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Surveillance Cinema: Narrative between Technology and Politics

Catherine Zimmer, *Pace University*

Catherine Zimmer

Pace University, USA. czimmer@pace.edu

Abstract

This essay examines both the historical emergence of surveillance themes in narrative cinema and their theoretical treatment. Arguing that the field of cinema studies has overwhelmingly distilled the discussion of complex and dynamic surveillance formations into either psychoanalytic accounts of voyeuristic pleasure or the Foucauldian model of panopticism, the essay demonstrates that the technological, political, and racial formations of surveillance that have consolidated around screen narratives complicate these theoretical parameters. Through analysis of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century short films, and the canonical example of Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, the essay suggests how 'surveillance cinema' might be addressed with greater attention to structural and historical specificity, as well as how cinematic narrative has itself been produced as a technology of surveillance.

In Paris, an oppressively static video gaze keeps watch on a bourgeois home and eventually leads to the disintegration of two families. A webcam in Portland documents the torture and death of kidnap victims, as each visitor to the website hastens the death of the subject—each site 'hit' becomes a literal act of violence. A device is unveiled to a New Orleans law enforcement officer that allows one to visually monitor past events as futural—and even intervene in a terrorist plot that has 'already' killed hundreds. And in a series of basements, warehouses, hotel rooms, and remote cabins throughout the known world, there are apparently myriad individuals and groups dedicated to the development and use of complex video surveillance systems that can contribute to elaborate torture scenarios.

The above film plots represent only a fraction of the cinematic narrative focus on surveillance technologies that has become increasingly common over the last fifteen years in a variety of arenas, in examples ranging from European 'art' cinema to American action-suspense, and on through the global reinvestment in horror. Works such as *Enemy of the State*, *Strange Days*, *Rising Sun*, *The End of Violence*, *Eagle Eye*, *Vantage Point*, *Untraceable*, *Déjà vu*, *Surveillance*, *Minority Report, Sliver, Caché*, *The Lives of Others*, and *The Wire* all organize their narratives entirely around surveillance technologies and practices, while others such as the *Saw* series, *District 9*, *Body of Lies*, *Lost Highway*, *Captivity, Panic Room, Snake Eyes*, and any number of contemporary action films utilize surveillance technologies as an occasional narrative or stylistic device. Taking as a starting point the recent surge in film and television narratives focused on and structured by surveillance technologies, this essay offers a historical and theoretical re-examination of the manner in which screen narrative has organized political, racial, affective, and even material formations around and through surveillance. I want to demonstrate that even when films are focused on insistently visual deployments of surveillance technologies, the narrative construction around those technologies suggests highly complex dynamics—dynamics that neither

psychoanalytic conceptions of voyeurism nor Foucault's discourse on Bentham's panopticon can entirely account for. The visual orientation of these approaches has made them, at least within the realm of cinema studies, the accounts that have overwhelmingly served to explain the formations and functions of a variety of disparate surveillance-themed narratives. A more phenomenological reading of the relations between technology and narrative, as well as a more dynamic intersection with political philosophy as is represented in the growing field of surveillance studies, allows us to see how what I am calling 'surveillance cinema' serves to consolidate the stakes of surveillance technologies and practices with greater attention to historical and structural specificity.

Cinema History, Surveillance History

Beyond the attention paid to surveillance in recent cinema, and the clear debt cinematic surveillance narratives owe to literary imaginings of surveillance cultures (most obviously represented by Orwell's *1984*), one could argue that surveillance has been both a theme and practice of cinema from its origins and antecedents. Certainly the visual technologies associated with cinema are intimately connected with surveillance practice and the production of knowledge through visibility. As Alan Sekula and a number of others have accounted for, visual models, particularly photography, were centralized in the production of modern forms of identity and identification—both normative and deviant (Sekula 1995).[1] The production of the body as visible, measurable, and categorizable is without question one of the defining facets of both surveillance practice and modern subjectification. While it is important not to conflate cinematic practice with that of still photography, it is clear that the photograph is an essential element of cinematic production and thus the historical uses of photography certainly weigh on the moving image. The most exemplary of this are the respective motion study series photographs of Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey that are most often cited as the immediate precursors to cinema; thought of as a middle ground between the still image and a moving image, these attempts to measure and record the movement of both animal and human bodies are part of the biometric practices accumulating around the body in myriad discursive fields at that time. As Lisa Cartwright has succinctly argued in her book on medicine and visual culture,

> [T]he cinematic apparatus can be considered as a cultural technology for the discipline and management of the human body, and … the long history of bodily analysis in medicine and science is critically tied to the history of the development of the cinema as a popular cultural institution and a technological apparatus. (1995: 3)

