiple devices of the group of people standing together. Added to this archival choreography was the presence of dancer Wubkje Kuindersma, performing live in the space between the still imag-

12 Held at Malmö University, funded by the Swedish Research Council. See:http://livingarchives.mah.se

13 The citation comes from Amin/Thrift (2002). It can be read in combination with their assertion that urban life offers "performative improvisations which are unforeseen and unforeseeable" (ibid.: 4).

14 Artists/designers: Susan Kozel, Jeannette Ginslov, Daniel Spikol, Jacek Smolicki, Camilla Ryd. See: http://livingarchives.mah.se/affexity-passages-and-tunnels

15 In 2015 Aurasma was purchased by Hewlitt Packard. See: https://www.aurasma.com

es, the devices and the people. Some of the archival imagery was of her improvising in Copenhagen two years previously.[16]

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT? (A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERLUDE)

Several events transpired immediately following this performance.

1. I realized on a somatic level that surveillance is the dark side of archiving
2. The implications of Edward Snowden's revelations continued to reverberate though political and personal realms.
3. I burnt out.

Juxtaposed with the unexpected success of *AffeXity: Passages & Tunnels* was the unease I felt with our entire research programme. No longer just channeling affect into artistic content for the project and opening access to archival material, I was forced to recognize the wider affective cloud permeating the entire project. In short, mobile technologies felt like a beacon to inner states, making them vulnerable to detection, tracking, recording and analysis. By whom? I couldn't say with any specificity, but the power dynamics were impossible to ignore and as a long time feminist (concerned with agency) and phenomenologist (concerned with corporeal experience) I found myself unwilling to peel away the last layers of unintelligibility, of protection, existing between inner bodily states and total transparency in the face of the ever expanding and complexifying network of connected devices and sensors. Slavoj Žižek (2013) explains the relocation of power behind the transparency of functionality:

"Here are two telltale words: abstraction and control. To manage a cloud there needs to be a monitoring system that controls its functioning, and this system is by definition hidden from users. The more the small item (smartphone) I hold in my hand is personalised, easy to use, "transparent" in its functioning, the more the entire setup has to rely on the work

16 The description of *AffeXity: Passages & Tunnels* in this chapter is condensed to support this argument, but documentation exists on the Living Archvies website and the following scholarly articles discuss it from various perspectives: on affect and the devising process (Kozel 2012), on affect, phenomenology and somatics (Kozel 2013) on archives and participatory performance (Kozel/Spikol/Smolicki 2014).

being done elsewhere, in a vast circuit of machines that co-ordinate the user's experience. The more our experience is non-alienated, spontaneous, transparent, the more it is regulated by the invisible network controlled by state agencies and large private companies that follow their secret agendas." (Žižek 2013)

In terms of "rearrangements" of the ontological status of dance, I shifted squarely to the position where the political and ontological complicity of our artistic work had to be acknowledged. So I stopped. And I fell ill, suffering from the typical condition of the media-saturated, multi-tasking, always-connected life. I burnt out. And I dropped my mobile devices as if they had burnt my fingers.

ENTER ENCRYPTION

> The Snowden leaks made people all over the world feel violated. We don't know who has read our most tender emails. It feels bad, and if we ever get used to that feeling, that would feel even worse.
> LANIER 2014: XIII

Here Lanier captures the beginnings of an affective approach to the politics of digital surveillance: it feels bad. Affect is more than feeling, but can begin with feeling, with an attention to body states. Then it ripples outwards to an exchange of forces and intensities between bodies of all sorts (organic and inorganic). Some affect theory points towards transcending physical corporeality, but much philosophical writing on affect is helpful to cultivate a sense of materiality that can reveal the ever more subtle and complex ways bodies exist and recombine in relation to technologies.[17] That technological systems are in themselves performing bodies is no longer a fantastical metaphor. In Edward Snowden's famous video statement from June of 2013, produced by filmmaker Laura Poitras, he revealed the extent of the data-snooping impacting every digitally networked being on the planet and invoked a physical metaphor for the US National Security Agency: "the NSA targets the communications of everyone, it ingests them by default, collects them in its system, filters them, analyses them, stores them"

17 I do not have the space to expand upon affect here but have discussed it at length in Kozel (2012; 2013).

(Snowden 2013). The NSA is described as a body: digesting, remembering, somatic. The metaphor for the system is bodily, the data captured is of actions and attitudes. Both system and data are bodily performances. Yet, it is no longer enough to state in a general way that performativity exists practically and metaphorically across bodies and systems. Speaking with greater precision: the performativity of capture is mirrored by a performativity of encryption.

