Narratives on the Watch:
Bodies, Images, & Technologies of Control in Contemporary Surveillance Cinema

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This thesis titled
Narratives on the Watch:
Bodies, Images, & Technologies of Control in Contemporary Surveillance Cinema

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores surveillance cinema though a body of films that thematize the increasing presence of surveillance images in social life. Suggesting a shift from two dominant representational modes, dystopic and conspiratorial cinema, recent surveillance films normalize the practice, diffuse the technology’s paranoiac connotation, and transcend the rhetoric that surveillance scenarios only target white men formerly a part of the surveillance apparatus. I argue that with new forms of the image, through cinema’s figuration of the surveillance image, “othered” subjects appear as “to-be-surveilled”—targeted bodies due to the determinants of their gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, or class status. The films I discuss thus raise an important question relevant to contemporary surveillance theory: does cinema normalize forms of control or does it challenge these structures through a critique of the power relations found within them? As surveillance cinema integrates images of surveillance into its texts, it critiques the power disparities that exist between hegemonic disembodied surveillors and controlled bodies.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to those in the field who have created (and in some instances directly granted me access to) such inspiring, thought-provoking work. Through them and their occasionally inaccessible films, videos, and writings I have gained an appreciation for the complex totality that is the surveillance cinema discourse.
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INTRODUCTION: THE SURVEILLANCE IMAGE IN CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

This thesis examines a body of films, beginning in the 1990s and increasingly central in the current cinematic landscape, that I will call Surveillance Cinema. Responding to the social ubiquity of technologies of surveillance in the contemporary world, these films thematize the surveillance image as a narrative and formal structure. Central to the surveillance image is a new relation between the categories of the look and the “to-be-looked-at.” Where the object of the surveillance gaze is most often a marginalized or minority body, the source of the look is disembodied: a camera looks, often in the absence of a direct human agent. This implies a greater distance between the body under surveillance and the surveilling gaze, as the image can now be transmitted across spatial boundaries. No longer does the looker need to occupy the same space as that of the object of their look. Furthermore, the notion of mechanization, constant recording and storing without an operative “looker,” complicates the perception that one always looks through the camera. With the turn to mechanization, films figure “over-surveillance”—the impression that constant recording amounts to nothing but mere data storage, thus sequences are characterized by mundane monitoring.

Along with new formal properties, the surveillance image also embodies a new set of power relations immanent to what Gilles Deleuze has called the “Societies of Control.” Whereas with embodied looking, people look and in return can be looked-at, surveillance scenarios offer no possibility of the reversal of the look. Thus, structures of control become invisible, or embedded into the forms and modes of everyday life. While the surveillance image becomes a generalized condition, however, not all bodies are similarly marked as “to-be-surveilled.” In fact, a fundamental tension that I describe in this thesis is that of the shift between a cinema of conspiracy, often centered on white male bodies, and the cinema of surveillance which is principally concerned with the bodies of racial and ethnic minorities, women, children, and low-wage income earners. This constitutes not only different surveillance subjects, but also a new relationship between spectator, camera, and object.
Since the surveillance image is always a technologically produced image, technology is central to the narratives and formal structures of surveillance cinema. These technologies take a variety of forms and functions. The military-industrial complex mounts surveillance cameras on drones, essentially distance-controlled robots. The military uses drones, in part, to surveil potentially dangerous areas that previously may have put human lives at risk. CCTV (closed-circuit television) is the technology’s most common form, especially prevalent in prisons and (public and private) urban areas. CCTV cameras are frequently clearly marked, however, they also sometimes appear unmarked. Their invisibility causes people to internalize the power of the surveillance image, as the subject senses the ubiquity of cameras all around them. Use of CCTV varies, although common functions include monitoring for security, crime prevention, criminal identification, production & labor supervision, employee behavior, and even watching households through “nanny-cams.” Whereas early video surveillance required a human operative, as there was no way to store images, surveillance has now become fully mechanized due to the low cost of hard drives and the reliability of solid-state storage media. With mechanization, the image is produced without direct intention of being seen by anyone; in the case of an incident, the images are scanned and watched by people in order to reconstruct past events.

While often used for governmental, institutional, and corporate interests, everyday people can also acquire variations of these technologies to protect their homes, or even attach to their own bodies as they record the world around them. GoPro cameras and the controversial Google Glass are current examples that show how surveillance technologies exist for personal use. Many, however, criticize Google Glass, a “wearable technology” that does not let people know whether or not they are being recorded. Variations of these technologies were previously depicted in science-fiction films. They are now tangible materials in the contemporary “surveillance society.”

These technologies are at the basis of this new surveillance cinema. Its narrative and formal presence informs nearly every aspect of the film in a way that suggests its social ubiquity. As these technologies appear in numerous forms and interact with different subjects, the films propose that in the 21st century surveillance technology has
diversified. Thus, the films I discuss focus on a range of subjects: surveillance operators, investigators, and everyday people with various cameras and communication technologies. Finally, due to the technology’s normalization and omnipresence in society, the surveillance image’s cinematic figuration does not alarm the spectator—even while this figuration creates new forms of the image.

My approach draws from important work in both surveillance studies and film studies, but focuses more specifically on overlooked areas within the two fields. Despite surveillance’s noteworthy effect on film form, the narrative, formal, figural, and aesthetic implications remain under-theorized. Notable exceptions are Thomas Y. Levin’s “Rhetoric of the Temporal Index: Surveillant Narration and the Cinema of Real Time” and “Vicissitudes of Surveillant Narration in Michael Haneke's Caché,” Lorna Muir’s “Control Space: Cinematic Representations of Surveillance Space between Discipline and Control,” Catherine Zimmer’s “Surveillance Cinema: Narrative between Technology and Politics.” and “Caught on Tape: The Politics of Video in the New Torture Film,” and finally, Julia Leyda’s “Demon Debt: Paranormal Activity as Recessionary Post-Cinematic Allegory.” Additionally, while these scholars explore how the cinematic surveillance image suggests inherent power dynamics, little attention is paid to race, glass, and gender—determinants which underlie these images.

Recent surveillance films suggest a shift from prior representational modes, in which narratives figure surveillance as technological spectacles within a dystopian future, or as a mechanism manipulated by those entangled within social or political conspiracies as in the conspiracy thriller. It is precisely the presence of surveillance images within a wide array of genres and modes of filmmaking that argues for its importance as a new type of image. While surveillance cinema is not an established genre, but rather a mode which includes films from preestablished generic forms, I investigate the genres in which these images appear. By doing so, I will account for important shifts in surveillance’s representation, since their location as genre films determines how they narrativize technological relations—for example, through suspense, spectacle, or normalized monotony.
My corpus primarily consists of American independent productions and mainstream Hollywood films. American cinema has long represented surveillance technologies and practices—from Classical to New Hollywood, to the Blockbuster and beyond. While surveillance is hardly a local phenomenon, American cinema’s often anxiety-ridden representations suggest something symptomatic about their need to reproduce these technological narratives.

Each of my chapters investigates a different aspect of the surveillance image. Chapter 1 locates surveillance studies within film studies, providing the theoretical framework for the analyses to follow. Of particular importance, I explore the shift from a cinema of conspiracy, specifically drawing on *1984* (Michael Radford, 1984), *THX 1138* (George Lucas, 1971), and *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974), to a surveillance cinema. Expanding on Frederic Jameson’s description of conspiracy cinema, I include dystopic figurations in this discussion, as they similarly thematize surveillance around elements of conspiratorial politics. Once a part of the surveillance apparatus, protagonists become victims of surveillance and thus experience paranoia over their overwhelming visibility. I argue that this mode, despite its prevalence and acceptance by surveillance and film studies scholars, no longer suffices as a way in which to analyze contemporary surveillance. To support this argument, I examine the thematic and generic limitations of the three aforementioned films in addition to their limited figuration of the surveillance image. I critically reexamine them by focusing on how they anticipate the surveillance image’s integration into the narrational and formal structures of contemporary film—structures which scholars understate, but which uniquely characterize surveillance cinema.

Since both the diegetic surveillance systems and the technologies used to produce the films have become digitized, Chapter 2 situates surveillance cinema in the discourse surrounding what scholar Steven Shaviro calls the “post-cinematic” digital revolution. Many surveillance films are created within this new “digital economy,” either filming entirely on digital cameras or having digital technology play an integral function within the narrative. To elaborate on this, I draw on *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005) in addition to a number of “found-footage” movies that uniquely shift between documentary style
footage and surveillance images: Paranormal Activity (Oren Peli, 2007), Paranormal Activity 2 (Tod Williams, 2010), 388 Arletta Avenue (Randall Cole, 2011), and Devil’s Due (Tyler Gillett, Matt Bettinelli-Olpin, 2014). As one focal point of this chapter, I argue that these films figure a newer mode of surveillant narration and aesthetics as facilitated by new media, and thus inscribe structures of control into their narrative framework.

In Chapter 3, I draw on Thomas Mathiesen’s theory of synopticism, an inversion of Foucault’s influential reading of the panopticon. In Mathiesen’s model, it is now “the many” that “watch the few.” I apply synopticism to the ways in which contemporary media creates, forms, and shapes “surveillance cultures,” thus new modes of surveillance are figured that align with spectatorial experiences of the image. I contextualize my argument through The Truman Show (Peter Weir, 1998) and Untraceable (Gregory Hoblit, 2008). I argue that these two films, through the specific mediums they depict, interrogate contemporary cultural formations around the surveillance image. In particular, they foreground how surveillance productions locate spectators and users around affective formations, whether through sympathy, identification, moral judgment, or even sadism and voyeurism—conditions that are ultimately determined by the specific surveillance subject and situation. In addition, this chapter will open onto a discussion of television reality shows, social media, and other places where surveillance becomes normalized as a way of life.

In Chapter 4, I argue that the surveillance image forces a reconsideration of feminist understandings of the relation between lookers and looked-at bodies. Feminist understandings of the power relations inherent in the camera’s look and its relation to bodies were developed as a critique of male hegemony and the cinematic apparatus. Traditionally voyeuristic texts, in which men gaze at women and thus relegate them to a sexual object, inscribe the women as the object of the look in relation to a masculine, active looker. While the surveillance image does not negate this gendered power dynamic, it does call for a reconsideration of the look since the “looker” is disembodied, and the object of the look involves forms of control that include, but are not limited to, gender. Surveillance cinema does not abandon the voyeuristic component of the look, but
alters its relation to bodies by dislocating it from the surveilled space. I analyze Sliver (Philip Noyce, 1993) and Alone with Her (Eric Nicholas, 2006) as examples of this updated structure. Compliance (Craig Zobel, 2012) begins to dismantle this notion since its male surveiller is disinterested in gaining pleasure from looking—he has no access to the visual surveillance data. The Ring (Gore Verbinski, 2002) and Red Road (Andrea Arnold, 2006), complicate the theory of the male gaze by permitting women to be disembodied surveillors. I argue that this recasting works against traditional notions of male voyeurism and female victimization, and instead, functions to craft female identifications and subjectivities in the surveillance narrative.

Surveillance practices must be considered through the framework laid by feminist critiques in addition to other schools of thought (based around race, post-colonialism, and Marxist modes) in order to move beyond the rhetoric that surveillance is centrally characterized by indiscernible ambiguities. My thesis attends to this claim and asserts that the surveillance image must be read in accordance with how it produces relations that are determined by race, class, and gender. I state that in order to account for the scope of these relations, which have not seen sufficient scholarship, surveillance cinema requires a critical reexamination. The central component of surveillance cinema is the surveillance image, therefore I stress its importance and emphasize its need to be deconstructed in order to understand its figural and literal implications. In the following chapter, I will begin by locating my arguments within surveillance’s theoretical history. I outline how scholars have thought about surveillance and surveillance cinema in addition to examining conspiracy cinema—the mode which preceded surveillance cinema’s present form.
CHAPTER 1: THE MECHANICS OF LOOKING: ANTICIPATING SURVEILLANCE CINEMA

In the 1993 film *Sliver* (Phillip Noyce) an apartment complex is under constant surveillance by its owner, Zeke (William Baldwin). Zeke monitors all of the building’s inhabitants using a large bank of video monitors connected to hidden video surveillance cameras located throughout the apartments. Since his look is distant and detached, mediated by the cameras that look in his place, he remains an invisible and anonymous source of the surveilling gaze. Zeke becomes infatuated by a female tenant, Carly (Sharon Stone), as the narrative focalization reduces the multiplicity of technological looks to a seemingly more traditional, voyeuristic, gendered relation between the male look and the female body.

In the sequence that first introduces surveillance technologies to the spectator, *Sliver* cuts between images of Carly masturbating in her bath, shot on anamorphic 35mm film, and video images of this same space in washed out shades of blue, suggesting those being watched by Zeke on his monitors. As she enters the tub (Fig. 1.01), the camera cuts to a close up of this different type of image (Fig. 1.02), filling the entire frame and aligning the diegetic frame of the video monitor with the frame of the cinematic image. As the camera pulls back from this close up, it reveals that the image is being played on a television in an unknown location (Fig. 1.03). The camera cuts back to Carly, shot “normally,” and then proceeds to move away from her, and, as if of its own volition, deliberately moves toward the bathroom mirror, revealing a hidden camera (Fig. 1.04). This is followed by yet another cut to the television’s surveillance image; this time filmed in a wide shot, thus exposing both the manipulative and controlling aspects of the surveillance image (Fig. 1.05).
Fig. 1.01. Carly’s face in close-up. (*Sliver*, Directed by Philip Noyce. 1993. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures: Fig. 1.01—Fig. 1.05)

Fig. 1.02. Carly’s close up as a full-frame surveillance image.

Fig. 1.03. The surveillance image’s location: Zeke’s TV.

Fig. 1.04. Hidden cameras in Carly’s apartment.
The surveillance image is readable through a formal difference that it marks from the “normal” film image, a difference that alerts the spectator to a range of aesthetic, technological, and historical determinants that underlie the contemporary surveillance image and its use in the cinema. Central to this new image is a technologically mediated look that explicitly and diegetically disembodies the looker, placing him in a radically different space and time from the object of the look. *Sliver* and other surveillance films in my corpus, whose release’s range from 1993 to as recently as 2014, do so by reenacting this structure: incorporating surveillance images into the film text. Significantly, the bodies placed under surveillance in these films primarily are those of a range of “othered” subjects: women, racial minorities, and low-wage workers. The films thus link a new technological mode of the image to the exposure of specific bodies that signify not an exhibitionist “to-be-looked-at-ness,” but a more complex “to-be-surveilled-ness.”

This chapter argues that this formal redeployment marks a significant shift from previous depictions of surveillance in narratives of conspiracy dominant in the 1970s and 1980s—of whose figuration of the surveillance image is rather limited. What we find in surveillance cinema is the insistent figuration of surveillance, the recurring structure of disembodiment, and the mechanization of the surveillance process.

Accounting for this cinematic shift, I will differentiate between prior representational modes, “movies about surveillance” and “surveillance narratives”—in which surveillance as a narrative or thematic structure has been steadily replaced by the visual and structural figuration of surveillance. This shift from narratives about surveillance to surveillance narratives closely tracks the normalization of an ever-expanding, and in some places nearly ubiquitous, presence of surveillance technologies in
American culture. In order to mark the history of this image, I will outline the history of surveillance studies, suggesting its main points of intersection with film studies, and linking them to a number of contemporary films that allow me to chart the transformation from images of conspiracy to surveillance images.

1.1 Surveillance Society and Surveillance Studies

The evolution of the surveillance image’s use in cinematic narratives runs parallel to the rise of the contemporary surveillance society. David Lyon, one of the leading scholars in the surveillance studies field, describes the techno-centric surveillance society as a product of the transition from the “welfare state” to the “safety state” following the emergence of a permanent state of national security after 9/11. The safety state “…depends extensively on gathering surveillance data” and its subjects are the civilians whose daily lives consist of consenting and rejecting to being under surveillance. Urban spaces, are increasingly incorporating visible and hidden cameras to monitor, discipline, and control its citizens. Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) technologies have advanced to an extraordinary level, with the camera’s mechanical gaze supplanting the “naked eye,” and in many respects, far surpassing what the human eye can see.

Unlike earlier conspiracy thrillers, such as The Conversation (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974), where the problem of monitoring was always a problem of physical space, the surveillance society now extends to networked and digital spaces. It collects not only images, but also places a large emphasis on data: credit card numbers, website visits, and metrics on what we watch, read and click. Surveillance depends primarily on an “opt-in” model where people are constantly asked to consent to their own monitoring in the numerous “sites of surveillance”: from the militaristic and governmental, to spaces of consumption and the private sector, to policing and crime enforcement, and the digital spaces of social media under the internet. Lyon states that: “Surveillance is not merely

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1 The history of surveillance dates is heavily documented as far back as the Counterculture & Civil Rights Movement, the Red Scare, and the inception of the FBI and CIA, although it is with certain technological advancements, the omniscience of surveillance cameras, in addition to the U.S.’s anti-terror foreign policy that have heightened surveillance’s presence in America

something exercised on us as workers, citizens, or travelers, it is a set of processes in which we are all involved, both as watched and as watchers.”

Surveillance studies, as a multi-disciplinary discourse, developed as a way to account for the diverse theories, histories, and contexts involved in making sense of this structure of surveillance, “…[as] the monitoring of ordinary people in everyday life became prominent, people in different disciplines came to realize that there was a phenomenon that defied conventional disciplinary boundaries and seemed to call for concerted intellectual attention.” The varied fields involved include sociology, anthropology, information technologies, law and political sciences, the humanities, and even geography and mapping.

Above all, surveillance studies is the study of bio-power, “Whatever the purpose of surveillance; to influence, manage, protect or direct, some kind of power relations are involved. Those who establish surveillance systems generally have access to the means of including the surveilled in their line of vision, whether that vision is literal or metaphorical.”

Surveillance studies is growing exponentially. In recent years, there has been a publication of key works in the field, such as the Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies (Lyon, Ball, and Haggerty, 2014), the 2013 edition of Everyday Surveillance: Vigilance and Visibility in Postmodern Life (Staples), and the post-9/11 publications of The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America From Slavery to the War on Terror (Parenti, 2004) and The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility (Ericson and Haggerty, 2006). Film studies has also begun to deal with this new type of image, as seen in Sebastien Lefait’s Surveillance on Screen: Monitoring Contemporary Films and Television Programs and Catherine Zimmer’s forthcoming Surveillance Cinema.

I model my intervention after scholars like Lefait, Zimmer, and Thomas Y. Levin—scholars who are interested in cinema’s figuration of surveillance. My

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3 Ibid, 13
4 Ibid, 22.
5 Ibid, 23.
contribution continues to bridge the gap between film studies and the interdisciplinary surveillance studies field. It is necessary to place these two fields together for a number of reasons and to justify why film is important for this project. First, cinema has provided a space for filmmakers to craft stories, themes, and allegories around contemporary social issues. Surveillance representations in film, in part, derive from society’s need to confront what it means to be under constant watch—both generally for society, and specifically, for certain kinds of bodies.

Second, cinematic reflections of surveillance enact relational structures, whether it is between governments, corporations, or individuals, hegemonic whiteness and otherness, bourgeois hierarchy and proletarianism, or through issues of sexuality and gender. Cinema describes these relations by positioning certain bodies as disembodied “lookers,” predominantly white men of a certain class or occupational structure, while other bodies become victims of the surveillance gaze.

Additionally, cinema and video surveillance are equally composed of types of images. In surveillance studies and film studies, the discourse around the relationship between these images has been overlooked, as many scholars favor analyzing the themes that are found in surveillance narratives. Few scholars within this intersection base their writing on the nature of the surveillance image as it appears in cinema. While I engage with scholars on both ends of the intersection of surveillance and film studies, I also stress the spaces that have been neglected in this field.

As a theoretical point of origin, surveillance studies texts nearly unanimously refer to Michel Foucault’s analysis of panopticism in his seminal 1975 text *Discipline and Punish*. Panopticism as a theoretical concept derives from Jeremy Bentham’s 18th century prison designs. The panopticon (Fig. 1.06) is a circular prison defined by internal open space; a tower invisibly houses guards located in the center. Due to the circular nature of the panopticon and the ubiquitous visibility of the inmate, the inmate internalizes the possibility of being seen, even if no guard currently resides in the tower. The inmate must consciously discipline themselves, shaping their thoughts and actions based on the prospect of “total surveillance.”
Bentham’s proposal would remain a blueprint, a concept that guided theorists who wished to analyze power relational structures between observers and observed, and the specific usage of architecture, space, and isolation for this purpose. Taking up Bentham’s theory, Foucault “sought to establish the potential political effects of a ubiquitous form of institutional power, not an all-seeing or all-registering eye, but a landscape that could at any time impart in an individual a likelihood of surveillance.”

Foucault concludes that Bentham “…invented a technology of power designed to solve the problem of surveillance,” —one that aimed to minimize conflict, violence, labor, cost, and material. Foucauldian surveillance then proceeds through the constitution of the inspecting gaze and the subject’s disciplinary interiorization. Foucault’s reconsideration of panopticism explained how it functioned in enclosed spaces such as prisons and factories, thus he saw the theory’s applicability to surveillance under the modern “disciplinary society.”

In the late 20th and 21st century, Bentham’s panoptic concept was adopted by surveillance studies theorists, in part to account for the widespread usage of video surveillance cameras. Harper writes, “The cultural and spatial organization of society

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8 Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne, and Peter Weibel, CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother (Karlsruhe: ZKM Center for Art and Media, 2002), 94-96.
9 Ibid, 98.
means that we are continually surveyed, constantly regulated by a panoptical gaze.”

Omnipresent installations of video cameras, then, construct society around the model of the prison. For some, Bentham’s architectural concept was fully realized by technological developments which effectively organize the disciplinary power of the hidden gaze—one which “sees without being seen.”

For 21st century panopticism to be applicable in relation to Foucault’s reading there would have to be literal, physical structures which mediate a hidden “disciplinary gaze,” for example, a visible video surveillance camera (Fig. 1.07). Panoptical structures continue to exist today; however, the saliency of spatial confinement and the “inmate’s soul-training” which Foucault exclusively ascribes to panopticism is also complicated by technological developments of the 21st century such as satellites, hidden surveillance cameras, drones, and other mobile communication-based technologies.

Fig. 1.07. Imagining disciplinary video surveillance under the 21st century panoptic eye. (Closed Circuit. Directed by John Crowley. 2013. New York, NY: Focus Features).

Recently in surveillance studies, scholars contest panopticism as much as they accept it. Gilles Deleuze’s relatively short (but highly influential) essay “Postscript on the Societies of Control” theorizes a break from panopticism as the principal force driving surveillance studies. Deleuze writes, “Control is short-term and of rapid rates of turnover, but also continuous and without limit, while discipline was of long duration, infinite and discontinuous.”

Foucault’s work reads panopticism as a self-disciplinary mechanism. Deleuze, on the other hand, draws a historical trajectory, starting with societies of sovereignty, the disciplinary societies (described by Foucault), and the shift towards societies of control. These structures of control are to some extent defined by late capitalism and new social relations under evolving technological forms. For example, the modern corporation replaced the factory. The corporation permeates nearly all layers of modern capitalist economy, and conducts unremitting control on citizens through advertising and data mining. Lyon suggests a similar analysis, drawing on Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*, and claiming it a more appropriate cultural metaphor of where society is today as opposed to Orwell’s “Big Brother.” Lyon concedes that we are heading towards “a more mindless process – of bureaucratic indifference, arbitrary errors, and dehumanization.”

The disciplinary panoptic model is systematically defined by enclosed spaces such as schools, factories, hospitals, and prisons—in factories it functioned through disciplining its workers to perfect a centralized production apparatus, molding and shaping the citizen as to produce and reproduce them as docile subjects. Deleuze states that society has accelerated the transition to the control model in the aftermath of World War II, and that it now points to “free floating forms of continuous control” which operate in open spaces: “Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt.” Deleuzian control, then, recognizes an inability to surveil and monitor. Foucault himself anticipated the shift from disciplinary to control societies:

While on the one hand the disciplinary establishments increase, their mechanisms have a certain tendency to become ‘de-institutionalized,’ to emerge from the closed fortresses in which they once functioned and to circulate in the ‘free’ state; the massive, compact disciplines are broken down into flexible methods of control, which may be transferred and adapted.

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12 Lyon, *Surveillance Studies*, 143-144.
13 Deleuze, “Postscript,” 6-7.
14 Elmer, “Panopticon,” 27.
Lyon concurs, concluding that the “…analogical sites are now paralleled by new digital means.”  

Contemporary surveillance films work through this transformation, and scholars like Lorna Muir, in her article “Control Space?: Cinematic Representations of Surveillance Space between Discipline and Control,” have made it their explicit object of study. While nearly all surveillance narratives deal with themes based around violations of privacy and collapsing public and private spaces, it is only until relatively recently that they figure what Deleuze has discussed as the transformation to control societies. Muir writes on the individual’s role in this control paradigm, as they become “dividuals”—as data subjects that find themselves under surveillance in the informational or “cyber-city.” She writes, “When we consider that the body of the individual was constructed with the notion of confined space and that Deleuze clearly views these sites as coming to an end, then it is evident that a new subject must emerge.”