It seems clear that the technological and historical emergence of cinematic practice is wrapped up in the production of visible bodies that is increasingly being recognized as the beginning of a modern global culture defined by mediated visibilities and surveillance, and it is not necessary to fully retread that path. However, despite the historical and technological arguments made in a variety of arenas in cinema studies (from Jean-Louis Comolli's 'Machines of the Visible' (1980), to Linda Williams' *Hard Core* (1989), to Lisa Cartwright's aforementioned work on medical imaging) that implicitly suggest the complexities of surveillance practice to be necessarily contiguous with cinematic production, the account of *narratives* of surveillance has remained either overwhelmingly indebted to a psychoanalytic account of voyeurism that cannot process the political and historical complexities of surveillance, or else a historical reading of surveillance narratives that does not account for the specificity of the formal interactions between narrative, surveillance technologies, and the cinematic apparatus.

Even before narrative forms began to dominate cinematic practice, imagery we have come to associate with surveillance has been with film from the beginning. As Thomas Levin has pointed out, one of the first Lumière actualités, *La sortie des usines Lumière* [*Workers Leaving the Factory*] (1895), was, after all,

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[1] Cf. Alan Sekula (1986), John Tagg (1993), and Suren Lalvani (1996).

the filming of the Lumières' own employees, a form of corporate surveillance; however benign it was in this initial incarnation, the monitoring and control of the workplace, visually and otherwise, has become one of the more predominant forms of surveillance (Levin 2002: 581). The phenomenon was certainly not limited to this early experiment. In the United States in 1904, the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company produced a series of films showcasing the operations of various factories of the Westinghouse Works.[2] And it is also true that the documentary impulse behind the majority of the Lumière *actualité* productions, which characterized at least half of the fantasy of cinema from its inception, is on a certain level logically inseparable from the same evidentiary claims of the visual surveillance that was to follow, and it is thus not surprising that *La sortie des usines Lumière*, a celebration of the Lumière industry both in front of the camera and in the medium itself, would find itself quoted by the video surveillance now ubiquitously positioned at the threshold of a great majority of businesses—be they corporate, industrial, or corner groceries.

While other early cinema, primarily that of the United States, was both more spectacular and performance driven, it is worth noting that as soon as narrative began to make its way into these films, surveillance thematics soon followed. In a number of contexts early films such as *Naughty Grandpa and the Field Glass* (1902) or *Photographing a Female Crook* (1904) have been shown to reflexively thematize the act of watching and the incorporation of visual technologies (in the case of *Photographing the Female Crook*, explicitly for the purposes of identification discussed above). But beyond these reflexive examples of narratives organized around voyeurism and/or visual apparatuses, it seems notable that there was a fairly constant churning out in the first ten years of cinema of 'caught in the act' narratives, implicitly casting both the construction of cinematic narrative and the cinematic technology as a revelatory device around, in particular, crime and sexuality. In the United States, such films ranging from *Interrupted Lovers* (1896), *Tenderloin at Night* (1899), *The Chicken Thieves* (1896), *Grandma and the Bad Boys* (1900), *Why Mrs. Jones Got a Divorce* (1900), *The Divorce* (1903), *The Kleptomaniac* (1905), *The Burglar's Slide for Life* (1905), *Getting Evidence* (1906) and countless others show a variety of sexually and criminally illicit behaviours to be accessible (and often punishable) by the motion picture camera, in the service of effects ranging from pure documentation to comedy to adventure. Tom Gunning has noted in his essay on photography, detective fiction, and early cinema that, 'The camera recording the very act of malefaction appears in drama, literature, and early film before it was really an important process of criminal detection' (1995: 35). Norman Denzin goes so far as to suggest that these early films 'made the camera the new way of establishing social and moral transgressions in private life' (1995: 29). These early films were laying the groundwork for cinematic genres to come, but they were also clearly mapping the kind of exercises of both surveillance narrative and surveillance practice that are often considered more contemporary:

> While the perfection of video has now made the recording of a crime a pervasive and effective form of surveillance (as well as a form of media entertainment), a fascination with photographic evidence of misdeeds seems to predate considerably its widespread application in reality. (Gunning 1995: 35)

While Gunning and Denzin are referring to films that *explicitly* incorporated photography and motion picture cameras into their narratives, I would extend the point to include all those early films presenting an illicit act as their focus, and suggest that both the non-diegetic motion picture camera and the drive toward narrative are also structured around the surveillant capacities of cinema.