The call to encrypt echoes widely, I map it and transpose it into the discourses and practices of digital performance. When Snowden addressed the SXSW conference in 2014, appearing by videoconference through seven proxies, with heavily lagged visuals and audio he urged everyone to use encryption software: "Our networks have been designed with surveillance in mind" (Snowden 2014a). His many videoconferenced presentations have become his own telematic performances of "From Russia with Love", calmly clarifying the extent of the mess we are in. In this one he explained the threat of predetermination, reminding us that the NSA would "figure out uses for the data down the road". From a performance perspective this is future performance, not performance as a repetition of the past or revelation of the present, but the performance of predetermination. It is a sinister rehearsal of the future because we participate unknowingly.

The political dimensions of encryption are by no means stable: neither rights nor practices are enshrined. The latest versions of Apple and Google's mobile operating systems are now encrypted by default, while other popular messaging services, such as WhatsApp and Snapchat, also use encryption. This has prompted calls for action both for and against strong encryption from activists and government officials.[18] Glenn Greenwald, the journalist and lawyer Snowden contacted to release his story, urges everyone to encrypt. Indeed he almost missed out on connecting with Snowden entirely because it took him so long to install encryption software (cf. Greenwald 2014). Tim Berners-Lee, famously the founder/developer of the protocols that established the internet, asked Snowden at SXSW what he would do to design a new security system. An open question that invited either a technological or socio-political response, Snowden's answer was "accountability" – about people not technology. He pointed to the soft side, the fleshy side: disruptive actions such as encryption and whistle-blowing. Meanwhile, British PM David Cameron and his government, notorious for attacking personal data privacy, demanded in the wake of the 2015 shootings in Paris at Charlie Hebdo and the Jewish Deli: "In our country, do we want to allow

18 Since writing the first draft of this chapter, the Apple-FBI legal procedures have dominated news in the first part of 2016, with the FBI demanding that Apple provide 'backdoors' or ways to hack into encrypted communication on iPhones.

a means of communication between people which we cannot read?" (Ball 2015). His words assume that communication is already readable and read, that encryption and ambiguity are not practiced in any materially significant way. Yet Snowden pointed out in his testimony to the EU on data security that the primary challenge of mass surveillance is not merely how you collect the communications but how you interpret, understand and analyse them (cf. Snowden 2014b). There is much noise in the system.

AFFECT TO AMBIGUITY TO ENCRYPTION

If there is much noise in the system, then what happens if we deliberately and, with full awareness of our political ontology, perform this noise? Returning once again to performance practices, I extract a stage of the *AffeXity: Passages & Tunnels* artistic process that was key to understanding the crucial link between affect and ambiguity. This moves us a little closer to understanding how encryption might be performed.

As choreographers know, the use of archival dance material is as constrained by copyright as any archival project in cultural heritage – perhaps even more so because of the many layers of attribution (costumes, music, dance, choreography, makeup, lighting, scenography). In conversation with Martin Larsen and Uffe Borgwart of the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen we considered what material we could safely use. One of the archiving principles in the Living Archives project is that archives don't have to be traces from the distant past. With pervasive, some might say chronic, documentation through social media a performance perspective opens up the possibility of including what we call "the archive of 10minutes ago." Borgwart, responding to this, suggested that we video rehearsals for a new piece being choreographed at that moment. He obtained the permission of Corpus, the young experimental ballet of the Royal Danish Theatre, and the consent of dancer Oliver Starpov to video his solo. This became the basis of 'The Oliver Series'. Borgwart did the original shoot of Oliver's lyrical and very beautiful solo, performed to Satie-like music. He sent the raw video to Ginslov who produced a series of three edits which she called "Corpus Solo 01", "Corpus Solo 02" and "Corpus Kelp Arms".[19]

19 Oliver's material can be found between minutes 2.31-2.57 in the documentation of *AffeXity: Passages & Tunnels.* Note the extended arms inviting the adjective "kelp" referring to rippling seaweed. See: http://livingarchives.mah.se/2013/10/affexity-passages-tunnels-re-new-2013