In addition to observing a “new subject” and their role within the control society, films are qualifying the rhetoric that surveillance only occurs in institutionalized sites. David Lyon writes, “…Deleuze’s work should be understood [as] exploring the new possibilities and complexities of ‘control’, only now, rather than disciplining the subject from scratch within set locales, we find surveillance ‘designed in’ and dispersed throughout the flows of everyday existence.” Conspiratorial and dystopic films clearly link surveillance to an explicitly institutionalized mode of monitoring. Films which fall outside of those cinematic models, including *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005) and *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007), approach surveillance as one may encounter it away from institutional sites, therefore the way in which these films engage with surveillance is both current and more complex, and in a manner that illustrates the shift as described by David Lyon. Film studies, as I will outline below, is also starting to engage with the history of surveillance and the theoretical trajectory of surveillance studies.

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16 Lyon, *Surveillance Studies*, 60.
1.2 Intersections: Film Studies/Surveillance Studies

The intersection between film studies and surveillance studies is less theoretically developed than in other disciplines; however, there have been great strides in recent years. As surveillance narratives evolve from a limiting thematic commentary of surveillance to a structural or figural practice of it, literature which contextualizes these complex shifts is beginning to emerge.

Norman Denzin discusses surveillance from the angle of voyeurism, noting that the cinematic machinery fostered the rise of a “cinematic, surveillance society.” This methodology does not usually focus on technological mediation as the defining feature of surveillance narratives and overlooks the figural implications of the cinema/surveillance integration. Voyeurism, which is analyzed as a formal articulation in narratives or is deconstructed with regards to camera or spectator relations, has its own long history with film studies. Scholars like Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey offer theories on “the gaze,” however, as Catherine Zimmer notes, the predominance of gaze theories organize “what it means to watch” around psychoanalytic notions of pleasure and scopophilia. Again, this cannot account for a comprehensive analysis of surveillance’s social, historical, technological, and political complexities and determinants. However, as I will point out in Chapter 4, films and surveillance situations which are based around watching women must also consider how traditional notions of voyeurism are updated or complicated.

Zimmer’s article “Surveillance Cinema: Narrative between Technology and Politics” recontextualizes the canonically voyeuristic film Rear Window (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) by locating it within surveillance studies rather than “cinematic voyeurism studies.” Zimmer makes a claim for cinema as a surveillant vehicle by outlining the ways in which the development of continuity editing anticipated the technological structure of surveillance. She writes, “The ability to track individuals over space and time was presented as the domain of cinematic narrative long before such a

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21 For an elaboration of Zimmer re-locating voyeuristic discourses to technology and history, see her article “The Camera's Eye: Peeping Tom and Technological Perversion.”
possibility would be offered by non-cinematic surveillance technologies.” Not only
does Zimmer’s work decenter the “surveillance-as-voyeuristic” discourse (which she
believes pervades both surveillance and film studies), she also offers a way to consider
how cinematic evolutions inform the way in which surveillance functions today through
CCTV screens—by collapsing different spaces and thus monitoring across the same time.

Dietmar Kammerer, on the other hand, focuses on how cinema uses technology in
surveillance narratives. In “Video Surveillance in Hollywood Movies” he details
Hollywood’s pervasive insistence on incorporating CCTV screens into their plots. Likewise, Garrett Stewart’s “Surveillance Cinema” concentrates on two Hollywood
action films, Total Recall (Len Wiseman, 2012) and The Bourne Legacy (Tony Gilroy,
2012), whose narratives are rife with surveillance technologies. These action-heavy
narratives depict extreme technological sophistication (satellites, GPS trackers), and
chronicle its usage and its narrative effectiveness in its ability to track subjects.
Kammerer’s article similarly examines Hollywood cinema through depictions of
surveillance technologies in Minority Report (Steven Spielberg, 2002 [Fig. 1.08]), Enemy
of the State (Tony Scott, 1998), and Panic Room (David Fincher, 2002)—three films that
diegeticize surveillance as an awe-inspiring technological spectacle.

Fig. 1.08. Fetishized technology and surveillance-action-spectacle. (Minority Report.

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John S. Turner, II’s “Collapsing the Interior-Exterior: Surveillance, Spectacle, and Suspense in Popular Cinema” analyzes the aforementioned movies in addition to conspiratorial and dystopic films. Turner argues that films that depict surveillance practices do so “…as an opportunity to celebrate the spectacle elements invested in surveillance…” or to integrate its use as a narrational device to “promote suspense and, subsequently, violence.”\(^{25}\) Turner concludes that “By converting the technologies and practices of surveillance into highly seductive cinematic images, images that border on the fetishization of such technologies and practices, popular cinema… frames an uncritical celebration of panopticism.”\(^{26}\)

This argument, however, must be taken in context. One must ask whether recent films such as those outlined by Turner, Stewart, and Kammerer spectacularize technology to the point that occludes any narrative critique. Or, if the critique remains, is it buried amidst the action and the spectacular role technology plays within the narrative? Turner’s concluding statement summarizes his argument, “Films that feature surveillance as a vehicle for spectacle, suspense, and violence demonstrate how we are no longer affected or unsettled by the video gaze or bodily intrusion. They have become ordinary images.”\(^ {27}\)

Importantly, Turner only analyzes films that are in themselves generically motivated by spectacle; in other words, the film’s surveillance episodes are anything but “normal.”

I argue that not all films seek to depict surveillance through immense-scale techno-action or suspense-thriller spectacle. Many are moving towards mundane, normalized representation—examples include the horror franchise Paranormal Activity, and dramas such as One Hour Photo (Mark Romanek, 2002) (Fig. 1.09), Gigante (Adrián Biniez, 2009) from Uruguay (Fig. 1.10), and Britain’s Red Road (Andrea Arnold, 2006). These selections oppose the conspiracy-action-thriller template and the dystopian sci-fi surveillance projection. It is in these films, among others, that attempt to visualize these types of images as “ordinary.” Newer surveillance films thus create different types of


\(^{26}\) Turner, “Collapsing the Interior,” 95-96.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 121.
spectacle than surveillance aiding the spectacle of action, for example: ogling over nude female form in *Compliance* (Craig Zobel, 2012) or attempting to capture the supernatural spectacle of ghosts in *Paranormal Activity*—both within mundane spaces of surveillance.


Fig. 1.10. Normalized surveillance. (*One Hour Photo*. Directed by Mark Romanek. 2002. Los Angeles, CA: Fox Searchlight Pictures).

Most scholars that approach the film/surveillance intersection focus on themes that derive from the films—this includes Anders Albrechtslund's “Surveillance and Ethics in Film: Rear Window & The Conversation” and Todd Herzog's “The Banality of Surveillance: Michael Haneke's Caché and Life after the End of Privacy.” In these articles, the authors treat surveillance as themes precisely because the films themselves thematize surveillance. In other words, many of these filmic representations figure technologies to comment on society, politics, or culture. They suggest a fundamental need to allegorize anxieties the way in which ubiquitous technology is restructuring notions of individual privacy. One oft-cited example, the home invasion film *Panic Room*, thematizes surveillance to expose certain limitations in its functionality. In the panic room, surveillance technology is used by the family in order to monitor the rest of
the invaded domestic space, but in no way does it help prevent against invasion—characters become merely trapped with the technology.

Scholars also historicize surveillance narratives. A dystopian example, *Minority Report*, allegorizes surveillance’s limitation as a preventative mechanism by crafting a story around crime-predicting technology. Thematically, *Minority Report* responds to pressing fears that the government (through institutionalized surveillance) is spying on its civilians, anticipating their actions for preventative measures. The Patriot Act was initiated during *Minority Report*’s production, and the film suggests, on a narrative level, a criticism of the Act, which its defenders argue permits the government to preventatively surveil potential threats to America. The film’s criticism manifests through comparing society’s generally controversial reaction to the Act, for example, through the many personal privacy infringements illustrated in the narrative. For Albrechtslund, when a film thematizes surveillance, it reveals the very power relations and ethical perspectives that constitute the contemporary dilemma of surveillance.\(^{28}\)

In “Surveillance in literature, film and television” a chapter from the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook*, Kammerer observes a polarization “…between plot-driven spectacle of high-tech and the display of external events…and the inner drama of the protagonists, that subtly explores the psychology and personal ethics of surveillance.”\(^{29}\) This argument concurrently attempts to conflate and separate two discourses—that of spectacle and of ethics within surveillance-themed narratives. While Kammerer acknowledges that most of these texts function within particular modes, more importantly, he exposes the way that these films are usually discussed—a discursive methodology which needs to be reappraised to account for surveillant figuration.

Merely analyzing the themes of surveillance films without considering how the film figures surveillance practices on a formal or structural level tends to rhetorically reduce surveillance cinema to a “reflective model.” Zimmer firmly states,


“…cinematic… narratives of surveillance serve as such specific structural models of the
dynamics within a culture of surveillance that they should be viewed not just as
‘reflections’ of an increasingly surveillance-centered media, but themselves as practices
of surveillance.” Zimmer concludes her article by claiming that cinematic narration
organizes and is organized by the logic of surveillance practice--yet little is written on
how cinema and surveillance histories may mutually inform each other. Herzog agrees by
stating that despite film theory’s preoccupation with spectatorship and voyeurism, certain
deficiencies still exist: “We have a wealth of theories of the ‘the gaze’; we have relatively
few theories of what it means to be looked at. But such a theory seems worth considering,
especially in light of the post-private world in which we exist.” My thesis, in part, is
motivated by these overlooked spaces within the aforementioned intersections.

Thomas Y. Levin has offered one of the most ground-breaking structural analyses
of surveillance narratives. Levin analyzes the figural implications of surveillance cinema
in addition to locating these features within a specific historical and theoretical shift:

…the locus of surveillance has thus shifted… away from the space of the
story, to the very condition of possibility of that story. Surveillance here
has become the formal signature of the film’s narration. And indeed, it is
this ambiguity – between surveillance as narrative subject, i.e., as a
thematic concern, and surveillance as the very condition or structure of
narration itself – that will become increasingly characteristic of the
cinema of the 1990s.

Levin’s “Rhetoric of the Temporal Index: Surveillant Narration and the Cinema of Real
Time” articulates the emergence of “rhetorics” of surveillance. He suggests how
contemporary films use surveillance cameras aesthetically, compositionally, and also to
alter traditional narrative form.

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31 Ibid., 439.
32 Todd Herzog, “The Banality of Surveillance: Michael Haneke's Caché and Life after the End of
33 Thomas Y. Levin, “Rhetoric of the Temporal Index: Surveillant Narration and the Cinema of Real
Time,” in CTRL Space: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother, eds. Thomas Y.
Levin, Ursula Frohne and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe and Cambridge: ZKM & MIT Press, 2002),
582-583.
For Levin, the cinematic image’s defining characteristic, its ability to physically capture space cinematographically onto film, is being compromised by the digital age, something I will expand upon in Chapter 2. Cinema can no longer rely on “celluloid’s photogrammatic referentiality,” and the truth of the images now lies in the fact that they occur in “real-time”: “The fundamentally indexical rhetoric of cinema’s pre-digital photo-chemical past thus survives in the digital age, albeit now re-cast in the form of the temporal indexicality of the real-time surveillant image.”34 This suggests a salient feature of the surveillance narrative: the emphasis on (real) time and the spectator’s experience of ‘duration’ as surveillant components.

The theory that Levin proposes not only stresses temporal indexicality as a characteristic of surveillance cinema, but moreover it is interested in the way cinema structures images. This brings me back to similar questions proposed by Sliver’s figuration of the surveillance image. Levin takes note that “The appearance of surveillance images in narrative cinema has become a naturalized code that is neither arbitrary nor incoherent but comprehensible.”35

Similarly to Levin, Kammerer briefly observes what it means for a film to have (or not have) surveillance aesthetics:

Unlike in Minority Report or Enemy of the State, in Panic Room, there is not a single shot from the point of view of a surveillance camera, in the typical blurred, grainy ‘video look’. Whenever the camera gets closer to the video surveillance monitors installed in the ‘Panic Room’. You can always still see that it’s an image on a monitor you are watching, and not the image itself.36

In this section of his article, Kammerer acknowledges how surveillance-themed narratives function when they incorporate surveillance aesthetics. He observes a distinction between surveillance images that appear on a television screen (that can be located, as well as lost) within the mise-en-scène, as opposed to a shot from the cameras point-of-view which takes up the entire image frame. Obviously these two instances hold different ramifications since they are very different strategies. Paul Cobley concurs, in his

34 Levin, “Rhetoric of the Temporal Index,” 592.
chapter “The Paranoid Style in Narrative: The Anxiety of Storytelling After 9/11.” Cobley describes a style associated with a particular strand of form and narration found in paranoiac conspiratorial surveillance films. The strength of his chapter comes from how he discerns between “surveillance themes” and “paranoid styles”—which in his opinion, is synonymous with that of the surveillance narrative.37

Scholars must continue to flesh out analyses of these distinctions, since more and more films now narrate through surveillance images—whether for extended or even entire durations. While I note the important works of Levin and Zimmer, both scholars who call for continual analyses of cinema’s complex figuration of surveillance, I demand that the discourse continue to move beyond its dominant thematization. My next section will establish a history of surveillance cinema through two modes: conspiracy cinema and science-fiction dystopia. While these modes primarily center on images of conspiracy that are in themselves historically and theoretically locatable, they also present glimpses of the present state of surveillance cinema.

1.3 Dominant Surveillance Representations – Dystopia

The conception of a control mechanism, giving the position of any element within an open environment at any given instant… is not necessarily one of science fiction.38

— Gilles Deleuze

It is important to understand that “surveillance cinema” is not a genre, per se, although it is often discussed as embodying reoccurring or defining features. Surveillance films typically exist within preestablished generic frameworks, including the action-thriller, science-fiction and dystopic films, and the conspiracy thriller. Recent depictions of surveillance, some of which constitute my corpus of films for later chapters, are additionally located in multiple genres and modes: horror, melodrama, erotic-thriller, drama-comedy, art film, experimental film, and docudrama.

This section outlines how surveillance functions in its dominant representations, embedded within narratives and genres that mediate this new image in relation to

38 Deleuze, postscript, 7
recognizable story and representational forms. Thus, I will discuss two types of movies that precede the surveillance film: dystopic science-fiction and the conspiracy thriller, beginning with *1984* (Michael Radford, 1984) and *THX 1138* (George Lucas, 1971), and followed by *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974).

Science-fiction is frequently defined through its speculative capacity: it comments on society’s sentiments towards science and technology by projecting questions onto another time or space. Science-fiction is thus often read as a highly allegorical genre. Surveillance’s use as a narrative structure or theme largely depends on the availability of and the public’s understanding of such technologies. Therefore, before these technologies were implemented, possible, or even fathomable, they were worked through as the fevered nightmare of science-fiction authors. Kammerer observes this by stating that surveillance narratives offer viewers future dystopic visions of society, visions which then provide scholars with metaphors and models for thinking about surveillance.\(^{39}\) Lyon concurs, and additionally states that dystopic surveillance holds a didactic function, “Such movies and novels help us get our bearings on what surveillance is all about—because they are usually negative, dystopian—[and] gives us a sense of the kind of world we wish to avoid.”\(^{40}\)

Dystopian surveillance narratives largely follow the framework of George Orwell’s postwar novel *1984* (1949), thus their frequent designation as “Orwellian.” Orwellian narratives take place in authoritarian futures in which governments and various policing units monitor civilians, controlling them with the aid of surveillance technologies. Orwellian products therefore thematize surveillance by projecting societal anxieties over technology’s controlling capacity. In *1984*, telescreens pervade the mise-en-scène. Winston, the protagonist, knows he is under constant “technological watch” by Big Brother, and therefore interiorizes his anxiety over his total visibility. Orwellian films overwhelmingly thematize the psychological effects of disciplinary surveillance, thus, they are typically discursively connected to Foucault’s panoptic theories.

\(^{40}\) Lyon, *Surveillance Studies*, 139
While scholars note 1984’s influence on a notable sect of literature and films, most tend to overlook that surveillance is used as a theme, or rather, a narrative structure, rather than a figural presence. In other words, 1984 is more about fleshing out conditions under totalitarianism than it is explicitly about being surveilled or tangible structures of control. The film adaptation of 1984 also averts diegetically foregrounding surveillance images and surveillance cameras. Telescreens supplant commonplace video surveillance procedure; consequently, the surveillance image’s absence suggests how antiquated the film might read in our contemporary moment.

Only one scene in 1984 anticipates the future figuration of the contemporary surveillance film. Less than nine minutes into the movie Winston leaves work to go to his apartment cell. The sound of the propagandist telescreen greets him, as the screen’s speaker looks forward (Fig. 1.11). After cutting to a medium-close-up of Winston smoking (Fig. 1.12), the camera cuts to an unusual perspective: that of the telescreen itself (Fig. 1.13). The spectator is afforded an ambiguous point-of-view shot from whoever is anonymously surveilling Winston. The style of the image changes to a grainier aesthetic, therefore the image is clearly marked as a surveillance image. Additionally, the shot lasts for an uncomfortable duration of twelve seconds.

![Fig. 1.11. The telescreen staring at Winston. (Nineteen Eighty-Four. Directed by Michael Radford. 1984. Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox: Fig. 1.11—Fig. 1.13).](image-url)
Fig. 1.12. Winston looking away.

Fig. 1.13. In 1984 the surveillance image appears in full cinematic frame only once, as an ambiguously sourced return gaze from Big Brother.

The surveillance image’s appearance in 1984 raises more questions than it answers. Why does this image type occur only once? Who will spectators assign the POV to? What motivates its emergence? The image itself has a history with science-fiction cinema that predates contemporary surveillance cinema, as aesthetically it has been rendered to imply the point-of-view of a cyborg, for example in The Terminator (Cameron, 1984) and RoboCop (Verhoeven, 1987). Lefait, who devotes half of his first chapter to both the book and film, overlooks this image as it occurs in 1984. He does, however, expand on the nature of this image type as it appears in other surveillance narratives. The “surveillance subjective shot” (SSS) describes shots that are presented as subjective because they are seen through an “automatic watching device,” in other words, a surveillance camera. According to Lefait, the SSS deviates from Classical Hollywood’s deployment of subjectivity because the latter lets the spectator know that someone is
looking and who they are.\textsuperscript{41} The SSS, by comparison, tells the spectator that a camera is capturing the on-screen surveillance image without necessarily letting them know who is watching, or indeed, if anyone is watching them at all.\textsuperscript{42} Typically, Orwellian cinema presents these images as totalizing because the worlds themselves suggest that characters are under total technological watch.

By figuring the surveillance image, cinema actualizes what was previously only theorized by critics and film theorists: its capacity to surveil. However, while surveillance cinema is defined by how surveillance images structure film narrative, \textit{1984} has only one such image. \textit{1984} divides its primary narrating agency between sequential and “normally shot” events, flashbacks, and voiceover; the latter two are clearly derivative of the literary source material. Unlike classical narration, in the surveillance narrative the image itself is the ultimate source of narrational agency, as I will demonstrate in my next chapter.

\textit{THX 1138} (1971), George Lucas’s dystopian debut film, more appropriately anticipates the surveillance image’s usage and function in contemporary cinema. At its core, the film focalizes and addresses what it means to surveil and be surveilled. As with Winston in \textit{1984}, \textit{THX 1138}’s titular protagonist is a prisoner under an authoritarian apparatus. The dystopian future of the film is, as Kammerer puts it, “techno-fetishistic,” and is similar to other surveillance-themed science-fiction films, most notably \textit{Minority Report} and \textit{Equilibrium}. However, differently than those two films, \textit{THX 1138} barely uses surveillance technology to motivate action spectacle sequences. In other words, instead of encompassing action or thriller elements by using technology to motivate chase sequences, fight scenes, GPS or satellite-motivated cross-cutting, much of \textit{THX 1138}’s narrative is based around simpler (yet salient) notions of monitoring and observation.

Although \textit{THX 1138} film has a clear relationship to Orwellian cinema, it refuses to be neatly classified within them, predominantly because the film uses technologies that society still uses today—thus emphasizing how the film favors normalization over spectacle. In \textit{THX 1138}, CCTV screens and surveillance images are commonplace (Fig. 1.14). While \textit{1984}’s “technological watch” remains formally implicit, \textit{THX 1138} often

\textsuperscript{41} Lefait, \textit{Surveillance on Screen}, 33-37.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 34-35.
cuts between “regular” images and surveillance subjective shots which fill the entire cinematic frame (Fig. 1.15). *THX 1138* anticipates much that will come to characterize the surveillance image. When images change from normally shot to a SSS, the shift implies that characters are doubly under watch. Additionally, cinematic spectators are occasionally granted visual access to the diegetic “control room.” In this room, workers occupy the CCTV spectator’s position. This reveals that *someone is watching*; the surveillance process has not been mechanized and still relies on the labor process.

Fig. 1.14. The control room in *THX 1138*. (*THX 1138*. Directed by George Lucas. 1971. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros: Fig. 1.14—Fig. 1.15).

Fig. 1.15. The controlled image in *THX 1138*.

In comparison to other dystopic surveillance-themed narratives, *THX 1138* exhibits a noticeably experimental style—noting its production during the early stages of the New Hollywood. Whereas *1984* follows Classical Hollywood conventions of continuity editing and traditional cinematography (in addition to being informed by certain literary techniques), much of *THX 1138* consists of mundane episodes of pure spectating. *THX 1138* very clearly privileges *watching* (surveilling) over action, dialogue, or spectacle. Its script is minimal; there is little dialogue or monologue, and instead the
film is concerned with blurring image types and testing the spectator’s experience of duration.

Consequently, while *THX 1138* figures the surveillance image in a comparable way to *Sliver*, predating it by two decades, its generic codes displace it in time and space from reality as the spectator knows it. Science-fiction brings viewers into different worlds, ones which mirror or comment on the present day, but worlds that are marked as different nonetheless. In these dystopic worlds, surveillance is brought to its most “super-panoptic,” to quote Sebastien Lefait. Surveillance is only manipulated by authoritarian regimes, for governmental or corporate interests, and to convey within the diegesis the prospect of omnipotent control. Authoritarian surveillance, then, always alludes to a one-sided power dynamic, which in itself does not fully replicate its contemporary complexity.

### 1.4 Dominant Surveillance Representations – The Conspiracy Thriller

If dystopia imagines a world in which we may be headed, or rather a world society fears it may turn into, then the 1970s and 1980s conspiracy thrillers illustrate a world in which alienation and paranoia are very locatable, contemporary problems. The conspiracy thriller emerged at a historic moment in post-Vietnam American culture and society: the years preceding and following Richard Nixon’s Watergate fiasco—its own episode of surveillance gone awry, encased within a narrative straight out of the thriller mold.\(^43\) Comparative to how dystopia negatively anticipates worlds under total control, the conspiracy thrillers also associate the technology with societal pessimism.

Many scholars note that the conspiracy thriller converses with trends in post-Vietnam and post-Watergate cynicism. Ray Pratt, Robert Kolker, and Robin Wood attribute the cultural gestation of these narratives to American society’s distrust of government.\(^44\) Against the general public’s wants, the government prolonged participation in an unwinnable war. President Nixon covered up his role in the Watergate


fiasco, in which his administration bugged political opponents and those generally
deemed “suspicious.” During impeachment proceedings it was revealed that the President
recorded numerous conversations held in his own office; when the tapes were forfeited to
the Supreme Court it revealed episodes of paranoid self-surveillance, an obsession that
essentially did more harm than good. American film directors Oliver Stone and Robert
Altman have represented Nixon’s fascination with the power of surveillance—the former
in Nixon (1995) and the latter in the adapted play Secret Honor (1984 [Fig. 1.16 & Fig.
1.17]).

Fig. 1.16. Nixon’s narcissistic fascination with surveillance. (Secret Honor. Directed by
Robert Altman. 1984. New York: NY: The Criterion Collection: Fig. 1.16—Fig. 1.17).

Fig. 1.17. The surveillance image in Secret Honor.

Robert Altman’s Secret Honor imagines Nixon as a raving narcissist who not only bugs others, but
records and watches himself on CCTV screens while he proceeds with his verbal political tirades. This film
predates the surveillant “culture of narcissism” that defines later surveillance found-footage films by twenty
years.
The conspiracy thrillers thus reflect themes such as governmental distrust, paranoia, and conspiratorial collusion. Cinematically, the genre evolved from crime films. They emerged in the 1970s, starting with *Klute* (Alan J. Pakula, 1971), *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974), *The Parallax View* (Alan J. Pakula, 1974), *Three Days of the Condor* (Sidney Pollack, 1975), and *All the President’s Men* (Alan J. Pakula, 1976), and continued early into the 1980s with Brian De Palma’s *Blow Out* (1981) and David Cronenberg’s dystopic *Videodrome* (1983). Many of these thrillers depict reconnaissance or reconstruction of surveillance recordings. Narrative tension arises when characters try to gain either truth or knowledge from the recording, information that would expose the conspiratorial parties and lend clarity to the surveillance scenario.

The conspiracy thriller’s protagonists are either formal or informal investigators: journalists and newspaper reporters (*All The President’s Men, The Parallax View*), sound recording experts (*The Conversation, Blow Out*), or private investigators (*Klute*). These characters are driven by personal obsession, and similarly to the dystopic films, they experience the psychological effects of surveillance—characterized by extreme tension and paranoia. Technology lets characters indulge in their incessant wish to see and hear. Their quest for clarity and information, however, leads them into dark corners in which the structures of surveillance are usually reversed; they become the victims of visibility, and their inquisitive nature signals their demise. The thrillers thus describe how surveillance is “dangerous when in the wrong hands.”

