

# WAYS OF BEING SEEN

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**the uncultured**

# TL;DR you can mess around at work if management can't see you doing it.

## Style Note:

I am a sometime artist and moretime invigilator (guard) at an art gallery in central London. The following text is written from my perspective as an invigilator, concerned with institutional hierarchies and management structures, the three central protagonists being: management > invigilators > gallery visitors.

For our purposes here, I hope these protagonists and basic relationships are for the most part relatively interchangeable for application to other contexts, depending on the reader's interest. For example; management could be substituted with funding body, organisation etc, invigilator could be substituted with freelancer, producer, artist etc.

The text is written as a series of numbered short notes, a little bit like Wittgenstein's Tractatus. This is a reflection of how this text was constructed: all initial notes for this were made in quiet moments while I was on-shift, requiring short sentences and quick thoughts. Collating these notes together into a relatively coherent body of text was done later, at home.

**1.**

I do not see the following as lessons for structural change. These are not long-term solutions. Rather, these are potential methods for retaining agency in restrictive systems; contingent time-limited coping mechanisms, finding spaces for acts of self-care. Look elsewhere for a sustainable way out.

**2.**

The following approaches were learned, observed and/or practised in the course of my day-job working as an invigilator at an art gallery in central London. These are the thought processes and actions of artworkers.

**2.1**

Where not directly relevant, the thrust and spirit of following articulation of workers' tactics may still be salvageable for application to other artworking contexts.

**3.**

An invigilator is primarily a surveillance worker.

**3.1**

Most culture workers are also in-part surveillance workers.

**3.11**

Most all workers are in-part surveillance workers.

**3.2**

Most surveillance actions require the actor to both see and be seen to be seeing.

**3.21**

Most surveillance workers will be seen both by their own managers and by the targets of their surveillance.

**3.3**

Most surveillance operates primarily as a deterrent and secondarily as an actual watching system.

**3.31**

Management surveillance of subordinates shares a similar deterrent/watching dynamic to that of a surveillance worker with their target.

**3.32**

This being the case, most of the following can apply to both invigilators and their managers, and gallery visitors and their invigilators.

**3.4**

Seeing and being seen can also be a good working job description for an artist.

**4.**

Being a worker in an institution requires a certain level of 'being seen'. Managers will monitor the actions of the worker through 'seeing' them.

**4.1**

Seeing in this context can be expansive. I do not mean just sight; monitoring might better catch the essence of this process.

**4.11**

A portion of this monitoring is concerned with restricting the agency of the worker, attempting to ensure that company time is not used for other activities.

**4.2**

The ability of a manager to monitor a subordinate is limited.

**4.21**

There was an early internet meme, lifted from The New Yorker, that depicted a dog using a computer while speaking to another dog. The caption read "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog".

This is not true anymore; the internet knows very well that you're a dog.

**4.211**

The dog statement might be more true in manual working contexts though. In the gallery, management doesn't know you're a dog.

**4.212**

Management doesn't know you're a dog because their ability to see is limited. In physical social contexts, seeing only identifies the surface.

**4.213**

A lot of emerging technology is devoted to this problem of limited sight capability.

**4.3**

Management cannot see your thoughts.

**4.31**

Actions that look like appropriate labour will be understood by onlookers as appropriate labour.

**4.311**

This will be particularly true if the thing that looks like appropriate labour actually is appropriate labour.

**4.312**

It is possible to make an action appear appropriate and to actually be appropriate and yet also operate in other directions simultaneously.

**4.4**

Knowing the limits of monitoring maps the limits of the requirement to self-manage how one is being seen.

**4.41**

These limits will often be soft and your knowledge of them imprecise. You cannot know who is around the corner, you cannot know if a CCTV monitor is being watched.

**4.411**

Playing probabilities is best avoided. The odds will be stacked against you over time.



**4.412**

Heath Bunting once told me that anyone can provocatively get themselves caught – the art is in not getting caught. I think I agree with him.

**4.413**

There is often no need to openly transgress right up to the monitoring limit. There is usually potential for agency at a safe distance from this limit.