The transformation of affect, movement and sound that occurred through these edits was striking. The affective choreographic and editing vocabulary Ginslov had been developing for two years manifested itself through the qualities of distortion and ambiguity to such an extent that the original dropped away and was replaced by iterations with substantially different affective tones. The point is not to raise the sticky question of the relation between archives and interpretation, far more significant from the perspective of this argument was the performance of ambiguity through media manipulation. Ambiguity and affect were revealed to be intimately entwined, and one way they played out was through distortion. The Oliver series helped me to understand, through artistic practice, the philosophical point that *affect is already a play of ambiguity* because it exists in liminal states. Affect is ambiguous because it is in a perpetual and dynamic state of exchange or transition, it is impossible to pin affect down to one person or one definable emotional state: it is an "inventory of shimmers, of nuances, of states, of changes […] of the borderline nature of human existence" (Barthes 2005: 77). The ambiguity of affect is due to its dynamic qualities but also due to an innate obscurity: an "opacity in transparency" (ibid.: 100). If we add to the qualities of shimmering and opacity the awareness that the ontological condition of affecting and being affected is not passive, it is possible to say that ambiguity can be performed.

The step from the performance of affect through ambiguity to the performance of encryption was a simple one to make. Recalling the context of political surveillance captured by Koelsch's installation based on Figes' book *The Whisperers*, specific contemporary examples can ground what may seem like an abstract aesthetic argument. In an interview with journalist Carole Cadwalladr, Laura Poitras makes explicit the parallels with contemporary digital surveillance, when each person's Google search terms are a psychogram of their thoughts. "I'm so careful about that", says Poitras, and she provides a small glimpse of her own practices: "I use different computers for different uses." And throughout Berlin, the city where Poitras now lives in order to obtain a modicum of personal privacy, "there are people working on ways to fight the technology with technology; who've devised the crypto equivalent of what, in the former German Democratic Republic, was done by turning on the radio or running the tap." (Cadwalladr 2014: 8).

Saying that affect is already a play of ambiguity means that it is imprecise, unintelligible or differently intelligible. This sense of creative or expressive unintelligibility, one might even say meaningful unintelligibility like running a tap of water to obscure one's words, is a thread linking affect and ambiguity to encryption.

PERFORMING NOISE

Earlier I referred to the three whispers as a prologue, but this entire chapter can be seen as a prologue for a much wider research programme. This becomes clearer as I expand a working definition of encryption. Encryption is a set of practices that render confidential communication unintelligible, or intelligible only to those with whom we desire to communicate (Piper/Murphy 2002). Thus far, this is quite a standard definition but here it becomes more refined for performance and affective exchanges: *encryption is not a wall, it is a re-patterning, or a distortion, of a flow*. There is a reason for using the expression performing encryption rather than performing cryptography: cryptography refers quite broadly to the history and science of keeping information or communication secret, while encryption is a stage within this process. A plaintext (readable message) is encrypted by means of an encryption algorithm (also called a key) into incomprehensible ciphertext, it is then decrypted by the designated recipient. Classic encryption systems were symmetrical, meaning the sender and the receiver had to know each other and use the same key, but the contemporary encryption that underpins all confidential internet transactions (such as banking) is asymmetrical, meaning the sender and receiver do not need to know each other (cf. Piper/Murphy 2002: 4-8). Currently, the performance research being developed alongside further versions of *AffeXity* is a workshop series called *Performing Encryption* which aims to expand the poetic implications of asymmetric encryption systems at the same time as trying to bridge the gulf between computational encryption processes and physical performance. Even the fairly open mode of a participatory performance felt too sealed to explore encryption. An exploration and development of the philosophical foundations, the politics and the performativity requires workshops conducted in a way that merges performance and interaction design methodologies. We have begun by trying to break open what is essentially the black-box process of digital encryption, and to address the psychological and technological hurdles to encryption.[20] Of course this description in itself sounds cryptic, not just because of the early stages of the research but due to the very nature of the topic.

Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey, authors of *Evil Media* (2012) would say that this venture is entirely pointless because of the sophistication of dataveillance algorithms and forensic computing technologies (cf. Fuller/Goffey 2012: 31). Feeble, body-based attempts to obfuscate, loop, ambiguate or slide across

20 For a description of the workshop and an argument that closely follows the one in this chapter see Kozel (2016).

registers are futile in the face of big data capture, storage over time and data-mining. No doubt this is true, and yet Snowdon reminds us:

> "Hey, we can spy on everybody in the world, all at once, it will be great we will know everything. […] But the reality is when the NSA did it they found out it didn't work. […] The stored mass of all metadata […] two independent white house investigations revealed it has no value at all. It is never helpful." (Snowden 2014a)

So there is a fissure. A crack. In terms of affect this is enough. It may be a crack in the soil, or a ripple of dissonance in cultural discourse. It is a shimmer. A small opening for performing otherwise.

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