Both the conspiracy thriller and dystopic film present worlds in which surveillance technology interacts with a uniform subject: white, masculine figures, who fall into a certain class and occupation. Denzin writes, “This narrative system reinscribes the myth of the solitary, male individual in the anonymous mass society who acts also with honor, grace and self-sacrifice in the name of a higher good.” This, of course, is a mythic construction, and more often than not, society favors (and institutionalizes)

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surveilling “othered” bodies. The 1970s conspiracy thrillers frame how white men exhibit anxiety when they too become surveilled subjects under “look and listen.”

I argue that these films appear strategically removed from various movements that were happening at that historical moment. The second-wave feminists of the 1970s, for example, focused on a number of issues pertaining to women’s rights. The conspiracy thrillers craft fantasies around men losing agency and are very clearly about masculine crises—that they were released when women’s voices were being heard louder and more clearly informs their “inverted” gendered historical commentary. I read the conspiracy thrillers as reacting to “hegemonic castration,” against notions of whiteness and masculinity during the 1960s civil rights and 1970s feminist movement—movements which observed the injustices of life under white patriarchal domination.

Thus, white characters experience paranoia because they are longer able to map the world around them. While scholars commonly historicize the relationship between the thrillers and post-Vietnam and post-Watergate pessimism, one cannot overlook the genre’s emergence alongside marginalized movements. Recent surveillance cinema also comments on this trend, by figuring a globalizing world—one that attempts to rectify the conspiracy thriller’s uniform subjects: Caché, from a racialized and post-colonial standpoint, Paranormal Activity and Compliance from a class and gendered angle, and Red Road and The Ring from a more emphatically gendered context.

Frederic Jameson deconstructs the conspiracy thriller in The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System. His chapter, “Totality as Conspiracy,” argues that the genre diverges from its predecessors: the detective crime story and film noir. In the conspiracy thriller, characters must “map the emerging social totality itself.”

Instead of figuring out the reason for someone’s death, as common in noir films, conspiracy narratives encourage their protagonists to map social spaces in the evolving world of late capitalism. Formerly situated within a small group of individuals (noir),

the thriller’s conspiratorial conflict situates the individual’s entanglement with the social collective itself (often depicted as the governmental or private sector).\textsuperscript{50}

Harper, citing Jameson, elevates the emergence of the conspiracy thriller to a figurative concept: “… the conspiratorial narrative is a solution to a fundamental representational problem: how to picture an unimaginable and increasingly technologically sophisticated global network that is so vast that it cannot be “encompassed by the natural and historically developed categories of perception.”\textsuperscript{51}

Likewise, Zimmer writes that the thrillers “propose the possibility of conspiracy as a way to frame an understanding of what [Jameson] calls totality.” According to Jameson, the narrative form of a totalizing system is conspiracy: “everything is related, interdependent, mutually informing” and that the “surveillance narrative highlights the structural components of the move toward the visually and visibly situated world system, as well as the place surveillance technologies have come to hold in the structuring of geopolitics.”\textsuperscript{52}

Engaging with Jameson’s seminal work, Zimmer discusses a specific strand of surveillance narrative in her paper “Surveillance Narratives and the Geopolitical Aesthetic.” Zimmer focuses on films that are continuations of conspiracy cinema, including \textit{Enemy of the State}, \textit{The Bourne Trilogy}, \textit{Eagle Eye}, and \textit{Body of Lies}—films which “…produce their conspiracy narratives in conjunction with visualizations of that global system.”\textsuperscript{53} These films realize (and even, simplify, as Zimmer notes) what Jameson theorized in relation to the contemporary “world system.” However, the modern thrillers can also read as a type of generational narrative that induces paranoia and associates conspiratorial power, politics, and practice with surveillance and telecommunication technologies. Contemporary surveillance cinema more complexly figures technological control that is largely disassociated with hegemonic governmental

\textsuperscript{50} Zimmer, engaging with Jameson writes that these films function “…as allegories serving in the “cognitive mapping” process attending the subject’s maneuvering through what Jameson aptly refers to as the “unmappable world system.” Conspiracy, in this case, is not merely the political gestalt of the 1970s, but an allegorical function serving to map the \textit{form} of the global in late capitalism.”
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
practice. Before I conclude, I will briefly analyze the most canonical of the conspiracy thrillers, Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Conversation*.

In *The Conversation*, surveillance expert Harry Caul is contracted to record and then decipher a couple’s conversation. Unbeknownst to him, the couple has conspired to cover up the murder of “The Director,” a faceless corporate head. Not only does Harry become entangled in the conspiracy that leads to his psychotic breakdown, but he is ever-present during the recording and reconstruction process. Whereas later surveillance films like *Sliver* and *Paranormal Activity* imply the process’s mechanization, Harry’s exploited human labor and personal attachment come to characterize the film.

Caul is left totally broken as his surveillance fails to help thwart deviancy and conspiracy. By the film’s end, the tables have turned on Harry and he is the victim of surveillance, presumably by another surveillance contractor hired by the couple. Harry breaks down—destroying everything in his room that may potentially be bugged. As with *1984*’s anticipatory glimmer of surveillance cinema through its surveillance subjective shot, Coppola’s *The Conversation* sticks out due to its peculiar formal articulation of Harry Caul’s “looked-at-ness.”

The film’s final sequence is shot in a manner that is unusual for the majority of the conspiracy thrillers, which are filmed in accordance with typical Hollywood style and its deployment of point-of-view. *The Conversation*’s camera gains autonomy; it moves away from Harry seemingly without motivation. After Harry destroys his apartment, the camera surveils him, panning left and right, back and forth, shot from a slightly overhead angle (Fig. 1.18) which figures a surveillance camera’s position in space. Although this sequence does not literalize the surveillance process (since the cinematic camera is not diegetically motivated as a surveillance camera), it does allegorically formalize the function of the surveillance camera, and thus, the power relations inherent in the

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54 In a manner akin to Jameson, Denzin writes on the film’s strategic difference from its influencer, the detective film: “…*The Conversation* inverts the… usual triangular structure of voyeur, subject and client… The client, the Director, is also a voyeur. The traditional voyeur (Harry) is now the subject of the client’s gaze, and the subject, Ann and Mark, are the real villains. Their villainy merges, in the end, with the Corporation, who is… complicitous with them.” (Denzin, *The Cinematic Society*, 172).
disembodied surveiller. By including this camera movement, the film visually enacts a structure of control that foreshadows future techno-anxious films such as *The Ring*.


Levin points to *The Conversation*’s finale as initiating the transition from a thematic approach of surveillance to a figural one. Coppola’s “exploration of panoptical hermeneutics,” according to Levin, no longer uses surveillance as an occasional formal strategy to *differentiate* images from one another. For Levin, this suggests a different strategy than a formal or aesthetic distinction between surveillance images in a film like *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960), which *clearly marks* the image. When comparing the marked surveillance images in *1984* and (more explicitly) *THX 1138* with *The Conversation*’s unmarked, diegetically unmotivated, and allegorical structure, we find that the films enact different strategies—which I will deconstruct in the following chapter.

Surveillance cinema illustrates the practice’s normalization and thus visibly moves away from the conspiracy mode in order to realize surveillance as a complex control mechanism. Lyon asserts conspiratorial surveillance’s limitations while concurrently acknowledging its dominance:

But this is already to fall into the trap of thinking that ‘surveillance and popular culture’ is all about undesirable circumstances and anxious,
paranoid responses. While it is true that one strand of the surveillance genre is indeed alarmist, unsettling, haunting, conspiratorial, other strands of popular culture may not only reassure about the realities of surveillance or support the view that surveillance is a necessary dimension of life today but even encourage deliberate disclosure.\textsuperscript{55}

Through a fleshed-out dialogue of the surveillance image’s complexity, we can move beyond its dominant discussions and representational forms.

This chapter has, in part, laid the foundation of my thesis: the theoretical trajectory from Foucault to Deleuze; an introduction to both the surveillance studies field and its intersection with film studies and film theory; an analysis of the dominant surveillance mode’s limitations and how it typically conflates whiteness, paranoia, conspiracy, and spectacle; and finally, the dominant mode’s anticipation of the surveillance image’s contemporary figuration—figurations which anticipate contemporary surveillance cinema. Subsequent chapters will move beyond the dominant representational forms in order to stress my corpus’s newness and radicality.

\textsuperscript{55} Lyon, \textit{Surveillance Studies}, 139.
Chapter 1 outlined a historical shift in cinema: from images of conspiracy to the surveillance image. This chapter continues an analysis of the surveillance image by detailing the narrative, formal, and figural properties of the surveillance film. I will begin by addressing the problem that Bordwell identifies as that of the motivation of formal devices: how a surveillance image is shown within a series of non-surveillance images. I state that the films under consideration use devices traditionally found in experimental cinema, such as fixed camera positions, extreme long takes, and others, to signify the presence of the surveillance image. Using these devices, the films re-introduce issues of “readability” typically associated with slow, early, and experimental cinema. Additionally, distinctions are made between “marked” surveillance images and “unmarked” ones. One question becomes, what happens when a surveillance image is no longer recognizably different from other images? This chapter will thus look at a group of films where the surveillance image is foregrounded as a formal cinematic device: *Timecode* (Mike Figgis, 2000), *Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2005), *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007), *Paranormal Activity 2* (Tod Williams, 2010), *388 Arletta Avenue* (Randall Cole, 2011), and *Devil’s Due* (Tyler Gillett, Matt Bettinelli-Olpin, 2014).

Similarly to surveillance films discussed in Chapter 1, films that grew directly out of the tradition of conspiracy cinema, *Paranormal Activity* and *Caché* center on surveillance recordings as sites of investigation. However, the films in Chapter 2 prioritize their visual investigations in a manner that includes the cinematic image since they center on video surveillance and thus narrate (entirely or partially) through surveillance images. The older mode of conspiracy cinema centered primarily on recording and reconstructing audio surveillance rather than integrating video surveillance into film form, and as such, their narrational styles are considered ‘Classical’ as opposed to experimental. In turn, Chapter 2’s films locate distinct narrative, formal, and aesthetic changes.
The way surveillance cinema recasts “watching” is, in part, through historical and technological shifts: the switch from photographic cinema to digital film. This switch, which the films under discussion often explicitly thematize, engages with notions of the “post-cinematic” as discussed by Steven Shaviro in *Post Cinematic Affect*. Digital cameras better enable an emulation of surveillance as we encounter it today: as a mechanized recording of too much data, more than the human eye can see and human intelligence can take in at once. Therefore, it is through technological advancements that cinema can more aptly figure contemporary anxieties in surveillance studies, and, in turn, experiment with narrative, form, style, and spectative experiences.

The role of disembodiments will also have a central place in this chapter. Diegetically, the surveillance image exposes relations of control between bodies that are looked-at and bodies that are allowed to be “absent lookers,” which are typically white men who earn above the middle-class. Formal and narrational structures, however, carefully delineate these poles in relation to the types of bodies and spaces that are being monitored or controlled, specifically, those that are “othered” as racialized, gendered, or lower-class subjects.

While much of this chapter focuses on film form (cinematography and editing) in order to establish how cinema crafts the surveillance film, it is only a necessary set up to my primary argument concerning the ramifications of these diegetic technologies and how they are able to articulate the control of bodies. Concerning my overarching thesis I will focus on *Caché* and *Paranormal Activity 1 & 2*, films that explicitly use surveillance to narrate through the disembodied look. In *Caché* the hegemonic “to-be-surveilled” character is targeted by the sub-veillant, off-screen, “othered” looker. Conversely, *Paranormal Activity*’s surveilled subjects are targeted from a higher, panoptical position: that of the economic crisis’s debt collector.

These films accordingly align the surveillance image with the spectatorial look. The spectator occupies the position of a disembodied, antagonistic force (the ghostly

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specter the *Paranormal Activity* films, the ‘hidden’ subject of *Caché*). In other words, these formal observations open up the question of the significance of spectatorial alignment with the off-screen gaze. What does it mean to identify with the surveiller rather than the characters in the frame? For *Caché*, the recognition of the muted post-colonial subject (the victimized French-Algerian) motivates the formal parameters in which the film is crafted. In the case of *Paranormal Activity* & *Paranormal Activity 2*, the film explicitly comments on class and whiteness, as the specter provokes, attacks, and possesses—all within the “haunted” space of the house of the economic crisis. I conclude that these three films appear as strong texts because they allegorize surveillance in relation to racial, economic, and political power.

2.1 New Ways of Seeing: Split-Screens, Motivated Images & the Post-Cinematic

In 2000, Mike Figgis released *Timecode*, an experimental film constructed from four single ninety-minute takes. The film has been analyzed for its peculiar narrational and formal structure. Four digital video cameras capture the intersecting lives of a small group of L.A.-based characters. However, rather than edit through the four cameras in accordance with Hollywood style and the tenets of montage, *Timecode* divides the image’s space into four quadrants. All four takes are presented as happening at the same time; therefore, they play out the illusion of “real time.” Dividing cinematic space becomes a highly self-reflexive act, as evidenced by the first few shots of the film (Fig. 2.01 & Fig. 2.02). From the moment the production company’s name appears on-screen, it is divided into quarters. The spectator must follow this unusual narrative and formal arrangement, although they are helped by the soundtrack. The soundtrack features overlapping dialogue, but at key moments one quadrant’s dialogue rises in the sound mix, which guides the spectator’s eye to crucial narrative information.
Timecode turns the cinema into a surveillance apparatus; Levin writes that it “recasts cinema as a surveillance station.” While it does not technically narrate through surveillance images, by dividing the image into quarters which temporally run concurrently, the film formally and functionally emulates CCTV video surveillance technologies (Fig. 2.03 & Fig. 2.04). This changes the nature of the spectator’s position. They not only become aware of watching, but are also left to piece together a narration by scanning the quadrants—on the lookout for important or potentially suspicious information. However, although Timecode presents the spectator with the illusion of occupying a monitoring position (like that of a surveillance control room), they are still ultimately passive observers. The spectator cannot manipulate the image or enact control onto the characters. Additionally, characters do not know that they are being watched,

and the film does not figure the camera as a surveillance camera. Therefore, *Timecode* functions as an *illusion*—as if to present the contradiction that the cameras function as surveillance—and *allusion*—as if to equate cinema itself with a mode of surveillance.

![Fig. 2.03](image1.jpg)

**Fig. 2.03.** Spectators occupy the “surveillance operator” position in *Timecode*.

![Fig. 2.04](image2.jpg)

**Fig. 2.04.** They must learn how to read and monitor images that occur simultaneously.

Dietmar Kammerer inspects what it means for surveillance and cinema to intersect: “*Time Code* [sic]… explicitly inscribes itself into the surveillance discourse and understands itself as an artistic reflection not only of what it means to be under constant surveillance, but also of what it means to watch these images.” The film’s endlessly long takes, monitoring of people across (urban and private) spaces, and its split-screen aesthetic all signify surveillance within a film that fails to be neatly compartmentalized as a surveillance film. Nadia Bozak writes in “Four Cameras are Better than One: Division as Excess in Mike Figgis’ *Timecode*” on *Timecode’s* “CCTV aesthetic” and how it reflects “how normalized… post-industrial culture’s great submission [is] to being

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monitored and monitoring in turn” and that “technological change is manifested within
narrative and aesthetic shifts and, therefore, audience expectation.”

Bozak’s article offers a history of film’s use of the split-screen technique, which
proves useful in contextualizing contemporary surveillance cinema. Early cinema used
split-screen to connect two spaces across time during telephone conversations. Brian De
Palma used the technique in a number of different ways, but often to create montage
within a connected time and space, “a montage in real time” (see: Carrie, Brian De
Palma, 1976, [Fig. 2.05]). De Palma employs this methodology in Carrie in order to fully
capture the climactic narrative spectacle. Recently, films and television shows have
turned split-screen into direct allusions of a surveillance aesthetic. Timecode is the
primary film example, but shows such as 24 (2001-2010 [Fig. 2.06]) redeploy the split-
screen by signifying quadrants as “normalized surveillance screens-within-screens,” even
if the images themselves are not attributable to diegetic surveillance cameras. De Palma’s
later films, in particular Snake Eyes (1998), Redacted (2007) and Passion (2012), figure
surveillance technologies to consider how the surveillance image suggests an extension
of the point-of-view shot. This is ultimately what is missing from the unmotivated
montage structures of Carrie and 24, in addition to Timecode’s unbroken quadrants.

59 Nadia Bozak, “Four Cameras are Better than One: Division as Excess in Mike Figgis’ Timecode,”
http://refractory.unimelb.edu.au/2008/12/25/four-cameras-are-better-than-one-division-as-excess-
in-mike-figgis%E2%80%99-timecode-%E2%80%93-nadia-bozak/, no pagination.

60 Perhaps more than any other contemporary American filmmaker, Brian De Palma has challenged
spectators through the way in which his work confronts themes of voyeurism, surveillance, technology’s
ubiquity and its social, sexual, and political implications. See: Hi, Mom!, Blow Out, Body Double,
Redacted, and Passion for an elaboration on these themes and De Palma’s surveillant construction of the
camera’s look.
Recently in cinema, split-screen has been completely redeployed as literal surveillance quadrants, a redeployment that suggests companies, corporations, and governmental agencies mastery of surveillance technology. For example, the split-screen surveillance images in the British conspiracy thriller *Closed Circuit* (John Crowley, 2013) allegorize visibility and capture in Britain's security state. The U.K. is notoriously known as a heavily monitored state; everyday citizens can “expect to be filmed 300 times each day by one of the country’s estimated 4.2 million CCTV surveillance cameras.”\(^6\) *Closed Circuit*’s surveillance images appear in abundance at random points in the narrative (Fig. 2.07). They are shown almost entirely without the reverse-shot of someone watching, as if to stress the ever-present potentiality of being monitored in contemporary

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England. Surveillance images are used as a formal parameter in film, as evidenced by non-found-footage films such as *Closed Circuit* and *Look* (Adam Rifkin, 2007). *Look*’s narrative is composed entirely of fictionalized surveillance images, images which allude to the total collapse of public and private spaces in contemporary American society due to the ubiquity of mechanized surveillance cameras.

![Split-screen’s redeployment through actual surveillance images.](image)

Critical literature on *Timecode*, like that of many other films in this chapter, discusses cinema’s turn to digital and pressing notions of the “post-cinematic.” As an example, Levin and Bozak explore *Timecode*’s significance since the film introduced the “post-cinematic paradigm of surveillant narration.”\(^\text{62}\) Bozak’s article claims that *Timecode* was “…the first American studio production executed entirely in digital.”\(^\text{63}\) *Paranormal Activity*, an independent production distributed by Paramount, also helped usher in cinema’s digital age as a new surveillance film. What, then, is the post-cinematic, and its relevance to surveillant figuration in cinema?

Cinema’s gradual change-over from film to digital cinematography has instigated major theoretical debates. Questions range from what constitutes a *film* if it no longer is shot on film, to the ways in which labor and finances formerly associated with obtaining and using costly film have changed. Fabe observes that “…the affordability of digital recording is what allows for the experimentation and creative risk that is *Timecode*’s

\(^{62}\) Levin, “Rhetoric of the Temporal Index,” 592.

\(^{63}\) Bozak, “Four Cameras are Better than One.”
premise." At the center of this transformation is the change in costs of labor and production that go along with digital cinema.

Scholars describe what constitutes the post-cinematic across many platforms. Therese Grisham, Julia Leyda, Nicholas Rombes, and Steven Shaviro held an electronic roundtable discussion, primarily for the purpose of analyzing the first two Paranormal Activity films. Additionally, Shaviro has devoted an entire film and philosophy manuscript to the subject, entitled Post-Cinematic Affect. Leyda’s forthcoming “Demon Debt: Paranormal Activity as Recessionary Post-Cinematic Allegory,” motivates the post-cinematic qualities of the film as reflecting current economic crises, which I will return to later in this chapter. Rombes has also written on Paranormal Activity, specifically about its avant-garde qualities, in both “Six Asides on Paranormal Activity” and “The Fixed Camera Manifesto.”

Together and separately, these scholars fixate on the post-cinematic climate in general, but also on Paranormal Activity, and thus, the contemporary surveillance film specifically. Surveillance films that record digitally take advantage of new liberties granted by the relative cheapness of digital technology. This new “digital democracy,” as Bozak assigns, proves to be even more radical than the advent of video:

[the] digital democracy is singular in how it enables amateur and/or independent filmmaking and threatens the hegemony of conventional Hollywood cinema which is typically fictional, based on invisible continuity editing and, as “style is subordinate to narrative” and “must not draw attention to itself”, uses a single screen.65

The Paranormal Activity franchise started as a low-budget independent production, but eventually saw immense backing from a major Hollywood studio. Oren Peli, director of the first Paranormal Activity, spent only $15,000 before it was picked up for distribution by Paramount. After acquiring the film rights, Paramount put additional finances and resources into marketing the film. Despite (and excluding) the additional cost tacked on by major studio marketing and distribution, as of date Paranormal Activity is the most successful film based on return-on-investment, earning just shy of $108

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
million domestically. Later films in the franchise have seen higher production budgets, although they remain relatively low in the low million dollar range. The films themselves have also become more ambitious. For example, \textit{Paranormal Activity} 2 films many sequences on numerous fixed cameras that therefore emulate surveillance cameras, as opposed to \textit{Paranormal Activity}’s single digital camera on a tripod. All of the films in the franchise have achieved similar notable financial successes.

The \textit{Paranormal Activity} franchise has spawned numerous imitators. Recent low-budget “found-footage” surveillance films such as \textit{Devil’s Due}, \textit{388 Arletta Avenue}, and \textit{Alone with Her} (Eric Nicholas, 2006) follow \textit{Paranormal Activity}’s narrate either partially or exclusively through surveillance images. The turn to digital not only allows these films to alter cinematic narration and form, but more interestingly, the diegetic surveillance technologies which are figured as narrative or formal devices are presented as ubiquitous systems of control.

\textit{Paranormal Activity}, \textit{388 Arletta Avenue}, and \textit{Devil’s Due} inscribe the technology of surveillance into their narratives. This informs how they refuse neat compartmentalization in the “found-footage” subgenre. Found-footage is a genre in which the presented film consists of “discovered” film or video recordings. It has become very prevalent in the modern horror film as a way to exploit the camera’s ontological realism (through the diegetic use of hand-held, documentary, or news cameras). Traditionally, found-footage films like \textit{The Blair Witch Project} (Eduardo Sánchez and Daniel Myrick, 1999), \textit{REC} (Paco Plaza and Jaume Balagueró, 2007), and \textit{Cloverfield} (Matt Reeves, 2008) always show 	extit{people} in constant control of the means of recording: documentary filmmakers (\textit{Blair Witch}), news reporters (\textit{REC}), and an urban

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68 Found-footage’s origin is in experimental cinema, in what Akira Lippit calls “minor cinema” which is defined by its inversion of mainstream narrative fiction. For Lippit, experimental film inherently complicates “the machinery of phantasy,” therefore mixing the tradition of experimental cinema (which is concerned with the subjective) with documentary style (the objective and the “real”) and narrative fiction produces a work that insists on an aesthetic and politics of revision. Akira Mizuta Lippit, “The Only Other Apparatus of Film,” In \textit{Derrida, Deleuze, Psychoanalysis}, ed. Gabriele Schwab, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 171-191.
inhabitant whose “home-movie” captures a giant monster attacking New York City (Cloverfield).

With Paranormal Activity, 388 Arletta Avenue, and Devil’s Due we begin to observe partial personal detachment from the recording apparatus (Fig. 2.08 & Fig. 2.09). During surveillance sequences, spectators do not see anyone operating the camera. The surveillance process has in part mechanized, and human labor is now employed to sift through the video’s raw data. This marks a shift in how found-footage typically depicts “humans as recorders” to the machines themselves as standalone agents. The mechanized cameras are diegetically set up by humans to monitor domestic spaces. As a process, mechanization realizes the notion of “over-surveillance,” meaning, that much of the data which the camera is recording is deemed ultimately “useless,” “wasteful,” or “excessive.”69 These films figure “over-surveillance” by making spectators sit through long takes and extended episodes narrated through surveillance images, episodes in which nothing happens—thus, the very real problem of over-surveillance is problematized within the films.

Fig. 2.08. Mechanized surveillance images and disembodied looks. (Paranormal Activity. Directed by Oren Peli. 2007. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures).

69 Bozak, “Four Cameras are Better than One.”
Fig. 2.09. The mechanized surveillance image. (*388 Arletta Avenue*. Directed by Randall Cole. 2011. New York, NY: Tribeca Film).

Whereas the traditional found-footage films explicitly signify when a human body is recording, surveillance found-footage encounters the problem of *motivation*. Found-footage surveillance problematizes the very notion of narrating through surveillance technology, since cinema typically does not narrate through such cameras and images. Classical Hollywood cinematography aligns the spectator with the camera’s look, a position that is “in the scene, but not seen.” Found-footage typically takes an approach that is more similar to documentary practice, self-reflexively showing characters in control of the camera. Indeed, even found-footage surveillance must shift between two types of filmmaking: the usual trope of person-as-recorder (Fig. 2.10) (occasionally, stalker [Fig. 2.11]) and camera-as-recorder without a clear body behind it (see: the above images).