**4.42**

For our purposes here, the areas beyond the monitoring limit are less interesting. This is an exploration of what can be done in plain sight, with higher stakes.

**4.421**

But that is no reason to ignore or overlook easier potentials. If your goal is situated outside of the already existing monitoring limit, all the better.

**5.**

Managing appearances is our primary tool for the generation of additional potential agency while operating inside already existing monitoring limits within restrictive hierarchical structures.

**5.1**

By appearance I do not mean how one looks, although this may be a part of the calculation. What I mean by appearance is visibility and legibility of action, meaning and intention.

**5.2**

It is possible to demonstrate an appropriate appearance, whilst simultaneously doing things counter to that appropriateness.

**5.21**

Actions demonstrating this dual nature can be called ‘plausibly deniable’.

**5.211**

Speech resulting in a similar outcome is often called ‘dog whistle’ communication. This is most frequently encountered when a politician uses a phrase commonly, but crucially not officially, understood to denote a defined minority group whilst not explicitly naming them. In this way they are able to plausibly deny the connotation whilst allowing that connotation to be understood.

**5.212**

These methods of plausibly deniable communications bear some similarity to the way puns work in jokes.

**5.2121**

For example, the joke “My dog has no nose” “How does it smell?” “Awful!” is funny because smell can mean two different things here; the dog’s ability to smell and the smell of the dog itself. Appearances can operate in a similar way, with an action having two simultaneous meanings.

**5.2122**

Incidentally, the joke could be improved if ‘Awful’ also had a clean, functioning double meaning closer to ‘awfully’, allowing the whole scenario to operate in two simultaneous senses.

**5.22**

Plausibly deniable actions and speech set a new monitoring limit at the limit of verification.

**5.221**

This verification limit is smaller than the original already existing monitoring limit.

**5.3**

Where two viewers have access to differing levels of information, different concessions to appearances may apply to each respectively.

**5.31**

If one is able to generate audiences that have access to different levels of information about an action, one is able to create spaces where simultaneous discrete meanings can be derived from a single individual action.

**5.311**

Such generation of simultaneous separate audiences can also be achieved by the withdrawal of information from a defined section of the audience.

**5.3111**

Here I am classifying management as an 'audience'. This could stand for any persons higher up a disciplinary hierarchy.

**5.3112**

For a gallery visitor, invigilators could be such an 'audience'.

**5.312**

There are a variety of ways to obscure information. This is the sphere of disguise, impersonation, lying and deception.

**5.4**

Differing access to full-picture information can also be controlled by supplying identified people with additional information, adding rather than subtracting or hiding.

**5.41**

A good example of this would be a secure code.

**5.42**

A secure code can create discrete publics inside monitoring limits.

**5.43**

An ideal secure code is one that does not look like a secure code. An excluded audience will only remain so if they are unaware that they are part of an excluded audience.

**5.431**

Users of a secure code that doesn't look like a secure code can communicate in relative safety.

**5.432**

A secure code that doesn't look like a secure code differs from a dog whistle in that everyone has access to the dog whistle's true meaning, it is just that the true meaning can be denied. A secure code that doesn't look like a secure code restricts true meaning to only those who has access to the key.

**5.433**

Use of a secure code that doesn't look like a secure code sets a new monitoring limit at the limit of recognition and understanding.

**5.4331**

A recognition and understanding limit maintained in this way can be smaller than the verification limit and definitely is smaller than the original already existing monitoring limit.

**5.5**

Plausibly deniable dog whistles and secure codes that don't look like secure codes offer different types of spaces for additional potential agency while operating inside the original already existing monitoring limit. Both are viable tactics in the subordinate role.

**5.51**

Returning to the smelly/smelling dog joke, these two types can be represented as the following:

Dog whistles = the whole audience understands both relevant meanings of 'smell'. The intended primary meaning cannot be verified.

Secure codes that don't look like secure codes = a defined portion of the audience only understands one meaning of 'smell'. The remainder understands both relevant meanings.

**6.**

A secure code that looks like appropriate labour cannot be seen by management.

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