Fig. 2.10. Manned cameras: documentary capture. (*Paranormal Activity*. Directed by Oren Peli. 2007. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures).
How does cinema solve the problem of motivation in these films? Found-footage attempts to solve the random appearance of the surveillance image through the notion that someone is editing, rather than filming, the images. What the viewer sees is some version of an assembled “cut” that combines both the hand-recorded and mechanized footage. Part of the way in which these films figure control, then, is found in what gets edited together, who controls the surveillance camera, and who (or, what type of body) is put under watch.

For example *Paranormal Activity* and *Devil’s Due* enact slightly dissimilar structures with saliently different ramifications. *Paranormal Activity*’s characters consent to “self-surveillance,” although it is eventually revealed that the ubiquity of the evil force, in a way, inhabits the camera itself. Conversely, *Devil’s Due*’s main characters do not know that a satanic cult has placed hidden surveillance cameras all throughout their house—he cult monitors the female character, tracking her pregnancy with intentions to steal the child. *Devil’s Due* shifts between images in which protagonists consent to their own recording to surveillance images which are ultimately controlled by the disembodied conspirators.

In *388 Arletta Avenue*, James (Nick Stahl), the protagonist, is under total watch by a mysterious stalker who also kidnapped James’s wife. While *Paranormal Activity* and *Devil’s Due* intersperse surveillant episodes with documentary or home-movie narration (thus retaining a link with traditional forms of “found footage”), *388 Arletta Avenue* narrates entirely through surveillance images—it thus illustrates the prospect of total
surveillance. James is under watch by a predatorial stalker who habitually produces, compiles, and then archives his recordings. The spectator watches along with the stalker as he looks through his own hand-held camera (Fig. 2.12), a menagerie of cameras hidden all throughout James’s house, surveillance cameras in James’s workplace, and a number of computer screens operated by James. Virtually all technological forms are controlled, and as a result, emit a controlling gaze upon James. The film’s climax finally reveals James becoming aware that he is watched (Fig. 2.13), his panoptic awakening, but by then it is too late.

Fig. 2.12. Hidden camera images of Nick’s stalker physically recording him. (388 Arletta Avenue. Directed by Randall Cole. 2011. New York, NY: Tribeca Film: Fig. 2.12—Fig. 2.13).

Fig. 2.13. Nick’s realization that he has been monitored.

The way in which 388 Arletta Avenue structures its images creates the impression of a continuous, diegetically motivated stream of control. Every shot, independent of origin and human involvement, is controlled and controlling. Through this framework,
the spectator always voyeuristically looks at James, since they eventually come to learn that the film is shot entirely from a sinister, disembodied perspective. While *Timecode* has no way of motivating its image as a surveillance image, even if the quadrants signify CCTV aesthetics, *388 Arletta Avenue* becomes a true surveillance film. The real horror of *388 Arletta Avenue*, then, is not James’s seemingly random victimization, but that he is under total surveillance watch by ubiquitous cameras. James is a prisoner of controlled technological looks, and furthermore, the film constructs this type of “digital imprisonment” as a normalized reality.

*Paranormal Activity* and *Devil’s Due* distinguish between character’s handheld scenes and surveillance scenes. *Paranormal Activity*’s surveillance sequences are self-initiated while *Devil’s Due*’s are controlled by a different party. *388 Arletta Avenue* takes *Caché*’s digital-stalking premise but frames it as a totalizing techno-nightmare—all instances of surveillance are essentially “stalking episodes.” With these four films we see a narrative developing in the progression from *Paranormal Activity*, *Devil’s Due*, and *Cache*, to *388 Arletta Avenue*. Spectators bear witness to increased mechanisms of control through how these films figure power: who is in charge of the surveillance technology, who gets to look, and to what extent does the surveilled party knows they are under watch?

Control is relative in its varied forms and contexts. Nicholas Rombes writes that “we are now surveillors of ourselves.”[^70] In found-footage surveillance films, this is compounded when characters narcissistically film themselves and then repeatedly review the recorded material in order to see their likeness on computer or television screens. William Staples concurs, writing that “As a society, we have become obsessed with the gaze of the videocam, not only because we perceive that it brings us ‘security’ but also because we are fascinated by the visual representation of ourselves.”[^71] During self-initiated “non-surveillance” sequences, characters do not merely consent to their


recording, they demand to-be-looked-at. When scenes transition to surveillance images, character’s control of their likeness, their body, and their image is stolen away from them—invariably, characters become “to-be-surveilled.” Consequently, when surveillance is used in found-footage films it fundamentally comments on the subgenre’s depiction of “digital narcissism.” Characters that were previously (sometimes, emphatically) exhibitionistic are henceforth turned into digital prisoners. Surveillance images are contrasted with “home-video” scenes which emphasize human reaction and subjectivity. Comparatively, surveillance images illustrate a detached inhumanity. Their sterility details a total disregard for human affect. They lifelessly watch, control, and subvert.

2.2 Unmarked Images: Caché & Ubiquitous Control

…there is a turn here away from the classic horror formulation that “someone is being watched and there is danger there,” to someone is being watched, and we don’t quite know what it means, who is operating the technology, and what the association with that technology implies.  
— Catherine Zimmer

Michael Haneke’s Caché, a European mystery-thriller, centers on Georges Laurent (Daniel Auteuil), a reserved French television host who receives a series of provocative surveillance tapes. In these tapes are a series of long, static, continuous shots of Georges’s house—shots which the film reveals as lasting over two hours. Caché opens with such a lockdown shot (Fig. 2.14); unbeknownst to the spectator, this image is a controlled surveillance image. A game is set up between the film and the spectator, which provokes numerous questions. What is the significance of this chosen space? Where are we to look? Why is the film shot from such a distance, and how does this distance problematize how to read the image? Two minutes and thirty seconds go by before off-screen voices alert the spectator that this image is being watched by off-screen characters. Additionally, tracking lines that appear on the image signify that it is being fast-

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forwarded (Fig. 2.15). *Caché* then cuts to Georges, outside of his apartment (Fig. 2.16), presumably looking for the image’s source—its camera and its human recorder. Following this shot, the film cuts back to the initial image, and then finally to Georges and his wife Anne (Juliette Binoche) watching the tape on a television screen (Fig. 2.17).

![Fig. 2.14. Unmarked image & destabilization. (Caché. Directed by Michael Haneke. 2005. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment: Fig. 2.14—Fig. 2.18).](image1)

![Fig. 2.15. Reading the image as a recording.](image2)

![Fig. 2.16. Georges searching for the source of the recording.](image3)
Through the cinematography and editing structure of *Caché*’s opening sequence, the spectator comes to realize that the film is about watching, being watched, surveillance, and the problem of reading images. The spectator is eventually able to acknowledge that the opening shot illustrates a convergence of looks: theirs as spectators, the Laurent’s (both as spectators and surveilled victims), and the surveilling gaze of the disembodied surveiller. The image’s power, then, derives from how aggressively it stares. Asbjørn Grønstad observe the opening image’s significance as it literally plays out “time passing,” however, he overlooks that what the camera saliently captures is a fully controlled *space*.\(^{73}\)

Catherine Zimmer elaborates on the opening sequence in relation to Hollywood productions by detailing the ways in which *Caché* destabilizes surveillance’s narrative coherence:

> The film’s opening here sets the terms for the way the introduction of video surveillance immediately destabilizes coherent structures through the indistinctions raised by narrative and visual interpenetrations… not only do we not know who or why someone is being watched, but it is also unclear what the technology is that is producing the image, and whether that technology is intra—or even extra-diegetic.\(^{74}\)

The fact that *Caché*’s surveillance images are most definitely recorded images separates it from the figurative aspects of films emulating surveillance camera aesthetics (*Timecode*, *The Conversation*’s finale). Unlike the “marked” blue and grainy images


\(^{74}\) Zimmer, “Caught on Tape,” 96.
found in *THX 1138, Sliver, Paranormal Activity*, among other surveillance films, *Caché*’s surveillance image holds no distinction from “reality as it appears” diegetically. Thus, *Caché*’s surveillance image looks just like the regular images of *Timecode*. In other words, the film intentionally distances itself from the “recognizable” or “signifiable” surveillance image in order to create the sensation that the camera’s look—which harbors the gaze of the disembodied, off-screen force—is spatially totalizing.

Zimmer elaborates on *Caché*’s unmarked images by discussing its techno-historical moment in relation to film practice:

…this technological confusion is significantly produced by the use of high-resolution digital video. While earlier video images within film are often marked off as low-res, and thus stamped with the mark of a gritty reality, Haneke’s turn to digital video here also introduces indistinction between the subjectivized, diegeticized video surveillance gaze, and the narrative and visual verisimilitude of the cinematic image… It is not of neutral interest that this apparently “aesthetic”… choice is made not only when narrative films are increasingly composed of digital production and postproduction, but also when surveillance is increasingly composed of a relation between visual and informational technologies.  

*Caché* calls attention to its mode of production only insofar as surveillance images are presented in a realist manner, through what looks like a handheld digital camera, and whose images appear indistinguishable from how cinema has historically figured surveillance. Catherine Wheatley observes that the film frequently calls attention to itself since many shots are filmed in lock-down long-take. Since surveillance images are identical to the film’s entire form, the spectator must question whether certain sequences which occur in “real time” are in fact “naturally” narrated narrative events or surveillance images—images which are watched and recorded by an off-screen party. The complexity of these determinants requires an unpacking of the film’s plot in addition to its historical context.

75 Zimmer, “Caught on Tape,” 105-106.
77 This is compounded by the fact that *Caché* refuses to grant the “reverse shot” of the surveillance image, meaning spectators will never know whether a surveillance image is such until *someone* is literally watching the physical copy of the recording. All other instances of lock-down and long-take within the film are left ambiguously open-ended. An example of this is found in one scene where the camera “monitors” Anne, who is presumed to be engaging in an affair.
Caché’s enigma rests on Georges figuring out who is responsible for the tape and why they have chosen to stalk him. Eventually Caché reveals that Georges repressed traumatic events stem from his childhood, and that the mysterious tapes, in part, serve to initiate “the return of the repressed.” One of the videotapes brings Georges to Majid’s apartment, an Algerian man from his past. As a child, Majid’s parents worked for Georges’s parents. Majid’s parents, however, were killed in the 1961 Paris massacre during a demonstration protesting the Algerian War. A young Georges feared that Majid would be adopted into the bourgeois white family, so he tricked the young Algerian into committing a violent act, one that effectively had him banished to an orphanage. As the tape’s appearance reignites Georges’s childhood memories, tensions arise between himself and Majid, who he believes is responsible for the tape, culminating with Majid’s shocking suicide in front of Georges.

Caché ends not with a typical sense of closure, but with more questions than answers. Its final shot (Fig. 2.18), filmed in a similar manner to its opening scene, depicts Georges’s and Majid’s sons ambiguously meeting; a scene which has provoked discussion as to what extent the young men colluded throughout the narrative. What is significant about Haneke’s “poetics of negation”78 is consequently the way in which Caché articulates the disembodied, antagonistic surveillance look. The film’s “look” is constructed around the repressed, post-colonial subject: Majid as an “othered” body within French society. This complex formal inversion of a controlling gaze, redressing Georges as a “to-be-surveilled” victim, reflects France’s treatment of their own social and political history.

Grønstad writes in “Downcast Eyes: Michael Haneke & the Cinema of Intrusion,” that Caché is a “…narrative about cultural guilt and individual responsibility in the context of the aftermath of French post-colonialism.” The “return of the repressed” that the film figures calls attention to France’s crimes against the Algerians. The 1961 massacring of Parisian Algerians, an event seemingly “erased from cultural memory overnight,” resulted in an estimated two-hundred dead, although police initially presented the number as a mere two. Media coverage of the event (which occurred alongside Algeria’s war of independence against French colonialism [1954-1962]), in addition to cinema’s engagement with the conflict within that decade, was nearly nonexistent. Over thirty-five years later, in 1998, the French government finally acknowledged that the massacre occurred.

France’s historical crimes and long suppression of this history have been discussed as motivating factors for Haneke’s film. Haneke, as a provocateur, lets “…the brutalization of the spectator be the guiding principal of his art.” With Caché, Georges’s involvement with his harsh treatment of the young Majid, coupled with his subsequent psychological suppression, allegorizes his nation’s own violently traumatic past. It is the surveillance image, constructed as such in an idiosyncratic manner, that illustrates the film’s reactive subtext, “…the image in Caché has acquired a sense of

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80 Ibid, 136.
81 See Naomi Greene’s Landscapes of Loss for a history of this structure in French society and culture.
human volition, and that is perhaps the most unspeakable transgression of all." To paraphrase Wheatley, the film becomes about why Georges suspects Majid rather than whether Majid even did it in the first place. The parameters in which a political film like Caché constructs the look, by intentionally provoking (both Georges and) the spectator through the way the surveillance image confronts them with the “hidden” post-colonial gaze, is radical, not only formally, but in terms of content and context.

Grønstad, citing Mitchell, writes that the film functions by “showing-seeing”: “showing seeing entails that phenomenon capable of picturing these separate acts while remaining outside their totality.” What Grønstad understates is that picturing the events from outside the total and bound space of the image defines the disembodied act of surveillance in itself. As socio-political power is reversed, Caché reveals the possibility of counter-surveillance, or, “sub-veillance,” one which now monitors the hegemonic affluent. Importantly, Caché’s gaze does not merely provoke a historically locatable denial—one found locally in Georges and more globally in French society. It also instills fear in those who are equally as complicit—those who also fall in the dominant race and class.

The digital revolution consequently offers both a voice and a look to the “othered” subject, and because they have been historically marginalized, the film’s “sub-veillance” enacts a structure of power reversal. That Caché equally implicates the audience along with Georges reveals the film’s confrontational politics. As an art film, an noting Haneke’s tenure as a provocateur, Caché’s purpose is not guided by financial return or generic parameters. Instead, Caché implicates “…the viewers in the colonialist allegory that the film constructs… by saying goodbye to the aesthetic ideology of cinematic pleasure…”

The following sections will detail similar formal aspects in found-footage surveillance films—aspects that have been discussed as “distancing” and avant-garde. However, these avant-garde qualities are in service of how the horror and thriller genres

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83 Ibid, 135.
84 Wheatley, Cache BFI, 60.
85 Grønstad, “Downcast Eyes,” 137.
86 Ibid., 142.
generate shock and spectacle, which *Caché*, as an art film, refuses to do. *Caché* demands that it be read with the post-colonial gaze in mind, whereas the *Paranormal Activity* franchise (as Hollywood films) does not demand a singular subtextual reading—although scholarship exists which deals with its construction of look in relation to race, class, and gender.

2.3 Paranormal Taxonomies: The Avant-garde Surveillance Camera?

The new [post-cinematic] digital democracy, as outlined by Bozak, Shaviro, and Rombes, describes “…the immersion of our everyday lives in the slipstream of the digital, cinematic imaginary.”\(^87\) *Paranormal Activity* & *Paranormal Activity 2* document the shift from film to digital in addition to the way in which digital technologies have become normalized by society. Digital technology’s normalization informs the film’s premise (its story) and its narrational style (through surveillance cameras). The first *Paranormal Activity* centers on a couple, Katie (Katie Featherston) and Micah (Micah Sloat), who move in together and are then haunted by a supernatural presence in their suburban home. A camera, presumably bought to make home movies, is redirected as a surveillance camera in order to capture on video what is haunting them.

*Paranormal Activity*’s formal and narrational style also calls attention to its mode of production, albeit differently from prior surveillance films. A film like *Sliver* calls attention to its production when the surveillance image appears, since it is clearly shot on video while the rest of the movie is shot on film. Spectators, then, read these images as aesthetically, technologically, and historically different. *Paranormal Activity* establishes an entirely digital economy within the private space of the home. The first film in the franchise features only one camera, which is used both for documentary purposes (manned by characters, almost always Micah) and “self-surveillance” (in which the camera records free from human control).

*Paranormal Activity*’s surveillance images are aesthetically readable since, differently from *Caché*, it purposefully alerts viewers to which scenes require their attention. Whereas *Caché* is an art film, *Paranormal Activity* is a genre film targeted

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\(^87\) Grisham et. al, “Roundtable Discussion.”
towards a mass audience; therefore, in accordance with Hollywood code, distinctions must be rendered visible between surveillance and non-surveillance images. *Paranormal Activity*, though, is influenced by earlier surveillance films in how it figures the surveillance image. *Paranormal Activity*’s surveillance footage has a bluish hue and is almost entirely filmed with a fixed camera on lockdown, whereas “documentary” scenes are hand-held, mobile, and features bodies directly interacting with the camera. Moreover, in *Paranormal Activity 2*, the surveillance camera’s positioning in space gives it an “eagle’s eye” view, a vantage point which captures all points of interest (Fig. 2.19 & Fig. 2.20).

![Fig. 2.19. Panoptic camera positioning. (*Paranormal Activity 2*. Directed by Tod Williams. 2010. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures: Fig. 2.19—Fig. 2.20).](image)

Like *Timecode* and *Caché*, *Paranormal Activity* (and its sequels) has an experimental style which spectators must learn how to read. With nighttime scenes, primarily shot on surveillance cameras, *Paranormal* uncovers, and saliently “tames,”
certain avant-garde affinities through its diegetic motivation. While Katie and Micah (and in Paranormal Activity 2, Katie’s sister and her family) sleep, a camera records them as assisted by automated settings. Paranormal Activity 2 takes the same premise as its predecessor, but heightens the surveillant aspects by cutting between multiple security cameras that are installed in the family’s home following a burglary—although both films document how cameras are used to capture the haunting. While the Paranormal Activity films motivate surveilling episodes as attempts to capture evidence of paranormal intrusion, cinematically, the episodes test the limits of duration and readability.

For the Hollywood-watching spectator to whom the film was targeted, nods to early and slow cinema may go unnoticed. This has not stopped scholars from discussing the franchise’s unusual cinematography and editing structures. Surveillance episodes last for minutes at a time, which is unusual for contemporary Hollywood’s system of “Intensified Continuity,” as defined by David Bordwell. Steven Shaviro has compared Paranormal Activity 2 to the notorious 225 minute slow-cinema masterwork Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (Chantal Akerman, 1975), another film centered around observing mundane domestic life, albeit from a more explicitly feminist perspective. Both films use exceptionally long takes and require a certain attention from the spectator, however their differences suggest important oppositions. Jeanne Dielman clearly follows an anti-Hollywood aesthetic principle, a form that constructs its mundane shots as if to emphasize Jeanne’s daily routine. Director Chantal Akerman chose to film against conventional Hollywood style, although there is no diegetic motivation for creating, and thus watching, the long, monotonous episodes. Paranormal Activity 2 motivates its formal parameters around surveillance and digital technologies, and thus notably tames avant-garde practice through its diegetic motivation. As a result, it might be a mistake to strictly treat Paranormal Activity 2’s surveillance images as avant-garde images.

88 The avant-garde is defined not necessarily through a set of formal techniques, but as a determined history and a position within or against other modes of production. As I argue throughout this chapter, surveillance cinema that narrates extensively through surveillance images incorporates avant-garde aspects in its narrational style and form, however most of these films are in some way affiliated with Hollywood production, and thus a dominant filmmaking mode—Independent and foreign productions notwithstanding.
Rombe’s “Six Asides on *Paranormal Activity 2*” argues for the film’s avant-garde qualities by deconstructing six of its aspects: framing, “creative restraint,” repetition and disorder, the banality of terror in the everyday, sequencing, and its participation in the “fixed-camera manifesto” style. The “fixed-camera manifesto” states stipulations for films to abide by: the camera must be fixed to emphasize “stillness;” it must be stationary for 60% of the film’s running time; and it shall contain [at least] one 4-minute unbroken shot with no camera movement.

Rombe’s observations and demands are indeed reactive against Hollywood excess (intensified-continuity editing, shaky-cam cinematography), but what is understated (yet implicitly acknowledged) is the development of surveillance cinema tropes. Since digital cameras permit longer continuous recording (they record on memory cards and hard drives, not celluloid film) it can faithfully figure the processes of “mechanization” and “over-surveillance.” *Devil’s Due* and *388 Arletta Avenue* follow similar formal and narrational structures as the highly successful *Paranormal Activity* films, telling their stories through surveillance cameras—and this is not without financial motivation.

*Paranormal Activity*’s long-form, mechanized surveillance footage recalls early cinema, in which films and vignettes were typically filmed on one camera, in long takes, and shot from a noticeable distance. As technology evolved, cinematic grammar introduced varying shot scales that were later complimented by the ability to cut between spaces. As such, cinema moved away from the “primitive” filmmaking mode.

Ken Jacobs’s *Tom, Tom, the Piper’s Son*, an infamous experimental film, deconstructs a 1905 American short film. In the original short, a group of people chase a thief as he attempts to steal a pig. Since the film is shot with one static camera, in what Noel Burch has termed the “primitive mode of representation,” the modern spectator finds it difficult to pick out important visual and narrative information (Fig. 2.21). Leyda

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89 The *Paranormal* films are not the first to place horror in everyday, normalized settings. It is that the *Paranormal* films make the settings "hyper-banal" to the point where it seems to be using surveillance ironically.
notes similar issues in *Paranormal Activity*, “…the fixed security camera footage forces me to scan the frame continuously because I realize that the camera will not pick out actions or details that I should focus on.”\textsuperscript{91} Rombes, discussing *Paranormal Activity 2*’s sequencing, states, “The predictability of the sequencing means that we begin to look for difference.”\textsuperscript{92}

![Fig. 2.21. Preceding formal structures and narrative issues that were revived in modern surveillance cinema. (*Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*. Directed by Ken Jacobs. 1969).](image)

*Paranormal Activity 2* shares some similarities, but more noticeable differences, with *Tom, Tom*. The primitive method is updated and motivated to surveillance technology, therefore the long-take and distant camera is retained. Additionally, the spectator’s relationship to the image is somewhat similar. In both examples, spectators must scan the image for the “social violations”—be it a boy stealing a pig or a ghost’s unwarranted presence in a house. *Paranormal Activity 2* solves some of the problems of narrative “readability” that Ken Jacobs abstracts in his deconstruction of *Tom, Tom* by relocating what spectators are to watch in time and space. The events occur at night, and in a domestic setting, rather than the bustling urban spaces in *Tom, Tom*—thus, there are no visual obstacles distracting the spectator, and the callback is “tamed.”

What is maintained from the primitive mode, and what is illustrated as cinema’s figuration of surveillance technology, is the fixed camera. Therefore, in surveillance sequences there are no edits or close-ups. What results is a shared technique between the

\textsuperscript{91} Grisham et. al, “Roundtable Discussion.”
\textsuperscript{92} Rombes, “Six Asides on *Paranormal Activity 2*.”
primitive mode, experimental cinema, and the surveillance film—the first two of which are connected in Tom Gunning’s “The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde.” Gunning elaborates on the association between the primitive mode and the avant-garde by pointing to early film form and how this cinematic mode based itself around its “confrontationally exhibitionistic” quality: its ability to “show something” rather than complying with the rules of traditional diegetic absorption. With the advent of narrative film, this mode did not go away—it simply went “underground.”

Paranormal Activity 2 abides by the aforementioned techniques in a purposely motivated way. Various shot scales which may bring spectators into a closer affective relationship with characters are avoided in lieu of surveillance’s constricting fixed cameras. As the next section details, the camera’s (and image’s) coldness supports the spectator’s refusal to identify with the film’s characters—characters that are figured as unsympathetic products of the economic crisis.

2.4 Possessed/(Repo)sessed Spaces: Paranormal Activity & the Economic Crisis

In the “Paranormal Activity Roundtable” Shaviro, Leyda, and Rombes discuss a range of topics pertaining to the franchise, post-cinema, surveillance, and digital technology. Shaviro and Rombes discuss both theory and film form, while Leyda politicizes Paranormal Activity’s aesthetic. Leyda concludes that the franchise must be read with space, race, and class in mind: especially since the spaces are explicitly marked as domestic fortresses while the bodies belong to middle-class whites.

Later films in the franchise reveal that it is Katie and Kristi’s (Sprague Grayden) grandmother who partook in a contract with a demon in exchange for material wealth. This generational “inheritance” allowed the sisters to purchase expensive (yet unadorned) houses in addition to the various technologies in which the films narrate on. In return for this wealth, the demon demanded the next-born male: Kristi’s baby son, Hunter. The first Paranormal Activity focuses on Katie and Micah; Katie becomes possessed by the demon

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and eventually kills Micah. *Paranormal Activity 2*, a parallel prequel, centers on Kristi’s family as they experience the same demonic haunting. By the end of the film, the possessed Katie enacts vengeance upon Kristi’s family by killing Kristi and her husband and then leaving with baby Hunter.

The demon’s presence in the house signifies an invasive force. It demands re-payment for the family’s contract, and when they “default” on it, the hauntings begin. While the surveillance cameras are unflinchingly static, the demon is mobile and invisible. It moves objects in the house, violently forces bodies into other rooms, and seems determined to take over the space as a whole. Like Leyda, I read the demon as a figuration for the 2007 economic crisis. “The mobility and invisibility of the demon, its ability to move around the home and also to inhabit Katie’s body, echoes the insidious mobility of finance capital, which ultimately caused so many couples like those in the movie to be foreclosed…”

The demon’s predatory “mortgage” that Leyda describes is extended to the notion of social reproduction, since Hunter is the human capital that is sought after. I emphasize that the themes of “invasion” and “debt” in relation to the haunted space and controlled bodies suggests *Paranormal Activity 2*’s social, political, and economic subtext.

Whereas *Caché* illustrates surveillance’s inversion, the “other” monitoring the bourgeoisie from an outside position (as if to underscore the “other’s” ubiquitous gaze in external space), *Paranormal Activity* suggests that surveillance makes characters prisoners in their very own home. In addition to reconfiguring which types of spaces are monitored and from what position, *Paranormal Activity* stresses the space itself as salient to deconstructing the film.

As supernatural horror films, *Paranormal Activity* and *Paranormal Activity 2* follow traditions which stem from the Gothic novel, and subsequently, certain horror films from the 1970s and 1980s: “Descended from the Gothic novel, paranormal horror trains attention on the private home as a domestic site: in which families live, in which power hierarchies co-exist with complex emotional ties, and in which paranormal beings

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95 Grisham et. al, “Roundtable Discussion.”
terrorize humans, showing that daily life is both normal and paranormal.” Haunted house films such as *The Amityville Horror* (Rosenberg, 1979), *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980) and *Poltergeist* (Hooper, 1982) depict the space itself as the source of the haunting. Houses or hotels are built over ancient burial grounds, and the repressed return in the form of vengeful, “colonized ghosts.” *Paranormal Activity*’s domestic space is no longer this signifiable space; it is filled with expensive items, yet its mise-en-scène is inexplicably barren in comparison to the space’s expansiveness. Visual horror signifiers found in the aforementioned supernatural films are removed in order to accentuate *Paranormal Activity*’s house as a stand-in for any generic house which had defaulted during the housing bubble.

In the *Paranormal Activity* franchise, not only is the space updated from the Gothic and “post-Gothic” mansion to the mundane suburban house of the economic crisis, but the source of the haunting itself is figured in the form of “credit,” a figurative debt. Possession and repossession thus appear as recurring motifs in the franchise. The *Paranormal Activity* films then become about how debts can be passed down to family members who have little to do with the person who created the original debt, even after their deaths. Creditors continue to harass relatives of the debtor (alive or dead), even if those relatives did not co-sign on the loan, credit card, bill, etc. Leyda historicizes *Paranormal Activity & Paranormal Activity 2*’s release years by discussing them as “post-ownership society” films. When *Paranormal Activity* saw wide release in 2009 there were 2.8 million foreclosure filings and a ten percent unemployment rate. While *Paranormal Activity & Paranormal Activity 2* were not made with the economic crisis in mind, it is uncanny how this reading unpacks the film’s subtext.

Katie and Kristi’s debt, their “credit” to the demon, looms over the families in the form of possession and repossession. Since the demon wants Hunter, it privileges social reproduction as it provides the means of “human capital.” When it cannot obtain the child, the demon marks its presence in physical space (the house), biological space (Katie

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98 Ibid.
and Kristi’s bodies), and then digital space (the camera). As it inhabits the camera, the
demon enacts a controlling gaze upon the families.

Leyda’s “Demon Debt: Paranormal Activity as Recessionary Post-Cinematic
Allegory” lays the foundation for considering the Paranormal Activity films as economic
crisis texts, however she understates certain points. In general, Leyda minimizes
surveillance’s role in the franchise—a figuration that is both important and revealing.
Leyda understates the surveillance gaze by discussing the camera’s inhuman point of
view:

…unlike conventional horror cinema’s use of point of view to increase
suspense, such as filming a sequence from the killer’s perspective
observing the unsuspecting victim, this camera does not represent any
human point of view. Positioning the camera in a non-human POV, the
movie produces an uncanny sense of helplessness; we occupy neither the
demon’s perspective nor the sleeping characters’, but that of a machine,
the diegetic digital camera.99

Leyda is correct in her observation that the camera’s POV may not be human, but this is
not to say that no one is looking. Surveillance technologies enable technological
mediation, that is to say, a disembodied look that can be removed from the watched
space.

I interpret the surveillance camera’s look as a figuration for the economic crisis’s
debt collector’s gaze. Leyda, by removing the surveillance camera as a salient mediating
point for the “off-screen look,” undermines the way in which Paranormal Activity &
Paranormal Activity 2 structure power. In other words, the films figure surveillance
cameras in order to craft a specific look, one that asserts control over specific characters.
Through this reading, I argue that franchise suggests a conservative ideology, thus its
content informs and motivates its peculiar form. The first two Paranormal Activity films
center on monitoring white middle-class characters that have lost control. Fundamentally,
Katie, Micah, and Kristi’s family revoke their right to privacy as soon as they “default”
on repaying the “lost capital.”

99 Ibid.
The surveillance camera’s conservative surveillance gaze acts in two ways: Narratively, it clearly monitors those who have defaulted. Formally, the camera’s fixed position in space dissuades aligning with *Paranormal Activity* and *Paranormal Activity 2*’s “financial victims.” The franchise’s form is often read as supporting its horror qualities, for example Shaviro writes, “…the use of surveillance-camera-based long shots and long takes, and the consequent withholding of expected close-ups and reaction shots, intensifies the dread and anticipation, which are the conventional affects of horror.”

Exclusively associating *Paranormal Activity*’s form with how it motivates generic conventions negates its complex underpinnings. The cameras enunciate distance and detachment for a reason; close-ups which would otherwise generate sympathy are avoided in order to frame characters as unsympathetic.

Additionally, the camera’s “high angle” location in *Paranormal Activity 2* alludes to the spatial hierarchies that exist within panoptic power, while, conversely, *Caché*’s ground-level photography positions the narrative as an example of Jessica Lake’s description of “sub-veillance,” which I will elaborate on in Chapter 4. With sub-veillance, monitoring comes both literally and figuratively “from below.” *Caché*’s “other” monitors Georges, not from overhead, but from the street. Through this method, *Caché* figures surveillance in relation to how the “other” is racially, socially, and politically “lower” than the French-born, white, and bourgeoisie Georges. That the “other” monitors suggests a radical power inversion since it operates away from hegemonic panopticism. Ultimately, *Paranormal Activity* and *Paranormal Activity 2* ideologically invert *Caché*’s radicality by removing the latter’s sub-veillant qualities, and therefore its socio-historic implications and ramifications.

With these salient film examples we see how surveillance cameras and images are specifically used in film narratives. Narrating in this manner changes the nature of the camera’s relationship to characters, thus, the spectator’s relationship to both characters and the image itself is also altered. This is accomplished, in part, through the way in which cinema constructs surveillance “form”: by placing certain characters under watch and certain bodies as “off-screen,” disembodied lookers.

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100 Grisham et. al, “Roundtable Discussion.”
Abiding by this model, surveillance cinema narratively and formally depicts what is at the heart of modern surveillance: control. *Paranormal Activity 2* figures the surveillance “look” as an allegory for *enforcing* characters which have financially “defaulted.” On the other hand, the figuration of surveillance in *Caché* is meant to *interrogate* its protagonist, since the look comes from an “othered” position. With both of these films, in addition to ones mentioned earlier in this chapter, we see that cinema is concerned with how it structures surveillance images in the 21st century. Narratives become experimental, form is modified, and affects and ideologies are generated that are in service of how control is constructed. The following chapter will transition from Chapter 2’s “surveillance societies” to a broader discussion of “surveillance cultures”—cultures that retain affective and controlling formations around the surveillance image.
CHAPTER 3: REPRESENTING THE SYNOPTICON & SPECTATORIAL AFFECT IN SURVEILLANCE CULTURE

New modes of surveillance closely aligned with the ubiquity of cameras and, later, the internet, has dramatically altered the relationship between power, bodies and control in the 21st century. As Evangelos Tziallas observes, “Surveillance metonymically encompasses looking and the complex and ambivalent nature of looking and being looked at, and these elements of human social life are currently undergoing radical transformation due to technological advancements spurring on a “culture of surveillance” or “surveillance culture.”101 Diverting from the model of the panopticon as discussed in previous chapters, surveillance must also account for what Thomas Mathiesen calls synopticism. In this model, instead of the few watching the many, the many surveil the few, as facilitated by the advent of televisual and internet communication technologies in addition to cultural productions that foster a “surveillance audience.”

People with television or internet access can use that technology to monitor bodies, and are thus permitted to position themselves as “little brothers” or “little sisters”—as individual surveillance operators. Spectators of television programs and various internet sites thus occupy the disembodied, absent looker—which for video surveillance has historically (and panoptically) been held by CCTV operators.

However, the internet has also facilitated broadcasting—whether a person’s image, a recording of themselves, or merely a status update on a social media website. In a Deleuzian sense, part of his “Societies of Control” essay details the internalization of the demand to make everything public, and thus potentially surveillable.102 This analysis of surveillance cultures accounts for the way audiences are positioned as surveillors in addition to positioning themselves as exhibitionists—as bodies that demand to be seen.

The notion of surveillance cultures opens up many questions which I will address in this chapter. What does it mean for surveillance images to circulate on a global scale?


How has contemporary society and culture facilitated the growth of surveillance spectators, and what are the ramifications? How does a medium like film shape our experience of surveillance and how are these experiences then represented (or figured) cinematically?

In this chapter I transition from writing on how the surveillance image reorganizes the aesthetics of the look in relation to an absent looker, found explicitly in Chapter 2’s films, to how the image itself is reconfigured through affective and interactive formations within surveillance cultures.

I argue that cinema has responded to changes in the culture of surveillance by creating new image forms, and with it, varied spectatorial experiences. I support this argument through a discussion of two films and their immediate contexts: *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998), placed within the proliferation of reality television, and *Untraceable* (Gregory Hoblit, 2008), as a response to online modes of surveillance and the advent of “users.” *The Truman Show* additionally figures a shift in surveillance from monitoring to identification, while *Untraceable* marks a shift from identification to voyeurism and sadism, as the diegetically viewed surveillance imagery is highly transgressive. Despite the different strategies of these two films, the resolutions bear similarities; surveilled characters remove themselves from the synopticon, and consequently, the surveilled space that is broadcast.

I will conclude this chapter with a study of web, TV, and film projects such as *The Inside Experience* (D.J. Caruso, 2011) and *Tosh.0* among others which continue to observe the spectator’s increasingly interactive role in surveillance culture.

### 3.1 Panopticism, Synopticism, & Understanding the Viewer Society

In his seminal 1975 book *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault describes an execution that took place in mid-18th century Paris. Large crowds attended the spectacle, in which the criminal was tortured and eventually torn apart by horses that were tied to his limbs.¹⁰³ Foucault argues that the public shaming spectacle described in

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this model defined the pre-disciplinary society’s notion of punishment. By the early 19th century, however, modern penal structures changed dramatically. Now under the threat of constant surveillance, the prisoner functioned through an interiorized “self-control”—discipline of the soul via control of the body—replaced extreme corporeal punishment. Removing the elements of spectacle and shame, punishment became a more hidden or indescribable practice, though also a more continuous one. Instead of the many watching the few in open spaces (public spectacle), the few (private prison guards) now surveilled the many (prisoners) in enclosed spaces.

In 1997, Thomas Mathiesen’s publication challenged Foucault’s theories on modern control and punishment by introducing the concept of synopticism. For Mathiesen, the disciplinary society’s historical emergence in the 1800s occurred at the same time as the advent of the mass media, in addition other important techno-historical innovations which in turn altered social conditions. Mathiesen writes:

As a striking parallel to the panoptical process, and concurring in detail with its historical development, we have seen the development of a unique and enormously extensive system enabling the many to see and contemplate the few, so that the tendency for the few to see and supervise the many is contextualized by a highly significant counterpart.  

The invention of the mass press and the development of steamship, train, and telegraph technology permitted that information be communicated at an increasingly faster pace. Mathiesen describes how this saliently emerged at the same time the “new modern prison” was being implemented. Later, film, radio, and television would work to contradict “…Foucault’s thesis that in modern times we have moved away from the situation where the many see the few, away from synopticism”—albeit in a manner that has its own complex history. In short, technology responds to the demands of communication and specific modes of surveillance. However, technology also facilitates and participates in shaping experiences, as I will outline below.

Mathiesen elaborates on how modern mass media provides millions with pertinent social, political, and cultural information, and that this process works against how

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105 Ibid, 220
panopticism disseminates power through its restrictive structures—through who surveills and who is surveilled. Foucault largely understated the significance behind the mass media’s ability to articulate power or control. This is likely because the media is harder to deconstruct as a space than the tangible enclosed sites which had constituted Foucault’s focus. Today, society is synoptically molded through cultural productions and formations. Spectators and users have greater access to a vast range of information than ever before. By looking through the lens of the theory of the synopticon, we see the stakes at risk in films like *The Truman Show* and *Untraceable*, which apply synopticism exclusively around “sites of surveillance” rather than attributing it more generally to “all media.” These two films respond to different ways by which the media has technologically adapted to the demands of “cultures of surveillance,” by specifically addressing how formations around the surveillance image redefine what it means to be a spectator.

In addition to recasting which (and how many) bodies get to look at which, the role of disembodiments in surveillance is also noticeably changing. Whereas the spectator that Foucault outlines plays a passive yet embodied role in viewing the 18th century public executions, spectators are now disembodied, and to briefly draw on *Untraceable* as a later example, quite active and interactive as users. *Untraceable* imagines a world where an unlimited number of spectators have access a website that broadcasts live murders. Although the film’s antagonist is responsible for kidnapping and then broadcasting, death is partially mediated by the spectator. Not only do they have access to the site, they are put in a position that grants them a certain dimension of control, since their hits determine *how fast* the surveillance subject dies. While ultimately this might not change who is in total control, this interactive and mediated experience epitomizes the spectator’s new role in the digital age.

*Untraceable* documents how through the internet, synopticism has become an increasingly active, though disembodied and largely anonymous experience. While the villain who kidnaps and then sets up death traps physically occupies the same space as his victims, he is partially portrayed as passive if not disinterested in his own crimes. Here we may wonder whether murder and death are his ultimate goals or whether his
objective is simply to generate website hits and user interaction in our digital age—albeit, in a highly transgressive fashion.

I emphasize the structural differences between televisual and internet-based modes of surveillance in the 21st century. By deconstructing these particular surveillance narratives we see how they highlight the audience’s relationship to the production’s surveillance subjects. Before I delve deeper into Untraceable, however, I will first turn to The Truman Show and its and figuration of synoptic television culture.

3.2 “Utopic Synopticism” and Television Surveillance in The Truman Show

It’s all true. It’s all real. Nothing here is fake. Nothing you see on the show is fake. It’s… merely controlled.

— Marlon, The Truman Show

One year after Mathiesen’s “Viewer Society” article was published, Peter Weir’s The Truman Show (1998) was released. As the title suggests, the film follows Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey), a naïve man whose life, unbeknownst to him, is continuously captured by hidden surveillance cameras and televishly broadcast across the globe. Truman was adopted by a corporation at birth, therefore the show promises to chronicle his entire life. He lives in a heavily monitored enclosed space, virtually a large scale studio set that simulates “reality” as he knows it. “The Truman Show” is broadcast uncut, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as an announcer discussing the show observes:

1.7 billion were there for his birth. 220 countries tuned in for his first step. The world stood still for that stolen kiss. And as he grew, so did the technology. An entire human life recorded on an intricate network of hidden cameras and broadcasted live and unedited 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to an audience around the globe. Coming to you now from Seahaven Island, enclosed in the largest studio ever constructed and along with the Great Wall of China one of the only two man-made structures visible from space, now in its thirtieth great year... it's The Truman Show!

The show was the brainchild of Christof (Ed Harris, Fig. 3.01), a media mogul who prides himself on the show’s success in addition to his airtight control over all aspect

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106 For the sake of clarity and consistency I refer to Weir’s film as The Truman Show and the television show that takes place within the film’s diegesis as “The Truman Show.”
of Truman’s life. Christof invisibly watches over Truman in a hidden CCTV control center (Fig. 3.02) and manipulates everything from the people in Truman’s life to the constructed environment’s weather conditions. Truman’s co-workers, best friend, and even his wife are all actors in service of promoting the fiction that is the show’s “reality.” Moreover, everyone within the show’s artificial space plays an intricate part in monitoring Truman. He is always watched by hidden cameras, his body is almost always locatable in space, and his behavior is heavily monitored for consistency. The Truman Show’s enigma, then, rests on Truman becoming aware that he is being watched and, more frighteningly, broadcast for billions to see (Fig. 3.03). The film takes place over the final few weeks of Truman’s “show.”

Fig. 3.01. Christof the operation’s chief technician. (*The Truman Show.* Directed by Peter Weir. 1998. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros: Fig. 3.01—Fig. 3.06).

Fig. 3.02. Christof is hidden in the control center where he is able to manipulate all facets of the space he created.
Fig. 3.03. Truman’s “forced exhibitionism”: he is watched from the perspective of an anonymous audience member.

One of the more unnerving aspects of “The Truman Show” comes not from the fact that its protagonist is a controlled subject in an artificial space, but that this extensive monitoring exists so audiences can peer into his life via live television (Fig. 3.04 to 3.06)—although the film eventually discerns that spectator’s affects are equally as controlled as Truman’s body. *The Truman Show* exemplifies another generic transformation and hybridization of the surveillance narrative. While the film borrows elements from the dystopic and conspiracy thriller, the film’s (and the show’s) melodramatic aspects purposefully connect with spectators and thus shape their identifications. Audiences of all demographics tune in to watch Truman’s life unfold. They are intrigued by how Truman only minimally questions his enclosed surroundings, the mundane scope of domesticity, and why a melancholic sense of longing pushes him to want more out of his life.

Fig. 3.04. Truman’s audience: male security officers.
Fig. 3.05. Truman’s audience: female waitresses.

Fig. 3.06. Truman’s audience is diverse in terms of race, class, and gender, but more importantly they are presented as empathetic as and less voyeuristic than Christof, despite them both having 24/7 visual access to Truman’s life.

By the end of the film, spectators cheer for Truman when he finally escapes Christof’s “pseudo-utopian” construct, as they know that Truman can presumably now live a real, normal life. In this regard, the show perpetuates a very specific type of synoptic control. As the man in charge, Christof feeds off of audience affects, for his show partially exists to mold as well as create and train the control cultures to become accustomed to viewing surveillance images as narratives in their own right.

*The Truman Show* imagines that a new experience of surveillance is figured by new televisual modes, specifically, reality TV. The movie brings the reality television paradigm to the forefront through how it presents Truman as a surveillance subject—a victim of total visibility, whose life is broadcast globally for television audiences. Additionally, *The Truman Show* figures its diegetic spectators as complicit components of the show, since they watch the “normalized surveillance spectacle” that is Truman’s broadcast life. Historically, surveillance is inherently concerned with monitoring bodies
and spaces, yet spectators of “The Truman Show” most notably identify with Truman—partly because he was spatially, physically, and visually controlled since birth, although there are more pressing reasons that I will outline below.

Numerous scholars have written on *The Truman Show* at the intersection of film and surveillance studies—in fact, it has the most prominent discourse on synopticism and the control culture. Dusty Lavoie’s “Escaping the Panopticon: Utopia, Hegemony, and Performance in Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*” focuses on Truman’s commodification, the show’s alignment with theories of spectacle, and finally the spectator’s complicity in image consumption.¹⁰⁷ Felicity Brown’s “Hollywood Panopticon: Representations of Consumer Surveillance in the Truman Show” additionally elaborates on the film from a political, economic, and postmodern standpoint, primarily focusing on the film’s representation of “consumer surveillance.”¹⁰⁸

The most useful article on *The Truman Show* for this study comes from J. McGregor Wise’s “Mapping the Culture of Control: Seeing through the Truman Show.” While the publication does not historically situate *The Truman Show* within the proliferation of reality television and other surveillance cultural products, it offers the most relevant theoretical analysis. Wise explores the cultural implications of the shift from Foucault’s disciplinary societies to Deleuze’s societies of control. For Wise, the disciplinary docile subject has become the consuming subject, and production and marketing have become key elements in the apparatus of control. At the beginning of the film, Truman is the “docile, disciplined subject,” although he is certainly a “controlled body.” As Truman starts to become suspicious that his life is both simulated and surveilled, the cracks in Christof’s control appear abundantly. Bizarre occurrences such as set lights falling from the sky or fake elevators that house camera crews and actors only exacerbate Truman’s conspiracy-based anxiety.

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When viewing *The Truman Show*, theatrical and diegetic spectators essentially “watch themselves watching.” Wise supports this claim by analyzing the film’s formal structure.

The first half of the film involves us with the events of Truman’s life as television viewers. We then pull back to view (from the POV) of the television set the fictional audience watching Truman. We begin to question our own viewing practice, the fun that we, the audience sitting in the theater, have been having at Truman’s expense. This double view (of program and audience) emphasizes our complicity with the society of control, not as victims but as part of its apparatus.

Wise’s reading is partially correct, however, he downplays the affective bond between the show’s spectators and Truman. The spectator’s “need” to watch Truman rests on Truman’s sympathetic nature. Comparatively, the way in which *The Truman Show* generates affective formations from its audience is clearly different than reality television shows that sprang up during the film’s release period. These shows, which I outline in the following section, were highly salacious and largely disarticulated themselves from traditional notions of identification. Regarding Wise’s reading, deducing that diegetic audiences (and subsequently, theatrical spectators) are “part of the problem” only works to reveal the film’s limited critique of surveillance cultures on a general level.

Historically speaking, television spectators are not intertwined within an interactive network. Their experience is rather passive, even if, for example, “The Truman Show” lets them view content that surveillance CCTV operators usually have access to (Fig. 3.07). Despite their passive observation, the fact remains that the show grants spectators 24/7 access to watching Truman, and this is highly voyeuristic. An important distinction must be made between Truman as a voyeuristic object of the look (Christof watches him, audiences watch him) and as a surveilled subject. As I will outline.

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110 Ibid, 43.
111 “The Truman Show” is utopically modeled after relationship-centric or nuclear family sitcoms of the 1950s such as *Leave it to Beaver, I Love Lucy,* and *The Honeymooners.* The fictional show’s dialogue, production design, colors, and even on-air advertising campaigns all recall television practices of the 1950s. Collectively this works to create a sense of nostalgia for the time period in addition to locating Truman’s identifiable “everyman qualities” as a product of “a better time” in American history, society, and culture.
below through my discussion of reality TV, surveilled subjects are at least potentially criminal, criminalized by the surveilling process itself. Truman is neither of these, so obsessively watching him is an unusual act—one which disarticulates the notion of surveillance as a security-based apparatus.

Fig. 3.07. Truman as a locatable body in the “marked” surveillance image.

3.3 Demanding Surveillance or Surveillance on Demand: Reality TV

In order to contextualize my reading of The Truman Show it is important to historicize it within the proliferation of reality television in the 1990s and 2000s. Nic Groombridge writes:

Mathiesen (1997) uses the phrase Synopticonism to describe the capacity of the mass media to enable the many to watch the few in contrast to the Orwellian reading of Foucault that posits CCTV… [as] the few watching the many. It is ‘reality shows’ that approach Mathiesen’s concept…

Sebastian Lefait, who devotes an entire chapter to cinematic and televisual synoptic projects, notes the irony behind the TV show Big Brother since it “…takes its name from the equally well-known Orwellian phrase, to indicate that the viewer’s sofa has become the new seat of watching power. With such programs, what is implied is that Big Brother is no longer “watching you,” but that, while watching Big Brother, you become Big Brother.”

As a television genre, reality TV offers the illusion of attempting to document reality: real spaces, real social interactions, and no scripts. Sometimes these shows use hidden cameras, thereby avoiding the notion of “disciplinary performativity” which may occur when participants know they are being filmed. Reality TV flourished in the 1990s and 2000s, but its roots are visible in versatile works from prior decades. *An American Family* (1973), *COPS* (1989-present), *America’s Funniest Home Videos* (1989-present), and *The Real World* (1992-present) pre-dated the boom and set the stage for future shows through the commodification of “reality,” “real life,” and thus “real subjects.” *The Real World* proved especially important in its moment as it began the trend of blending reality with fiction, with producers of the show manipulating who was on it, how they behaved, and through careful control over their crafting their living space. Additionally, later seasons set up a competition format which numerous contemporary reality TV shows now abide by.

Contemporary reality TV shows such as *Big Brother* (1999-present, [Fig. 3.08]), *Cheaters* (2000-present), and *To Catch a Predator* (2004-2007, [Fig. 3.09]) suggest important differences from other reality shows as they use hidden (or sometimes, concealed) surveillance cameras as part of their narrational and formal strategies. A distinction must be made between these surveillance reality TV shows and reality TV shows that circulated at the same time—shows that are filmed either in documentary, “testimonial,” or “confessional” style. Spectators of the surveillance shows are invited to watch the “real hidden lives” of its surveillance subjects; they thus occupy a fierce monitoring position—the position of moral judgment, which I will elaborate on below.
On Cheaters, camera crews track down people suspected of cheating on their spouses. Cheated subjects get retribution on their cheaters by catching them in the act, usually captured by said camera crews and other hidden technological devices. The cheated parties then confront and humiliate the adulterers. As Christian Parenti’s “Voyeurism and Security Culture” notes, Cheaters mixes “…police style tactics, ride-along footage, and high-tech surveillance with Springeresque pseudo-moralism and raw confrontation.”114 While the show is equally as voyeuristic as “The Truman Show,” it is

notably predicated on *monitoring*—on capturing philandering behavior through direct and mediated surveillance tactics.

*Dateline NBC’s To Catch a Predator* is unequivocally more transgressive than *Cheaters* since it portrays the potentiality of pedophilia. Chris Hansen, the show’s infamous host, lures male sexual predators onto a set that is disguised as a normal house. The offenders come into contact with underage people through internet chat rooms. During the show’s run, chat rooms were a pressing concern given their relative newness, ease of access, and the way in which they offered the ability to formulate (if not entirely manipulate) your digital self. Secretly, the underage contacts are adults working for the program; they participate in the sting operation set up against the pedophilic predator. The parties arrange a time and place to meet and are initially watched through hidden surveillance cameras before being bombarded by Hansen and his camera crew. The show thus works to monitor social and digital spaces from criminal behavior, especially considering how these spaces collide.

*Cheaters* and *To Catch a Predator* create both narratives and surveillance cultures that are definitively different than *The Truman Show*. Truman is not a subject that needs to be controlled, per se. He is a white middle-class heterosexual male, the “true-man” or “every-man” that in part comprises the target market demographic. *The Truman Show* portrays both its sympathetic audience and its near-perfect surveillance subject utopically. The film, then, is highly invested in older cinematic modes of identification because Truman is deemed a “normative” white male subject. Audiences place themselves in his position since they understand he is not to be faulted for being placed under surveillance. The only question that remains is realized through this untouched oversight: although audiences cheer *when* Truman escapes the synopticon, they never question *why* he was there in the first place.

The television shows that I list above, along with many others like them, replace the structure of identification with surveillance, and in the process posit monitored bodies as deviants. Audiences do not explicitly identify with the surveilled parties since they violate normative social behaviors and practices. As vital examples, *Cheaters* and *To Catch a Predator* are highly sensational since they focus on scandalous content. As such,
spectators come to read surveillance images as undoubtedly controlled and even performative. In *To Catch Predator*, surveillance images are configured to generate specific affects: social, sexual, and moral judgment. Regarding performance, at least one of the surveilled parties willingly knows and participates in the surveillance process since it is contingent on the set-up.

When surveillance and reality TV intersect, the outcome is often defined by social control, criminalization, and by broadcasting salacious activities such as watching sexual encounters on *Big Brother*, physical altercations on *The Real World* or satiric yet controversial content on Comedy Central’s *Tosh.0* (2009-present). Questions arise pertaining to the spectator’s role in these cultural productions. What does it mean for surveillance shows to create spectacles and surveillance spectators? How do these shows generate affects from spectators and to what degree is the spectator culpable for their drive to see more? On an equally important note, what can we learn from the specific types of bodies that are usually targeted on these shows? By analyzing *The Truman Show* in relation to surveillance-reality TV we see that televisually-broadcast surveillance is controlled yet controlling.

The transition from television spectators to internet-based users marks another shift in viewer’s relationship to the surveillance image. As I alluded to with *To Catch a Predator*, the internet’s ubiquity offers an opportunity to transgress and access transgressive content at a rate that has far exceeded the controlled structure of TV. The ability to revisit violent or disruptive content has its own history that predates that of the internet, for example, with the *Faces of Death* videotapes and their underground circulation. In general, it is with the penetration of the internet into people’s homes that the notions of “on-demand” and interactivity gain new meaning. *The Truman Show* barely alludes to the transgressive side of the viewer society since the show’s protagonist, content, and spectators are represented without discord. As social formations respond to the internet’s capabilities, so does cinema’s representation of surveillance cultures, as I will argue for in the final section.
3.4 *Untraceable* Users & Post-9/11 Interactivity in the Internet Age

Any American that visits the site is an accomplice to murder, we are the murder weapon.

– *Untraceable*

In 2008, *Untraceable* (Gregory Hoblit) saw wide release. In the film, Jennifer Marsh (Diane Lane), an FBI cybercrime agent, investigates a serial killer who operates a website called KillWithMe.com (Fig. 3.10). The site streams live video of rigged contraptions that are set up to torture his victims. When more users log on to the website, the generated “hits” result in quicker and more intense torture, followed subsequently by death. While little critical attention has been given to *Untraceable*, the film operates on numerous levels: as a post-9/11 film, a film about synoptic surveillance in the digital age, and as a film that situates itself within other 21st century cinematic images of violence known colloquially as “torture porn.”

Fig. 3.10. An invitation to kill: murder and mediation through *Untraceable*’s transgressive website. (*Untraceable*. Directed by Gregory Hoblit. 2008. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment: Fig. 3.10—Fig. 3.16).

In the film’s post-9/11 digital world, the enemy is hidden within an indecipherable network. Agent Marsh is driven by a need to secure her country from the website’s grisly murders, which are highly spectacularized due to the complex death contraptions. Whereas *The Truman Show*’s spectators are limited by the passivity of their look, *Untraceable*’s users participate in the killer’s plot. Thus, *Untraceable* comments on the shift from the familiarity of representing television audiences to the confusion of figuring internet-based users.
Post-9/11 American works are defined by their confrontation with anxieties, vulnerabilities, and confusions that derive either directly from the attack, subsequent ambivalences (or dedications) to the “War on Terror,” or similarly relevant and historically locatable sentiments. J. Hoberman’s *Film After Film* begins with the observation that the 9/11 attacks were, “…watched by millions “live” and in heavy rotation on TV—which is to say, as a form of cinema—these events could not help but challenge, mystify, and provoke filmmakers as individuals while, at the same time, dramatizing their medium in an impersonal way.”¹¹⁵ Agent Marsh’s quest to find the killer is equally driven by post-9/11 security (“by all means necessary”) as much as it is by a conservative need to edit the internet “for content.” Additionally, her investment is exasperated by the killer’s own counter-surveillance of Marsh; in a Foucauldian sense, the killer lets her know she is equally as susceptible to visibility and capture in this terrifyingly technological economy (Fig. 3.11).¹¹⁶

![Fig. 3.11. Agent Marsh as panoptic prisoner: the antagonist monitors her and wants her to know that she is watched and under his control.](image)

*Untraceable* critiques how transgressive surveillance images circulate on the internet. Eventually the film reveals the deranged killer motivation: he operates the website because he was distraught over how a video of his father’s suicide circulated on network news television and online shock sites. Recalling Foucault’s historicization of spectacular punishment, John E. McGrath writes, “…recordings of death under...

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¹¹⁶ This image is of Marsh’s house as it is surveilled by the villain, broadcast on her own computer but taken from a camera that is set up outside her house by the villain. It narratively functions to expose how she is equally as vulnerable to his “digital eye” as the villain’s other victims.
surveillance has allowed a freedom of circulation of imagery of ‘real’ death perhaps unprecedented in the West… since the disappearance of spectacles of execution.” In Untraceable, spectatorship is a fetishistic experience. Users are insatiably driven by an ambiguous need to see more transgressive content.

Interactivity is new for digital cultures, and Untraceable figures it horrifically. KillWithMe.com’s spectators greatly differ from those watching “The Truman Show”—they are no longer viewers that identify with Truman, KillWithMe.com’s spectators are defined by their voyeurism, sadism and their ability to interact and thus somewhat control the surveillance subject/victim. Untraceable’s diegetic audiences are active, invisible, and anonymous—tenets that are appropriately Freudian in their ascription of voyeurism.

In order to figure the invisible communication network, Untraceable focuses on KillWithMe.com’s real-time chat room commentary (Fig. 3.12). The spectacle of murder is what attracts spectators to the website. Surveillance cameras capture the gruesome deaths from various angles and focal lengths. The images are then broadcast over the internet across an encrypted stream, therefore the principle enigma centers on the FBI identifying the killer, figuring out why he streams the murders over the internet, and how to stop the video feed.

Fig. 3.12. While The Truman Show’s audience is importantly empathetic and visible, Untraceable’s audience is interactive, invisible, anonymous, and transgressive.

On a formal level, spectators who watch the movie view the murder scenes as they are filmed in three distinct styles: through the broadcast surveillance image (which creates distance [Fig. 3.13]), the killer’s own handheld camera (Fig. 3.14), and finally by

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cross-cutting to non-surveillance shots (in which spectators occupy the same space as both the victim and the killer. Non-surveillance images (Fig. 3.15) are highly spectacularized and filmed in a style reminiscent of post-9/11 torture-porn movies such as *Saw* (James Wan, 2004) and *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2006). In *Saw* and *Hostel*, the elaborate death sequences were part of the marketing campaign and subsequently became one of the spectator’s motivating factors to see the movies. While these three films may be linked through how they film and spectacularize violence in certain sequences, *Untraceable* stands out for its complex, fear-inducing conservativism. It wants to show you grotesque violence yet at the same time control and condemn it. The film is therefore reflexive with regards to its layered layers of watching (Fig. 3.16).

![Layered levels of watching in Untraceable’s death sequences: grainy surveillance images.](image1)

![Directly filmed videotape images.](image2)
Fig. 3.15. Normal cinematic spectacle, non-surveillance images.

Fig. 3.16. Spectator access points through the internet.

*Untraceable* reveals an underlying anxiety over security, scopophilia\(^{118}\), synopticism, and censorship in our digitized world. *The Truman Show*'s television surveillance is produced and controlled so that it does need to consider censorship; according to *Untraceable*, products of the internet, however, seem to demand censorship. During *Untraceable*'s climax, before he is gunned down, the killer delivers a monologue that details how surveillance images of death hold the potentiality for immense-scale commodification:

You see, soon, executions will be deliberately delivered live to our TV’s, our computers, our phones, our handhelds… and it won’t cost much. Maybe ten bucks. Millions of eyes, all watching the same thing at the same time. One big happy family. And all of it brought to you by… does it matter? They’ll have no trouble finding sponsors…

Transgressive content broadcast over the internet is typically less rigorously controlled than television; therefore *Untraceable* attempts to shed light on the cracks of a

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\(^{118}\) This psychoanalytic term loosely translates to “the love of looking,” and is meant to insinuate an obsession with looking that borders on (or traverses) fetishistic behavior.
panoptic mechanism (FBI control) as it coexists with a synoptic world. John E. McGrath devotes a chapter in his *Loving Big Brother* to watching surveillance images of death by exploring its contexts and meanings. He concludes that experiences of death have radically changed in our surveillance society:

…it is important to emphasize the degree to which the growth in surveillance technologies have led in general to an unprecedented public availability and circulation of imagery of death… Whereas previous imagery of death either bears the distance of representations… or the problem of agency… surveillance footage of death is able to circulate as apparently ‘real’ and yet ‘innocent’, in that the unmanned camera has ‘accidentally’ recorded the death with no question of agency within the scene.  

*Untraceable* is as an important yet fictionalized representation of surveillance cultures. While the cameras in the film do not “accidentally” record the deaths, they nonetheless present the spectacle of death as real for its audience. The film solves the problem of “surveillance camera agency” by making it clear that someone is both recording, broadcasting, and ultimately in control of the cameras. The way surveillance images of death and dying circulate over the internet, then, suggests spectatorial curiosity, access points, and affective formations in the 21st century.

Synopticism’s intersection with transgression is not new to the cinema. Films such as Kathryn Bigelow’s dystopic *Strange Days* (1995) and the horror film *Strangeland* (John Pieplow, 1998) similarly depict technological misuses by foregrounding society’s predilection for sadism, voyeurism, and violence. What distinguishes these “net anxiety” films of the 1990s from *Untraceable* is the increased ubiquity of telecommunications devices, society’s increased reliance on them, and the ways in which surveillance culture has continued to evolve and accelerate in the past ten to fifteen years.

A generation earlier, Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* (1960) linked surveillance to scopophilia and violent transgression. *Peeping Tom* centers on a disturbed man who films himself committing murders. His victims are penetrated by a blade physically attached to the camera that records their death (Fig. 3.17). A mirror is also attached to the contraption, therefore victims watch themselves die. The protagonist then revisits his

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119 McGrath, *Loving Big Brother*, 100-103.
footage in a private, secure space (Fig. 3.18). This privileged exclusivity defines his spectatorial habits. The aforementioned torture-porn films retain similar relationships with surveillance and private viewing by limiting who gets to see through the technologies. *Untraceable*’s surveillance cameras, however, are implemented for an audience that demands to see, not for the killer’s private collection. Both *Peeping Tom* and *Untraceable* maintain a fetishistic voyeurism that is located between the spectator’s relationship to the image (and the image’s contents). However, the killing process in *Untraceable* is dependent on spectator’s mediated agency and the look’s technological mediation in real-time rather than the more traditional single-antagonist murderer in *Peeping Tom*, who then revisits the killings as they appear in “recorded time.” This is among the defining features of synoptic internet surveillance culture.

![Figure 3.17](image1.jpg)

Fig. 3.17. The killer murders and films directly rather than passively. (*Peeping Tom*. Directed by Michael Powell. 1960. New York: NY: The Criterion Collection: Fig. 3.17—Fig. 3.18).

![Figure 3.18](image2.jpg)

Fig. 3.18. He then reviews his recordings privately; we see a generational gap between the privacy and directness of *Peeping Tom* and the spectator agency and mediation in *Untraceable*. 
Early in *Untraceable* it is also revealed that only Americans can access the site. What might be a simple plot point may also have larger implications for American digital spectatorship and interactivity. Scopophilia in the digital age can go unmonitored, and in many instances, the cultural vehicles that currently exist promote watching others as they are severely punished or suffering. As he speaks to one of his victims, *Untraceable*’s killer exclaims “The whole world wants to watch you die, and they don’t even know you.” To return to Foucault, the way in which spectators inhabit digital spaces through technological mediation across a singular *time* rather than occupying the same *space and time* of the old public torture (or for Ruth Penfold, the Ancient Roman amphitheater events)\(^{120}\) defines spectator dislocation in the internet synopticon.

Indeed, even American-based television shows like *TMZ on TV* and *Tosh.0* tread a fine line since they broadcast via a historically controlled broadcast (TV) yet much of their content consists of shaming or (concurrently glorifying) celebrity culture or 21st century wannabes’ through surveillance images. Comedy Central’s comedy clip show *Tosh.0* is an updated and more controversial version of *America’s Funniest Home Videos*.\(^{121}\) Tosh’s program is, in part, a satirical critique of contemporary society’s voyeuristic and exhibitionistic impulses in the 21st century. Various portions of the show consist of drawing attention to the circulation of surveillance images and then shaming what surveillance cameras capture. Fundamentally, this means that certain subjects do not know that they are under watch, let alone subsequently broadcast to millions.

*Tosh.0* contains different types of submitted videos: ones that are self-filmed, consensually filmed, or caught by surveillance. In the show all three modes of capture are equally critiqued, but the surveillance images reveal the difference between the

\(^{120}\) Ruth Penfold, “Modern Penalty and the Culture of Celebrity,” in Criminal Justice Review: Centre for Criminal Justice Studies, University of Leeds (2001-2002), 22-25. Penfold writes: “Not since Ancient Rome’s infamous amphitheatres has the notion of viewing a spectacle as celebrated as today. However spectacle has developed beyond the limitations of being simply the witnessing of an action or on a scale that is worth being seen and meant to be seen by a shift from direct mediated spectacle”

\(^{121}\) In *America’s Funniest Home Videos* viewers submit homemade “comedic videos” that then compete with one another for a cash prize. Since the tapes are typically home-videos they are markedly less controversial than unsanctioned surveillance capture. Additionally, on *Tosh.0* there is no cash prize for user submissions, only the premise of momentary fame.
exhibitionistic behavior that defines the first two types and the *forced* exhibitionism that comes with non-consensual broadcast (Fig. 3.19). The level of interactivity between *Tosh.0*’s production and its users/spectators is unprecedented; Facebook and Twitter fans can interact with host Daniel Tosh via message or uploaded video with alarming speed. Partly premised on the notion of how one’s visibility circulates, the show participates in the normalization and acceleration of 21st century surveillance cultures.

![Tosh.0](image)


Comparatively, *TMZ.com*, an internet-based news website that also operates the television show *TMZ on TV*, fixates solely on celebrity culture. Their aggressiveness is characterized by paparazzo’s guerilla-like tactics. One recent incident involved musical artists Beyoncé Knowles, her sister Solange, and Beyoncé’s husband Jay Z, wherein Solange attacked Jay Z in an elevator. Surveillance security footage of the altercation leaked within days and subsequently went viral (Fig. 3.20). The way in which the surveillance images of these black artists circulated across all mediums (television, newspapers, and online stories) must be considered under a racially charged sensationalism. The question becomes, can this incident be considered alongside the cultural narrative that is the media’s surveillance of African Americans and other minorities? How are viewers supposed to relate to these images when they circulate? Are spectators complicit within this particular mechanism of control?
Christian Parenti, author of *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America from Slavery to the War on Terror* remarks on the spectator’s shifting role, noting that surveillance shows:

…portray the television voyeur as the new *flaneur*—though, instead of strolling through the city anonymously “possessing unpossessed and seeing unseen” he or she now surfs the digital entrails of the information society, skipping from online webcams to *Cops* to *Bounty Hunters* to the eligible *Bachelor*… surveillance-based entertainment is just one more coat of glitz on the already amazing spectacle of modern American life.122

In the 21st century, the internet permits the formation of interactive communication platforms. While this is figured pessimistically in *Untraceable*, comparatively, in *The Inside Experience*, social media communication through technological mediation is also shown to have positive effects. In *The Inside Experience* a young woman, Christina Perasso (Emmy Rossum), is kidnapped and held prisoner in a room that is monitored by surveillance cameras (Fig. 3.21 & Fig. 3.22). While imprisoned, Christina realizes that she has been left with a laptop which has internet access. She immediately reaches out to friends, family members, and even strangers who follow her across multiple media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook (Fig. 3.23), as she begs for their help. *The Inside Experience* was broken into segments and initially broadcast in real-time to a

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real, live audience—one which interacted with and through Christina’s various media pages. "Viewers" helped shed light on Christina's capture by "liking" her posts, responding with their own video testimonials, and doing independent research on the “kidnapping.”

Fig. 3.21. The surveillance camera. (Inside. Directed by D.J. Caruso. 2011. Los Angeles, CA: RSA Films, 2011: Fig. 3.21—3.23).

Fig. 3.22. The surveillance image capturing Christina.

Fig. 3.23. Christina’s technological agency: webcam capture and social media circulation.
Billed as a mixed-platform “social film” experiment, *The Inside Experience* suggests that webcams provide users with agency. Christina holds the ability to record herself and distribute her message to all of her various “followers” who sympathize with her situation. Agency comes from her mastery over the webcam, and this counters the surveillance cameras that are located throughout the monitored room, which are ultimately *panoptic* not *synoptic*. In other words, it is because Christina is able to “expose herself” to the public that she is able to maintain some level of control over her life.

While both *Untraceable* and *The Inside Experience* involve sadism, kidnapping, and broadcast, the latter suggests a fundamental difference since its synoptic practice is ultimately predicated on consent. This difference details a shift in how the surveillance narrative has historically structured control. In the following chapter, the problematic of gendered surveillance within cinema will be my primary concern, as I will interrogate its confrontation with technological, historical, and voyeuristic control.

With this chapter I have looked at synoptic theory by analyzing cultural surveillance products. While most scholars have written on synopticism through a sociological or theoretical angle, I focus on specific, historically locatable cultural productions. A study of synoptic culture must account for its varied contexts and discontinuities. This includes cinema, television, and internet-based websites, in addition to other interactive platforms. With cinema, we find different commentaries on various synoptic practices. *The Truman Show*, while often discussed for how it is anticipates and represents the reality television boom, is a pre-9/11 example of synoptic surveillance spectators. *Untraceable*’s online users are presented figuratively since they are active, yet voyeuristically invisible and anonymous. The movie’s post 9/11 conservative ideology fears that without security and censorship, spectators viewing transgressive content may run the risk of mediating, perpetuating, and participating in violence.

These works are unified under their historical proliferation in the late 20th and early 21st century. However, it may be helpful to analyze them through how they are complicit as (or reflexively comment on being) surveillance cultural productions. As

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123 For an elaboration on gender, technology, and agency see Hille Koskela’s chapter “The Other Side of Surveillance: Webcams, Power and Agency” in David Lyon’s collection *Theorizing Surveillance*. 
media, especially films, continue to incorporate surveillance practices and images into their narrative form we must flesh out their particular function as they pertain to conditions of control. For synoptic cinema, the spectator is the one holding the powerful position in our increasingly interactive world, while surveillance subjects must escape the synopticon by any means necessary.
CHAPTER 4: THE WOMAN AT THE (DIGITAL) KEYHOLE: TECHNO-VOYEURS, GENDERED BODIES, & THE RECLAIMED LOOK

In the American supernatural horror film The Ring (Gore Verbinski, 2002) Rachel (Naomi Watts) stumbles upon a mysterious videotape rumored to kill its spectators seven days after they watch it. When Rachel first views the tape (Fig. 4.01), its images are shown entirely from her perspective. Dominated by the images of a circular and ocular ring, the television screen returns her look, watching her as she tries to makes sense of the ambiguous array of images (Fig. 4.02). During this sequence there is only a single reaction-shot of her response to the images. We see, first in close up, her horrified response and then in extreme-close up only her eye, mirroring the tape’s circular structure (Fig. 4.03 & Fig. 4.04). Through this sequence’s editing arrangement, The Ring stresses a rhythmic and symbolic relationship between the tape’s ring and Rachel’s eye. As the tape ends, white noise fills the screen and the telephone rings; a child’s ghostly whisper informs Rachel that she will die in seven days. The tape knows it has been watched. For the next week Rachel is under surveillance, haunted by a powerful look that she cannot locate. By violating the conventional horror code of the male protagonist, The Ring emphasizes the gendered aspect of the surveillance: we watch a woman being watched as she struggles to manage her grimly threatened life. The Ring is thus an important figuration of surveillance, gender, and control—one that engages with technological voyeurism and the female body.

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124 This rhythmic and symbolic match can be read as a revision of the rhyme of drain and eye in Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho (1960). Psycho’s rhyme starts when Norman Bates first voyeuristically looks at Marion Crane undressing and ends when Marion has been murdered, her blood circling around the drain. The Ring has its own match cuts centered around the eye and the drain, although it is later in the narrative and implies Rachel’s cleansing as opposed to (the spectacle of her) death.
Fig. 4.01. Rachel as spectator. (*The Ring*, Directed by Gore Verbinski. 2002. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros: Fig. 4.01—Fig. 4.04).

Fig. 4.02. The video returns her look with its own gaze.

Fig. 4.03. Rachel’s reaction to the tape’s images.

Fig. 4.04. Upon the extreme close-up of Rachel’s eye, she recognizes she is a surveilled body.
As outlined in Chapter 1, surveillance-themed conspiracy thrillers and dystopic films have historically focused on male characters in male-oriented genres (action, thriller, and science-fiction). Women exist in these narratives, but usually as lures of male desire or as subject to some degree of control by men. Strong, empowered women become the focal point of representation in the films covered in this chapter; however, these women are also placed under surveillance and therefore put in subordinate social positions.

The problematics of gender is glaringly deficient from most discussion of surveillance issues and surveillance films; therefore, it is the aim of this chapter to explore the relationship between surveillance, voyeurism, and gender in cinema. These surveillance films involve the link of looking and controlling women’s bodies at a distance and in a disembodied way. Through this process, the surveillance image describes a fundamentally different relationship to bodies than that found in traditional voyeuristic films that are based on the circulations of a male gaze. In voyeuristic narratives the body is seen as a locus of desire, as something to source pleasure from. In the surveillance film, the body (through its image) is defined less by how the look relates to it as a sexually desirable site and more by the look’s intention to control, occasionally (if not entirely free) from voyeurism’s sexual component. As such, the surveillance image forces a reconsideration of feminist understandings of the relation between lookers and looked-at bodies.

The films in Chapter 4, *Sliver* (Philip Noyce, 1993), *Compliance* (Craig Zobel, 2012), *The Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002), and *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold, 2006), reorient the surveillance narrative specifically around women, women’s bodies, and women’s ability, or inability, to control their image and look. Additionally, these films are located within genres that involve different camera-to-character relationships, and thus assume different spectatorial identifications. *The Ring* follows horror-mystery (and melodramatic) conventions, while *Sliver* is an erotic thriller, *Compliance* is a docudrama-thriller and *Red Road* is strictly a melodrama. The first three movies, which have not been extensively discussed as surveillance texts, center on the practice of monitoring women. Gendered victims are subjugated by the disembodied antagonists (Zeke in *Sliver*,
the ghost Samara in *The Ring*, and the male caller in *Compliance*) who hold mastery over technological forms.

In this chapter I argue against the rhetorical logic (or even, fiction) of surveillance. Surveillance is, on the surface, a mode of “protection” and safety—but these films show how it actually functions as modes of *control* when placed in relation to women’s bodies, (in addition to the bodies of the working class, which I cover later with my discussion of *Compliance* and “othered” minorities as found Chapter 2’s section on *Caché*). The films locate women as subjects of surveillance technologies, while they themselves have no control over their bodies, look, image, and other facets of technology that surround them.

More so than previous chapters, this chapter links the surveillance image to modes of cultural surveillance from which it draws its forms. As Laura Mulvey states, “In *reality* the fantasy world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it.” Movies present strategies of looking that figure those found outside of the movies; essentially, they thematize structures of control. *Compliance’s* “ripped-from-the-headlines” narrative and *Sliver’s* copy-cat crime illustrate how women’s bodies are being policed through technological formations in the real world. However, the films also use radically different strategies to reflect how society has adapted to disembodied looking and the mechanization of the surveillance camera/image. In *Sliver*, Zeke, the male techno-voyeur, exploits Carly’s body through how he *looks* and *controls* the surveillance cameras/images which capture her form; he is a traditional voyeur who has adapted technologically.

*Compliance*, a movie about sexual and economic rape, updates this dominion over women by using different technological forms, telephones, in addition to mediating control and “visual information” through human stand-ins—some of whom internalize surveillance, a notion suggestive of the society of control. The villainous caller never gets to look directly at his victim, as he does not have access to CCTV technologies; this is a parallel to mechanized surveillance in the digital age, as too much information is being recorded to actually sift through and watch. Surveillance is no longer something to

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manipulate or look through in order to gain visual pleasure through control, but rather, it is used as evidence after the crime itself has occurred.

_The Ring_ represents surveillance as an allegory for monitoring parents (specifically in this film, mothers). Rachel is a marked surveillance subject whose distant relationship with her child roughly mirrors the circumstances that led to the ghost, and thus, the haunting. _The Ring_ is a transitionary film that stages the surveillance of women around Rachel as an absentee mother, as a purely maternal body, rather than as a sexualized site of desire, as found in _Sliver_ or _Compliance_.

However, not all recent surveillance films follow the familiar formulas of _Sliver_, _Compliance_, or even _The Ring_. I will conclude this chapter by discussing _Red Road_, a surveillance film that features a woman as a CCTV surveillance operator. Given her profession, the film’s protagonist, Jackie (Kate Dickie), has a distinct control over her own look, and therefore inverts the typically masculine-gendered power relations of surveilling. This gives her a sense of agency that is absent from the patriarchal regimes of most surveillance related films. Andrea Arnold’s film does not stage the female body as a site of spectacle or desire in usual to-be-looked-at-ness, nor does it locate the main character Jackie as a to-be-surveilled body. Instead, Jackie demands sympathy and identification, characteristics which are emblematic of _Red Road_’s melodramatic leanings.

4.1 Victims of the Technological Voyeur: Gender, Surveillance, & _Sliver_

Jessica Lake’s article “_Red Road_ and Emerging Narratives of Sub-veillance” demands to understand the “…kinds of power disparities [that] exist in surveillance situations and how are they represented.”¹²⁶ Lake observes that the “prevailing theoretical model of the panopticon,” dominantly explored in surveillance studies, highlights an imbalance in how power is structured institutionally—between corporations, governments, and the private citizen.¹²⁷ This model tends to ignore the specific race,

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class, and gender of that private citizen, “The panoptic paradigm renders bodies and social identities irrelevant to the practice of surveillance.” In reality, it is because “othered” citizen meet at least one of these criteria that they may find themselves under watch. Citing Rosemary Betterton, Lake concludes that “the dominant modes of looking in capitalist and patriarchal culture have been linked to surveillance and control over those perceived as inferior: children, servants, workers, and women.”

That Lake interrogates this question at a specific historical moment, her article being published in 2010, is not without context. Her article arises at a time when panopticism is being critically reconsidered, partially in response to the relative exclusion of questions of gender within the discourse. Additionally, that she cites Betterton’s observation on historical control speaks to how they both consider the panoptic disciplinary model to be antiquated, if not entirely inaccurate, “…scholars in surveillance studies often divide the watcher and watched into two oppositional groups, ignoring fundamental differences of gender, race, class, and sexuality between and within those groups.”

In her article, Lake observes a salient fact that I pointed out in Chapter 1: that cinema typically places white, middle-class men in the surveilling position, thus these texts affirm the hierarchal structure that panopticism describes. However, not only must we consider those that look, more attention must be brought to the individual subjects that are being looked-at.

Lake’s article is exceptional in how it describes women’s control throughout history, in addition to cinema’s tradition of allotting surveillance duties to white men. Importantly, however, she noticeably overlooks how women have functioned in surveillance narratives and how surveillance often functions around them: as technologies manipulated by men so they can derive pleasure from women’s bodies. For my argument, the most important thing to gain from Lake’s article is that cinema, and the social spaces and formations that are narratively represented, produces surveillance around women very differently than it does for men. While this imbalance exists, it has not been

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128 Ibid., 233.
129 Ibid., 231
130 Ibid., 232
comprehensively picked up by scholars in film or surveillance studies, although Lake’s article, Hille Koskela’s work, and the forthcoming *Feminist Surveillance Studies* collection are initiating a discussion.

Scholars in the intersecting film and surveillance studies fields observe that the discourse surrounding “what it means to look” is well detailed due to Laura Mulvey’s seminal feminist/psychoanalytic article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” In this essay Mulvey offered a theory of the male gaze in Classical Hollywood, in part through an analysis of the proto-surveillance narrative *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954). Hitchcock’s film depicts a man’s voyeuristic curiosity, some of which manifests through arresting the narrative in order to gaze at women’s bodies (Fig. 4.05).

![Fig. 4.05. Cinema’s tradition of voyeurism: Hitchcock’s narrative arrest around the female form. (*Rear Window*. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. 1954. New York, NY: Universal Studios).](image)

In her article, Mulvey describes the way in which Classical Hollywood cinema creates a spectacle out of the female form. She charts cinema’s historically misogynistic representation of women and its formal articulation of women as objects of voyeuristic male pleasure. For Mulvey, films enact a “male gaze” upon women through an interrelated network of looking. This exemplifies cinema’s coding as a socio-patriarchal formation, given its ability to structure social spaces, relations, and hierarchies. Mulvey

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131 However, in a narrative turn, its protagonist starts to look differently at his neighbors once he thinks he views man murder his wife. Thus the story transforms from a traditional voyeuristic film to a surveillance film, since his look eventually comes to center exclusively on “monitoring criminality.”
writes that Hollywood films offer three sources for the look, all of which are coded as male and thus offer pleasure to its male spectators: a look between the spectators and the screen, a look between the camera and the characters, and a look between diegetic male characters. The spectator, regardless of gender, is put into the active masculine subject position, therefore the film encourages identification with the male character while negating a viewing position for female spectators. Men are then encouraged to indulge in viewing the female body as a spectacle, as a desirable image, while women must watch passively and masochistically as they are relegated to mere images—as objects of the look and as objects of desire that are subject to male voyeurism.

Mulvey’s essay also describes what it means for women to look at themselves on the screen, something which Red Road works through rather explicitly when Jackie’s surveillance becomes contingent on identifying with female subjects. Later, Judith Mayne’s work in The Woman at the Keyhole would question what it means for women to be both subjects that look and objects that are looked at, “The question is not only who or what is on either side of the keyhole, but also what lies between them, what constitutes the threshold that makes representation possible.” The very keyhole that Mayne describes in the title of her book can now include the institutionalized security apparatus of surveillance, with the keyhole being replaced by CCTV control centers. In actuality, however, women are typically not afforded the position of the surveillance looker, therefore surveillance systematizes patriarchal hierarchies similarly to cinema.

Voyeurism is a mode that has been thoroughly dissected, but many of its fundamental principles are complicated by the nature of surveillance. Mulvey’s claims are equally affirmed and complicated by how surveillance films represent looking at women. Her description of voyeurism in the cinema, as systematically reflecting a misogynistic patriarchal social order, is only applicable to surveillance narratives when they are in themselves traditionally voyeuristic. When a character uses surveillance technologies to gaze at women’s bodies, reducing her to a sexualized “object of the

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132 Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, 14-25.
look,” then that surveillance situation is tainted with voyeuristic intention and procedure. *Sliver* (1992) is an instructive example of such a conflation, although it has received minimal critical attention in film studies.

*Sliver’s* narrative describes how surveillance technologies are exploited to satisfy a man’s sexual deviancy. Zeke (William Baldwin), a man who owns a luxurious apartment complex in New York City, monitors the protagonist Carly (Sharon Stone), as well as many others, through hidden cameras that have been placed all throughout their apartments. Zeke occupies a powerful position, not only because he owns the means of surveillance (in addition to the building), but because he is a wealthy white male, thus he is put in an inherently privileged and hegemonic location.

Zeke becomes infatuated with Carly, watching her extensively through his PTZ (pan/tilt/zoom) CCTV system, where he is able to enter into a closer spatial relationship with Carly with just the tap of a finger on his computer screen (Fig. 4.06 & Fig. 4.07). As I describe at the beginning of Chapter 1, an early sequence focuses on Zeke watching Carly masturbate in her apartment. By manipulating PTZ’s capabilities, Zeke is able to gaze at all points of her body without the risk of himself being seen. When voyeurism alone no longer satiates his appetite, Zeke eventually “breaks the surveillance barrier” by courting Carly and beginning a romantic relationship with her. The rest of the narrative concerns Carly slowly becoming aware of the fact that Zeke has been monitoring her as well as others throughout his apartment complex. As an erotic thriller, tension derives from Zeke and Carly’s physical lust for each other despite the monstrous power imbalances that exist between them, in addition to Zeke’s penchant for criminality.134

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134 The way *Sliver* depicts the imbalances that exist between the male voyeur and the female object-of-the-look mirrors cinema’s history of reinforcing these roles. Producer Robert Evans has said that William Baldwin stated in his contract that he refused to be shown completely nude. This contrasts with the Sharon Stone’s exhibitionism; she is repeatedly shown fully nude, recalling her infamous nudity in 1992’s *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven), also penned by Joe Eszterhas. Evans states, “There isn't a leading man who will do frontal nudity. And there isn't a leading lady who won't.” Jess Cagle, “Chopped Sliver,” *Entertainment Weekly*, May 21, 1993, Accessed July 8, 2014, [http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,306611_3,00.html](http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,306611_3,00.html).
In *Sliver*, women in the surveillance narrative do not merely signify an absent representational space, which may be most evident in the masculine dystopic or conspiratorial thrillers, but rather, they become subordinated as sexualized “objects-of-the-look.” *Sliver* depicts surveillance’s use to fulfill sexual desire. The diegetic surveillance camera’s look is mediated by Zeke’s, and is therefore made masculine and overtly sexualized. Carly is then portrayed as a surveilled body since Zeke monitors her activity in her apartment, however, that images of her naked body often fill the surveillance screen reveals Zeke’s voyeuristic motivation as well as surveillance’s “criminal misuse.”

Scopophilia, for Mulvey, describes the pleasure in looking and how looking in itself is pleasurable as an act of voyeurism. In the Freudian sense, voyeuristic looking supplants normal fulfillment of the aims of sexual gratification; he ultimately labels it a
perversion in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. When surveillance is misused to fulfill the sexual desires of its operators, as in *Sliver* or Franck Khalfoun’s *P2* (2007), one must consider the ramifications of this misuse in addition to the social and historical determinants that led to such gross exploitation. Why are cameras placed in certain spaces? Who is monitoring these spaces, and who is being targeted?

One recent incident mirrors the problematic landlord/tenant violation that *Sliver* imagines. In March of 2014, a Kansas City woman found hidden cameras which had been placed throughout her apartment. Some of the cameras were disguised as smoke detectors. In total, eleven were found, with four located in her bathroom and one in her bedroom. The cameras found in the apartment, which was located above a tattoo parlor, uncovered wires which led to the basement. The basement housed a control center which revealed numerous video screens showing the occupant’s interior space. The landlord ran the tattoo business, and thus could potentially watch the victim 24 hours a day.

This sex crime shockingly mirrors *Sliver* in a number of ways. First, there is the inherent disembodiment and distance between viewer and viewed that surveillance technology affords. Additionally, there was no way for the viewed to consent to (or know) that they were being watched. Since this incident occurred in a woman’s private space also suggests Deleuze’s characterization of the shift from the “enclosed” or “imprisoning” structures of the disciplinary societies to the “geometry” of forms of control that are no longer located within a particular space. In other words, CCTV was located not in a prison to monitor criminals, but rather, in the world of privacy (or more generally, of social relations). Most importantly for this chapter’s argument, the viewer was a male figure interested in monitoring the female body through digital voyeurism—and this is only one incident. Violations in restrooms, locker rooms, changing rooms, and other spaces that offer the impression of privacy within the public sector have seen similar documentation. Ultimately, the relationship between historical events,

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surveillance situations, and narrative productions suggests an interwoven narrative of its own, one whose components inform and reinforce rather than contradict each other.

There have been numerous documented cases of voyeuristic surveillance acts—many of which explicitly center on capturing images of women’s bodies. The American surveillance thriller *Alone with Her* (Eric Nicholas, 2006), a movie clearly indebted to *Sliver*, begins with such a relevant warning—an opening intertitle quote by David Wiseman of the U.S. Department of Justice:

> Every minute, 3 people become victims of stalking in the United States.

> What concerns us most is that recent technology has created a golden age for predators to track and terrorize.

> Hidden video cameras, microphones and other spy equipment can now be purchased for next to nothing and are available through the internet and retail stores everywhere... to anyone.

In *Alone with Her*, Doug (Colin Hanks), an awkward-yet-obsessive tech-savvy man, spies on Amy (Ana Claudia Talancón), an attractive Hispanic woman, by bugging her house with audio and video capturing equipment. The film, like Chapter 2’s *388 Arletta Avenue* (Randall Cole, 2011), is about digital stalking, and both are shot entirely through the point-of-view of cameras that are set up and controlled by an antagonist. *Alone with Her*, however, is clearly the more problematic film since it centers around a man’s relentless sexual pursuit (and intent to control) an unassuming woman.

*Alone with Her* details how surveillance is no longer confined to a centralized CCTV control room. While *Sliver*’s Zeke is happy to let the mechanized cameras record to video when he is not there, Doug’s "technological intrusion" is defined by how he uses both mobile and static cameras—he bugs Amy's house, but also stalks her by using handheld video cameras and hidden spy cams that attach to his clothing. Digital stalking is now mobile and can occur ubiquitously in all spaces rather than being confined by it, thus the movie imagines a world that is totally susceptible to a man’s will

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137 *Alone with Her*'s looker is disturbed, nerdy, and ultimately unable to seduce his love interest; he is far removed from *Sliver*’s Zeke, who is confident, attractive, and financially viable.

138 For example, as in *Sliver*, there are numerous scenes that feature Amy, the object of his look, nude, masturbating, and generally vulnerable since she does not know she is being watched.
to see and obsessively control. Unlike *Sliver*, which ends with a glimmer of feminist hope with Carly leaving the bugged apartment, *Alone with Her* violently ends when Doug murders Amy and then begins to stalk another woman. He is free to pursue his emotional, physical, and technological control over women in a sadistically repetitive manner—one that is alarmingly new for the voyeuristic surveillance narrative.

Films such as *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) and *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) reinforce cinema’s tradition of staging the male look as unnervingly voyeuristic through the male character’s exercise of power through direct rather than mediated looking. Sequences in which deranged men look anticipate episodes of extreme violence against women. Thus, the voyeuristic narrative depicts the relationship between looking, female objectification, and violence.\(^{139}\) *Sliver* follows this formula, but updates the way in which the looker interacts with his victims by placing him in a hidden CCTV control center. And while *Sliver* also associates with the voyeuristic narrative, other women-centered surveillance narratives describe a more complicated relationship. As previously stated, Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze is affirmed when surveillance is voyeuristically exercised by men. My next section will outline how this notion is complicated with surveillance’s mechanization and the total disembodiment of the man who never gets to “look.”

### 4.2 Mechanized Cameras/Economies of Rape: Surveillance Failure in *Compliance*

A little young girl standing there naked wasn't a pretty sight.\(^{140}\)

— “A Hoax Most Cruel”

In the docudrama *Compliance*, a sinister prank caller accuses a young white employee, Becky (Dreama Walker), of stealing from a customer at her work-place: a non-descript fast-food restaurant. The caller, a man claiming to be “Officer Daniels” (Pat Healy) (Fig. 4.08), convinces the restaurant’s manager, Sandra (Ann Dowd), to isolate

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Becky by moving her to the back office. Sandra is ordered by “Officer Daniels” to detain Becky until the police arrive. Over the course of the work day the caller enacts control over Becky and Sandra. Becky, an attractive blonde, is subjugated to a strip-search (Fig. 4.09) and other demoralizing commands. Her victimization culminates when Van (Bill Camp), Sandra’s inebriated fiancée, is called upon to guard Becky while Sandra attends to the dinner rush. The caller tells Van first to spank Becky for her insolence and then have her perform oral sex on him (Fig. 4.10); the caller mediates control through Van (his male stand-in) as he rapes Becky. The film resolves when the caller is eventually exposed as a fraud who habitually commits sexually-motivated prank calls.

Fig. 4.08. The caller, controlling via his telephone. (Compliance. Directed by Craig Zobel. 2012. New York, NY: Magnolia Pictures: Fig. 4.08—Fig. 4.13).

Fig. 4.09. Becky forcibly undresses in the restaurant.
As the plot unfolds, *Compliance* makes it clear that surveillance plays a peculiar role. Spaces within the restaurant are under constant technological watch, as cameras (free from direct human manipulation) record and subsequently archive visual information onto a computer hard drive. The film clearly documents the transition to mechanized surveillance systems, and how the systems themselves serve a different function when one wants to effect control over another body. During the caller’s first accusation against Becky he vaguely (yet assertively) states that he has surveillance evidence that corroborates with “a victim’s story.” The prospect that incriminating physical evidence exists looms over Becky and Sandra, however this proves to be both a lie and a manipulative power play. In *Compliance*’s penultimate scene, Becky finally realizes that the space where the rape occurred has been monitored and recorded (Fig. 4.11 to Fig. 4.13).
Ironically, it is now the surveillance video that captured the rape that becomes vital visual and physical evidence, but the fact that this revelation occurs at the end of the film speaks to how mechanized surveillance can only passively witness crimes as they occur—no one watches the surveillance images except for the surveillance camera. With the process’s mechanization the need for a “human watcher” has been eliminated, but this is what creates vulnerabilities that ultimately affect Becky as a low-wage-earning gendered subject. By the film’s end the recordings are gathered as evidence against the caller’s criminal act and Sandra’s compliance is clearly called into question.

With mechanized surveillance, notions of security are challenged when considering how surveillance cameras passively record heinous sexual crimes. If a rape is captured by video surveillance, the recording can help identify the victimizer and also serve as a physical recording of the event in trial. However, with mechanization, the absence of the “constant looker” is also exploited. This is one of the failures that Compliance describes: since no one sees Becky’s rape through the surveillance footage
as it happens, surveillance is exploited as a flawed preventative technology. The cameras of course are not installed for that particular purpose; the diegetic surveillance cameras hold a specific function: to protect the store owner against threats from outsiders (those visiting with intent to harm or rob) in addition to its own employees (for example, Becky). In other words, they are effectively anti-theft not anti-rape devices. In this sense, considering the specific function of video surveillance in the film, the cameras are in active compliance with the rapist: the “threat of surveillance evidence” against Becky becomes a very real threat.

*Compliance* is based on a series of real events known as the “strip search phone call scam.” These incidents, which totaled more than seventy over a ten-year period, played out the same game and principally targeted the same lower-wage female workers. The most famous of these incidents, which served as the primary inspiration for *Compliance*, occurred in 2004 at a McDonalds in Mount Washington, Kentucky. The caller asserted power by testing the obedience of those on the other end of the line. Like the aforementioned Kansas City incident recalling *Sliver*, *Compliance*’s “ripped from the headlines” status observes a sexualization of technology and its use by men to mediate their control over women.

Though important, gender is not the only concern of the deviant caller. It must be taken into consideration that the targets were those in a specific class and lower-rank occupation. A reading of *Compliance*’s literal rape can also be read figuratively, as commenting on the near-criminal exploitation of labor of low-wage workers. This complicates Becky’s “to-be-looked-at-ness,” doubling her position as a desirable spectacle.

Traditional voyeuristic narratives produce pleasure by watching women who do not know they are being watched—the onlooker gets off on seeing them in natural (though, typically sexual) states or scenarios. This situation plays out in *Rear Window*, *Body Double* (Brian De Palma, 1984), *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986) and even

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141 This is ultimately not the goal of surveillance, but it is still an important consequence of the technology. Some of the dystopic films, primarily *Minority Report*, address this more directly by narrativizing how technology has evolved to where it can predict future crimes—as a preventative mechanism.

142 Wolfson, “A hoax most cruel.”
*Sliver*—although *Sliver*’s inclusion of technological mediation complicates how we historically define the voyeur. In *Compliance*, Becky’s body becomes both an investigative surveillance site and a source of desire which the male in control violently and repeatedly shames. Through this complex depiction of mediation, power, and control *Compliance* details a shift from sexual desire to control in the surveillance narrative. The function of sexual pleasure is abrogated by the surveillance function. The male caller is interested not in the sexual component of voyeuristic looking, which he gives to his male stand-ins, but rather with the component of control which is entirely his—and which he manipulates masterfully.

As a manager, Sandra is expected to act and react sensibly, but the caller’s ability to manipulate her proves to be too strong. When Sandra is away performing other duties, male stand-ins—Van, Kevin (another young employee), and Harold (an older custodian)—report to the caller, however, the latter two characters do not take part in the caller’s game. The caller demands men to comply with his power by having them continually describe Becky’s body and maintain her subordinate position. Sandra’s inability to take control of the situation signifies her maternal failure toward Becky, and this is one of the film’s most important themes, as it structurally reoccurs in the other surveillance narratives of this chapter. Sandra is complicit with the caller’s demands, which are assumed to be extensions of the store’s owner’s, and thus the demands of store policy and the law. Her compliance results in a failure to properly ensure the protection of her employees.

Hille Koskela’s chapter “The Problematic of Surveillance and Gender” considers the conflation of women’s “to-be-surveilled” and “to-be-looked-at” bodies. Koskela writes, “While often mediated via technology, surveillance is never purely technical. The presuppositions, experiences, emotions and attitudes of camera operators influence any surveillance practice.”

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surveillance, which is security. Considering such a conflation, Mulvey and Koskela agree on a fundamental point. Koskela writes:

…the female body is an object of a sexualized gaze in ways that are dramatically different than for male bodies [and this] also applies to women being viewed through surveillance cameras. So, for women in particular, being an object of surveillance does not necessarily uniformly foster a reassuring sense of security.¹⁴⁴

Adam Rifkin’s Look (2007) portrays the surveillance of women in a manner that lies somewhere between Sliver’s voyeurism and Compliance’s disembodiment. Look is a multi-thread narrative told entirely through surveillance cameras and images. Its first sequence focuses on a couple of mischievous girls in a dressing room. For many minutes they undress, exposing their bodies for static surveillance cameras to gaze at. The scene ends when one of the girls steals a shirt by placing it under her existing one (Fig. 4.14). While spectators know that a petty crime has been committed, they never see enforcement intervening.

Look figures surveillance around the spectacle of the female body, although more complexly since there is never a reverse shot of a male character looking. As the male stand-in’s position is eliminated, so is the second look outlined by Mulvey, thus the spectator is more immediately culpable for their voyeurism. When these young women reappear throughout Look, the surveillance camera does not treat them like the other characters (Fig. 4.15). The cameras ogle them with erratic zooms and punch-ins that place the camera’s look in a closer spatial proximity to their bodies. Comparatively, this is markedly different from the sterile aesthetic that characterizes the Paranormal Activity films: Look retains a voyeuristic relationship only to specific surveillance subjects.

¹⁴⁴ Koskela, “You Shouldn’t Wear that Body.” 52.
On a formal level it is important that *Compliance* does not narrate through images produced by surveillance cameras (as *Alone with Her* or *Look* do). Spectators are put in the space where the rape occurs; they do not view it from the distanced “vantage point” where surveillance cameras are typically placed. Spectators are granted close-ups of Becky’s facial reactions and slow tracking shots of her body. The coldness of the surveillance camera is replaced by the wider scope of cinematic language, and thus the multiple affects which it generates. Sympathy for Becky is demanded through the organization of point-of-view shots, especially as she is demeaned. Occurring at the same time, the camera’s embodiment of the position of those who gain pleasure from her body, in the intermediary between the spectator’s gaze and the woman’s body, covers spectators for their complicity.

*Compliance* chronicles the way in which men continue to control women’s bodies through surveillance mechanisms despite not having direct visual access to the bodies. As I will outline in the following section, this shift is again complicated when women look at
women. What happens when an othered body monitors another othered body? *The Ring* confronts this concept allegorically by crafting a narrative around the ghost of a child who surveills a maternal figure.

4.3 The Ghost in the Machine: Monitoring Motherhood in *The Ring*

In the horror-mystery *The Ring*, Rachel, a journalist, investigates the grotesque and mysterious death of her niece Katie. Katie dies a week after watching a puzzling, ambiguously-sourced videotape showing an array of disturbing images. Those who watch the tape contract a virus that, seven days after viewing the video, culminates with the “technological ghost” of a female child emerging from a television screen. The image on the television matches the final image on the tape; itself a static wide shot whose color palette resembles a cold surveillance image (Fig. 4.16 & Fig. 4.17); this desolate spot is the place where the child was murdered. The ghost crosses over from the tape’s world into the world of the real (Fig. 4.18), and then scares the “contaminated spectator” to death (Fig. 4.19). The only way to evade death is to make a copy of the tape and show it to another person, thus perpetuating a frightening cycle of spectatorship.

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 4.16. The tape’s final image reappears when Samara claims her victims. (*The Ring*. Directed by Gore Verbinski. 2002. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros: Fig. 4.16—Fig. 4.23).

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The Ring slowly reveals that the ghost is actually the specter of a possessed child, Samara (Daveigh Chase), who bore the gift of projected thermography: the ability to psychically burn images from her mind onto physical objects (e.g., the tape). Although she possessed unique powers, Samara was also an evil entity. Her parents banished her from the house and forced her to live in an adjacent barn (housing only a television) before throwing her down a well—where she lived for seven days before dying, thus the time-controlled punishment of the tape’s spectator.
As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, Rachel eventually watches the tape and becomes infected. Samara knows when Rachel views the videotape, and upon its ending, threateningly telephones her. The tape’s unusual images alone shock its viewers, but the ultimate source of terror comes from the instantaneous recognition that they too are being watched. Likewise, after “contamination,” electronic, analog, and digital technologies are now tools which the ghost uses to control her victims. Cameras, surveillance screens, and televisions function as panopticons and emit Samara’s gaze while she remains invisible to Rachel.

Diegetically, surveillance systems are not a major focal point in the film, yet they play a central role in understanding Samara’s obsession with technology (Fig. 4.20). Samara’s parents brought her to a hospital, where she was incessantly monitored by surveillance cameras; Rachel later watches those surveillance recordings during her investigation (Fig. 4.21). *The Ring* figures that surveillance cameras contain a prodding presence, an eye which coldly gazes from a static, distant position. Since Samara was put under surveillance before her murder, her victims experience the same anxiety-ridden relationship with technology and the concept of surveillance. Televisions and security screens emit a figurative return gaze to those who become infected after viewing the tape. In one scene, Noah (Martin Henderson), Rachel’s estranged ex-husband, realizes that his physical likeness appears distorted on the surveillance screen (Fig. 4.22 & Fig. 4.23). This peculiar scene, which compositionally mirrors the shot of Rachel watching Samara’s surveillance video, exposes Noah’s contamination, but more unnervingly, Samara’s control over technology.

Fig. 4.20. Samara’s drawing: internalizing the mechanism of surveillance in *The Ring*. 
My reading of the film concerns the relationship between surveillance, gender, and maternity. As a female investigator, Rachel is opposed to the archetypal male investigator of the 1970s conspiracy thriller investigator that I outline in Chapter 1. This gendered replacement positions Rachel as an authoritatively masculine figure despite the fact that she is a mother; this additionally complicates the film’s themes of reproduction, circulation, maternal failure, and “gendered looking.” She is also, importantly, depicted as an absentee mother, dedicated to her job and the pressing investigation. Thus, her
markedly gendered melodramatic journey (which starts with investigating the tape) eventually highlights how forging and maintaining familial ties has become a priority.

Saliently, because the ghostly surveiller is also the spirit of a victimized female child *The Ring* doubly qualifies as an example of Lake’s description of “sub-veillance.” Lake writes:

I use the term ‘sub-veillance’ to describe scenarios where the watching is done from below, by those traditionally positioned in social and political relations as subordinate… Thus, the watching done by children, by women, by prisoners, by the poor, by coloured and colonized people can be considered as scenarios of ‘sub-veillance’ and thus subversion (emphasis in original text).  

The videotape exists so its spectators can see that a crime against a female child occurred. The tape, once watched, must be deciphered and decoded, or else the spectator’s life will be claimed. The only way to save your life is to make a copy of the tape and secure another spectator. Through this threatening cycle of spectatorship the film states that absolution occurs only when crimes against children are rendered totally visible. Since Rachel investigates the circumstances surrounding Samara’s murder, in addition to why Samara has chosen to create the tape, *The Ring* alludes to Rachel’s absolution from a seemingly imminent death.

Rachel’s empowered character, particularly when paired with Samara as a gendered ghost, is an unusual trope for a horror film. However, *The Ring* blends together many aspects from different genres. It is first and foremost a horror film, a genre which traditionally stages the female body as pleasurable site yet at the same time often finds ways to punish or destroy it. *The Ring* is also a mystery and a melodrama—the latter being a genre more attuned to representing the plight of women in addition to more explicitly targeting female spectators. With the narrative’s focalization on Rachel as a

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147 *The Ring* primarily diffuses any references to sexuality or bodily pleasure. In place of voyeuristic spectacle, the film illustrates a colder surveillance form. This is emphasized by the muted color palette (which resembles surveillance image coloration), the deliberately smooth camera movement (which offers the illusion of ‘presence’ and ‘point-of-view’ within the framing), and through the mise-en-scene’s bleak spaces.
mother, the film suggests its melodramatic paradigm, and it is Rachel’s maternal intuition that helps her survive while her ex-husband, the absentee father, is killed by Samara.

Mary Holland’s “Morality in a (TV) Box, or, ‘I’m Not Your Fucking Mommy!’: Lessons on Media and Mothering from The Ring and The Ring Two” elaborates on the film’s melodramatic themes of maternal sympathy and familial suffering:

Rachel, as the viewer’s proxy, feels and expresses only increasing sympathy for this girl so abused, accusing her father of harming her and viewing the representatives of Samara’s exile into mediation—television, electrodes, videotapes—as weapons used against her. When she finds the girl herself, dead and prettily floating at the bottom of the well... Rachel greets the corpse with immense tenderness and a mother’s tears, telling the dead girl, “It’s OK now.”

The tape represents the endured trauma that is shared (and re-lived) between Samara, her family, and the tape’s spectators. At the heart of this trauma is the death of a young child, and her will to punish those who turn a blind eye to physical or psychological abuses of children. The technological anxiety that pervades The Ring conveys and confronts the narrative’s aforementioned subtext—the invisibility of cyclical abuse and the internal combustion of the nuclear family, of which the mother can either help or be eternally haunted. It is then vital that Rachel is not only someone that looks, but she is one that acts. She breaks the cycle of maternal failure that had characterized the narrative, and thus, ensures her safety in addition to the safety of her child.

The male gaze that pervades Sliver, Alone with Her, and Compliance is cast aside in favor of creating spaces for female subjectivity, and consequently, female identification. The Ring is defined by how it ambiguously confronts technological control with regards to gender, although I conclude that it rejects conflating traditional voyeurism

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149 The Ring subverts total narrative resolution through Samara’s relentless evilness. While Rachel and her son are safe since they made a copy of the tape and secured another spectator, the final shots of the film (a rapid montage of the video’s images) is shown in full frame as if to indict (and infect) The Ring’s spectator. In this pessimistic ending, as Holland notes, “Samara kills not out of some human need for mothering but out of her machine-like need only to reproduce her own image.” (Holland, “Morality in a (TV) Box,” 686).
with surveillance. My final section will demonstrate how *Red Road* moves one step further: it rejects the male gaze and reclaims notions of the gaze back to women.

**4.4 From Big Brother to Little Sister: *Red Road*’s Reclamation of “The Look”**

Andrea Arnold’s *Red Road* is about Jackie Morrison (Kate Dickie), a CCTV security operator working in a bustling, yet lower-income area of Glasgow, Scotland—one of the most heavily surveilled areas in the world. Distant and detached from basic social interaction, Jackie instead devotes most of her energy to her passive, observational work duties (Fig. 4.24). As the narrative unfolds, the spectator finds out that Jackie’s detachment is due her burying the trauma of her daughter’s and husband’s deaths, who were killed when a drug-induced Clyde Henderson (Tony Curran) drove into a bus stop. Jackie represses the trauma of her family’s death, which she ultimately feels responsible for. Her occupation, then, is in part motivated by the ways in which watching distracts her from her empty life.

Fig. 4.24. Jackie’s domain: operating the CCTV table in Glasgow. (*Red Road*. Directed by Andrea Arnold. 2006. New York, NY: Tartan Videos: Fig. 4.24—Fig. 4.26).

Clyde, now released from prison, returns to Jackie’s life by appearing on her CCTV monitor. Initially, Jackie monitors Clyde from a distance, watching him through her surveillance screen as he spends time at his Red Road flat. Like *Sliver*’s Zeke, Jackie eventually breaks the surveillance barrier and starts stalking him, physically mapping the spaces which had previously been mediated by her look. Jackie and Clyde enter into a complicated relationship: she stalks him, while Clyde, a womanizer, tries to seduce her.
The film withholds Jackie’s motives, but ultimately it is revealed that the reason she crossed paths with Clyde was so that she could frame him for raping her. Clyde is arrested, but later released when Jackie, guilty and traumatized, decides not to press charges. Red Road ends with Jackie confronting and forgiving Clyde—she concludes grieving, and consequently reintegrates with society.

Red Road is an important film because it inverts the traditional structure of surveillance: panopticism. Jackie separates herself from the notion of a centralized surveillance apparatus, the panoptic “Big Brother,” and instead monitors from a markedly subjective position; Jackie is, as Ty Burr states, a “Little Sister.” Panopticism describes a surveillance apparatus that thrives off of de-subjectification. As previously mentioned, Foucault’s reading of the model defines power structures that cast aside the individual’s race, class, gender, sexuality, and age. Surveillance is nothing if not the study of relational power; therefore, one must always take into account the specific characteristics of the surveilling and surveilled parties. With Compliance and Sliver, this means exposing the voyeuristic motivations of white men while taking into account particular instances of victimization against women. With Red Road, surveillance cinema edges toward a feminist mode by giving a woman the narrative agency and power that comes with being a surveillance operator.

Similarly to The Ring, Red Road traces a different narrative than the masculine 1970s conspiracy thrillers since it positions a woman as a surveillance operator—the non-descript white male surveillors have been steadfastly replaced, and this has salient implications, as Catherine Zimmer notes:

Were the gender roles reversed, the trope would read as suspense and automatically suggest the model of the voyeuristic predator; by reversing the more expected gender roles, Red Road decodes the received understanding of the voyeuristic model of surveillance narratives by highlighting that gendered subject positions determine that reading far more than the surveillance structure ever could...[T]he film’s spectator

follows the follower with little understanding of the purpose, or even the affect, of the investigative gaze.\textsuperscript{151}

In fact, overarching references to conspiracy and masculinity are diffused if not entirely supplanted by pressing ambiguities that plague contemporary surveillance. Does an operator have a responsibility to preserve the surveillance barrier? What happens when objective surveillance duties are supplanted by subjective notions of security which come from a marginalized perspective? \textit{Red Road} works through these questions, but intentionally avoids answering them clearly.

As with \textit{The Ring}, the surveillance narrative’s intersection with melodrama (also known as the “women’s picture”) signals a turning point in the focalization of female subjectivity, salvation, and redemption.\textsuperscript{152} Both films fixate on trauma, repression, and grief as experienced by women. However, while \textit{The Ring} still locates Rachel as a surveillance subject, Jackie is permitted to physically map spaces \textit{without} the looming threat of being surveilled. Most notably, \textit{Red Road} refuses to grant voyeuristic pleasure to (male) spectators who wish to view Jackie as a spectacularized body. Two scenes best exemplify this.

In a controversial sex scene between Jackie and Clyde, Clyde begins by performing cunnilingus on Jackie. On a general level, cinema typically shies away from depictions of cunnilingus in favor of crafting sexual fantasies more explicitly geared towards men. Starting off with this act raises red flags: does Jackie get pleasure from this act since it is Clyde who accidentally killed her family? As the camera’s fixates on Jackie’s face (shot in close-up, instead of her body) while she orgasms (Fig. 4.25), \textit{Red Road} activates her as a subject who can obtain sexual pleasure on her own terms. Although the complex personal relations between Clyde and Jackie complicate the act itself, the film implicitly comments on representations of female pleasure in cinema, which inevitably challenges traditional notions of male spectatorial scopophilia.

\textsuperscript{152} For an elaboration on how \textit{Red Road} functions as melodrama and “women’s picture” see “Falling, Looking, Caring: Red Road As Melodrama.”
Fig. 4.25. The camera fixating on a close-up of Jackie during a sexual encounter.

Moreover, the sex scene is important as it progresses the narrative. It is after this scene that spectators understand Jackie’s intentions to frame Clyde for rape. With this information, the sequence opposes how Mulvey describes the visual presence of women as a site of spectacle, which works against the development of the story and freezes the flow of action “in moments of erotic contemplation.”

Jackie’s surveillance of Clyde is directly linked to her faking a rape, therefore *Red Road* comments on how women’s surveillance is recast as a problematic and retributive act, yet can also be considered on the side of justice. Ultimately, the film’s understanding of rape in relation to surveillance is best illustrated by the way in which Clyde’s appearance in the surveillance image mobilizes Jackie’s need to dole out justice. While most rape crimes involve men violating women, Jackie’s actions, first as a female surveiller, and second as a “false victim” describe a vengeful vigilanism that inverts the traditional power dynamics associated with rape. *Red Road* concludes that with a female surveiller, women’s justice will always be a priority, even if it means moving beyond the surveilling position in a complex, and even problematic way.

While the sex scene in *Red Road* recasts pleasure and restructures power, the film’s conclusion resolves Jackie’s traumatic isolation by creating a space in which to work through female subjectivity. After she frames Clyde, Jackie attempts to rebuild her

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154 Mayne writes that “… women’s cinema may well be characterized, not necessarily by an outright rejection of voyeuristic and fetishistic desires but by the recasting of those desires so as to open up other possible pleasures for film viewing” (Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole*, 5). Jackie’s surveillance and voyeurism of Clyde best exemplifies the “recasting of desire” that Mayne highlights, since it is both narratively important and salient for the spectator that they identify with Jackie, but also question her look.
life. In a cathartic scene, she retrieves her dead daughter’s clothes and forms a child-size
doll-like structure; she emphatically grieves while clutching her remains. The camera
sympathetically watches her in a static medium-long shot—it demands the spectator’s
emotional alignment (Fig. 4.26).

In another connection to The Ring, this shot mirrors the sequence following
Rachel’s revelation in the well. She consoles Samara’s remains (Fig. 4.27); the shot is
meant to be a healing moment for her as a grieving, surrogate mother and also a supposed
exorcism of the ghost—that is, until we later find out its evil demands. The scene in Red
Road proves vastly more intimate than the sex scene, which the spectator eventually
realizes is out of malicious intent. With this grieving sequence, Jackie’s journey edges
towards closure. Red Road’s final shot (Fig. 4.28) formally, narratively, and symbolically
works to create a sense of closure. In another static shot, filmed from the familiar
perspective of a surveillance camera, Jackie ceases to separate herself from the world
which she views; she is able to re-assimilate herself into the city space, and thus the
world of social relations.

Fig. 4.26. Breaking away from the confinement of the CCTV room, Jackie finally mourns
the loss of her daughter.
For *Red Road* to be released at this historical moment, director Andrea Arnold asserts that women do not have to function as voyeuristic objects in the cinema and in the social spaces which cinema represents. Women can attain an agency of the look and a subjectivity that has traditionally favored men. However understated, perhaps the most important aspect of this film is that it was helmed by a female director in a mode that is so heavily dominated by (and focalized around) men. And while directors such as Kathryn Bigelow (*Strange Days*, 1995) and Jennifer Chambers Lynch (*Surveillance*, 2008) have released notable surveillance films, Arnold’s narrative stands alone for its feminized focalization.

I end this chapter by bookending my first discussion of *Sliver* in Chapter 1, the point in the film when the surveillance image of Carly’s body first occurs. *Sliver* concludes more radically than *Red Road*. Carly finds herself in Zeke’s control center.
(Fig. 4.29), the physical domain that permits Zeke’s look. Disgusted with his abuse of surveillance technologies, Carly shoots at the CCTV screens, the look’s mediating point (Fig. 4.30), while exclaiming “You like to look? Look at this!” The message behind her feminist awakening is clear: since Zeke threateningly engenders the surveillance look, his voyeurism will be punished with a “visual castration.” If Red Road’s function is to create a space for women to look, then Sliver’s ending articulates how women enforce the literal and figurative production of their image (as produced by men).

Fig. 4.29. Carly vengefully finds herself in Zeke’s control room. (Sliver. Directed by Philip Noyce. 1993. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures: Fig. 4.29—Fig. 4.30).

Fig. 4.30. Narrative closure as aggressive revenge: castrating the male look’s mediating point.

With this chapter I have argued that cinema configures modes of surveillance around women’s bodies and that are threatening rather than protective. I support this by analyzing patriarchy’s social hierarchy, cinema’s traditional organization of women as “objects-of-the-look,” and documented surveillance cases that reflect women’s continued subordination and control by men. Some of the films in this chapter, namely Sliver and
Away with Her, neatly align with the above interrelations since they structure surveillance around male voyeurism and women’s bodies. Compliance bears a more complicated relationship with gender because it disarticulates voyeurism’s sexual component and replaces it with the function of surveillance—which is a colder form of control. However, as The Ring and Red Road note, the surveillance narrative can also confront cinema and society’s patriarchal history of voyeurism in addition to its inherently gendered power imbalances. As these two films fight to claim back women’s ability to look, act, and possess ownership of their bodies (and its image), they illustrate how surveillance cinema can be as empowering, in a feminist context, as its female protagonists.
CONCLUSION: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS: THE FUTURE OF SURVEILLANCE CINEMA

The films discussed in this thesis thematize the transformations of the power of the look inherent in the increasing presence of surveillance images in social life. Thus, they raise a crucial question: is the cinema complicit in normalizing the forms of control that Deleuze points to in “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” or does it frame a way in which to challenge these structures through a critique of the power relations found in them? I have argued throughout this thesis that these new forms of the image also entail new subjects and bodies that appear “to-be-surveilled,” and it is from this context, rather than from a formal analysis alone, that a critique of the regimes of control is possible. What types of bodies are represented as subjects of surveillance? What motivates the particular surveillance situations? Do individuals, organizations, or governments instigate them? These relations are never incidental to the modes of the surveillance image.

Two potential problems, however, require further investigation: the significance of absence as a cinematic strategy in surveillance cinema, and the continued shift towards the digital image in both surveillance and cinema.

During the 2014 summer blockbuster season, Blumhouse Productions and Michael Bay’s Platinum Dunes released the sequel to surprise box office hit *The Purge* (James DeMonaco, 2013), entitled *The Purge: Anarchy* (James DeMonaco). *The Purge: Anarchy* takes place in the year 2023, nine years into the dystopian future. America is now run by the “New Founding Fathers,” a governmental sect that sanctions the annual “Purge”—a day where crime and murder are legal for twelve hours. In the film’s dystopic landscape, corporations and oligarchs rule. The wealthy, figured overwhelmingly as white (WASPs), have the means to protect themselves through guards, massive artillery, and access to high-tech surveillance. On this day, criminals and civilians alike release their frustrations. Mostly though, the affluent aim to rid the city of poor and racialized “others” by hunting them down, amplifying to the scale of an entire country the hierarchical violence of Shosdak’s *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932). *The Purge*’s powerful upper-class are driven by the belief, so instrumental in today’s political
landscape, that when these “othered” bodies are eradicated, America will become a prosperous nation yet again. Those “purging” think they are doing the country a commendable service. By killing off the “others” America will presumably free itself from high unemployment, soaring crime rates, and class division.

The sequel has salient differences from its predecessor. *The Purge* focuses on an upper-middle class white family. They fall victim to a home invasion after they save a young African-American teenager whose life is grossly endangered (Fig. 5.01). *The Purge’s* upper-middle class patriarch sells surveillance security systems to his wealthy techno-gated-community neighbors. Technology is thus central to the narrative, the characters, and the spaces they interact with (Fig. 5.02). *The Purge: Anarchy’s* narrative focuses on racialized lower-class “others.” Comparatively, those in *The Purge: Anarchy* lack the financial means to acquire the technologies that were figured prominently in *The Purge*. As the narrative focalizes on these “othered” bodies, technology is almost entirely absent from *The Purge: Anarchy*. The surveilling process remains hidden, even to the spectator, as diegetically, the affluent controllers track down the targeted characters in off-screen space.

Fig. 5.01. Racialized bodies are under surveillance, prey to a society that seeks to eradicate their existence. (*The Purge*. Directed by James DeMonaco. 2013. New York, NY: Universal Pictures: Fig. 5.01—Fig. 5.02).
What are the implications of these different strategies? *The Purge: Anarchy* describes how the surveillance narrative figures surveillance through the ubiquity and invisibility of the technology. The film associates the power and materiality of technologies with white upper-class bodies. As the film focuses its narrative around tracked bodies, technology is figured in its absence. This political strategy has figural and narrational repercussions that raise an important question: how does the film critique the surveillance of lower-class minorities? How does technology’s absence inform the narrative, and what are the implications of the way in which the film positions spectators with the “othered” victims?

*The Purge: Anarchy* suggests a different direction for the dystopic surveillance narrative. It comments on the surveillance of minorities instead of disingenuously organizing surveillance around white surveillors and white subjects (*see:* *THX 1138*, 1984, *Minority Report*, *Equilibrium*, and *Gattaca*). Looking deeper at Hollywood’s history of representing surveillance, most films overwhelmingly fall into this similar model. Fundamentally, Hollywood avoids representing the true location of surveillance. Even the modern conspiracy thriller fails to critique surveillance practices specifically, despite one example, *Enemy of the State*, centering on an African American male. In the film, Will Smith’s character is only targeted because he possesses incriminating evidence against a governmental agent, not because of his race, and especially not because of his modestly wealthy class status. *Enemy of the State* does not challenge specific power structures, hence I do not elaborate on it as such within the main thesis.
American films supported by major studios are still dominated by images of whiteness. This problem is prevalent even within my corpus. For example, the “whiteness under watch” found-footage films Devil’s Due, 388 Arletta Avenue, and Paranormal Activity inevitably comment on race only through its absence. The same can be said for recent European surveillance films, including Germany’s Das Experiment (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2001), in which twenty male participants volunteer to be cast as prison guards and prisoners—the participants either monitor or consent to be monitored through surveillance procedures. Loosely modeled after the Stanford Prison Experiments, these volunteers are almost all white. By positioning its cast as a uniform race, Das Experiment recalls the prison subjects that are rendered homogenous under Foucauldian panopticism. One must ask what it means for the film to figure the prison system as overwhelmingly white, whereas, at least in America, the ratios of white to minority populations are devastatingly imbalanced?

The issues of class and race are central to modern surveillance theory and practice, yet in films they are still not appropriately represented. In part, this is why I devote an entire chapter to gender as opposed to exclusively class or race, considering how cinema has a tradition of staging women as objects-of-the-look. Gendered surveillance narratives are numerous and developed; they illustrate women’s victimization throughout history, yet they also allude to the ways in which women can either combat their surveillance or gain agency from surveilling. Direct commentaries on race and class in the surveillance narrative are few-and-far-between. This suggests why Caché has received much critical attention, since it confronts both race (Algerian “otherness”) and class (Majid as a socio-economically lower-class citizen) in a very deliberate formal mode and in relation to French history. Haneke’s narrative is reflexive as a film about race, class, and negation. Caché brings attention to the fact that it refuses to show the actual surveillance process or how minorities interact with surveillance technology.

In addition to confronting race, class, and absence in surveillance cinema, one must ask where the future lies with the shift to the digital image. Surveillance technology’s digitalization has run concurrently to cinema’s own transition to digital
production and projection. More generally, this crucial shift to digital technologies is linked directly to the rise of the surveillance image, and thus, its figuration in cinema. Digital monitoring technologies are found seemingly everywhere, primarily because their implementation is less costly, and occasionally more efficient, than hiring human operatives. With the turn to storing recorded images, human labor is further removed from the process of scanning. Mechanization suggests forms of control that are detached from human subjective reaction and interpretation. What does it mean for images of bodies to be surveilled and stored? How does this change the very nature of surveillance?

Above all, the digital revolution lets cinema figure surveillance imagery that better exemplifies its contemporary appearance and operation. Cinema’s digital turn also exposes celluloid’s may constraints: its high cost, limited availability (especially to independent filmmakers), and its particularly finite storage capacity. Digital technologies permit much longer takes (see: *Timecode* or *Russian Ark* [Alexander Sokurov, 2002]) and are markedly cheaper to employ. One of the promises supporting digital cinema is that with its relative inexpensiveness and widespread accessibility, filmmakers from all walks of life, both formally educated and amateur, can now produce work without the need for studio financing. To connect this back to my discussion of surveillance and “absence,” filmmakers may begin to take advantage of digital cinema’s many propositions by producing narratives that render marginalizing surveillance practices visible.

As society and culture continue to normalize surveillance technologies, we must ask why this figurative absence still exists in cinema and why it is left largely unattended. Even in this new digital economy, surveillance cinema concludes that surveillance technology is still a hegemonic form of the image used to gain dominion over “others.” Sub-veillance narratives like *Caché* and *Red Road*, the only non-American films in my corpus, fight this notion, but they are only two examples that oppose the majority: surveillance cinema’s repeated practice of marginalization. Since the sub-veillance narratives exist outside of Hollywood, they suggest how Hollywood, as an institution, refuses to acknowledge its narrow representation of surveillance. Taking this into consideration, American surveillance cinema can only critique power relations as they
appear in films traditionally (locating “othered” bodies as victims), or figuratively, as the
notion of absence or negation implies.
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