The technical structure of these films is retroactively familiar in this light: the camera is placed in the scene before the actors appear and the crime takes place; it waits for them and captures the action that unfolds. What were then the limitations on camera movement and editing practice appear in retrospect

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[2] Library of Congress, 'Inside an American Factory: Films of the Westinghouse Works.'
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/papr/west/westhome.html (Accessed July 23, 2009).

extremely similar to the look of a stationary surveillance video camera, which also is positioned to wait for something to occur in front of it. And even with the elaborate forms of editing and camerawork that have followed in narrative cinema, it is still basic continuity practice to have the camera placed in a location preceding the entry of characters or occurrence of action in that space (even if only by a split second). As Dietmar Kammerer has pointed out,

> The techniques of editing and montage in cinema rely on the same principles that can be found in any surveillance system. Therefore, even if cinema and TV have in the last years started to incorporate CCTV into their formats, plots, storylines, the relation between these 'texts' of popular cultures and this technology of surveillance is not a simple one. (2004: 473)

In many ways, the 'caught on tape' forms of both surveillance practice and entertainment that are characteristic of later twentieth century and contemporary televisual media, and based on the increasing ubiquity of video and then digital video, are forms that preceded video surveillance by over half a century. Following Gunning, I would argue that the caught on tape phenomenon, a form that has had not just popular culture but political and legal effects, is suggested by film history to be a *narrative conceit of cinema* long before it was an operational mode of surveillance technology. However, it is also true that, as Kammerer states, 'there is no simple cause-and-effect relation between these two [surveillance and cultural texts]' and thus even if we are rethinking the timeline we should not assume that one is merely reflecting the other (2004: 473).

In fact, from the simplest narratives of early cinema to the most complex psychological, aesthetic, philosophical and political explorations of contemporary film, narrativity and surveillance have continued to intersect in dynamic and structurally significant ways. For instance, a number of early crime films were also chase films, such as *Stop Thief* (1901), *A Desperate Poaching Affray* (1903) and the better-known *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). Theorists and historians of early cinema, particularly Noël Burch, have pointed out how integral the chase film was to the development of the basic technique of narrative cinema, with Burch going so far as to claim that 'institutional continuity was born with the chase, or rather the latter came into being and proliferated so that continuity could be established' (Burch 1990: 149). Within this argument, the continuity editing that became definitional of narrative cinema as it allowed smooth and motivated transitions between spaces does not merely serve to promote the surveillant capacities of cinema: cinematic continuity—and thus narrative—is predicated on visualizable crime and discipline. These early films anticipate the way more recent action films such as *Enemy of the State* (1998) and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) would incorporate surveillance into their continuity devices as a narrative technology. What in the early unedited films is merely the capture (and production) of a crime and chase on film becomes in the more recent examples the narrative inclusion of satellites, global positioning systems and closed circuit television into the cinematic processes in order to motivate, advance, and legitimize fast-paced cross-cutting to establish narrative connectivity. Once again, the technologies of surveillance seem primarily to serve the devices of narrative as developed cinematically. The ability to track individuals over space and time was presented as the domain of cinematic narrative long before such a possibility would be offered by non-cinematic surveillance technologies.

However, these early films were simultaneously revealing that while the camera might produce, expose, chase, and capture an illicit act or figure, the visual production of these moments and subjects is rife with ambiguity, and that the field of visibility is a highly contested one, particularly around structures of identity. In *Photographing a Female Crook*, the moving image serves to humorously establish the failure of the still image to 'capture' the criminal, as the subject contorts her face into unrecognizable form every time the police try to snap a mug shot. *The Old Maid Having Her Picture Taken* (1901) similarly builds its humour on the failure of photography to capture the image of a woman, presenting a number of mishaps in a photo shoot that culminate in the camera finally exploding in a puff of smoke. Because it is the work of

still photography that is poked fun at within cinematic texts, these films seem to suggest that the moving image we are watching is more 'in the know' than the photograph, but they can't help but also serve to undermine the production of identity through visual technologies in general.[3] In fact, while 'caught in the act' and chase films were frequent narrative tropes, misunderstanding and mistaken identity were equally as common. A variety of comedic situations in these early films were predicated on the play between visibility and knowledge (both for the films' characters and the films' spectators), such as the Edwin Porter film *The Unappreciated Joke* (1903), in which a man reading something comical on a street car fails to notice that his friend sitting next to him has disembarked and has been replaced by an elderly lady, who becomes scandalized and angry when he slaps her on the knee and otherwise physically molests her in the belief that he is enjoying a joke with his male friend.

At times, the 'caught in the act' films and the misunderstanding films become one and the same: the Edison Company produced, for instance, a series of 'Bad Boys' films, in which the eponymous characters are shown by the motion picture camera to be responsible for a number of hijinks. In one such film, *The Bad Boys' Joke on the Nurse* (1901), a nurse sleeps while holding an infant. An old man sleeps across the room from her. The film shows the 'bad boys' sneaking in and taking the infant from the nurse, placing it in the sleeping old man's arms. Upon awakening, the nurse attacks the older man for the kidnapping and the police marches them both off. In this case, and in *The Unappreciated Joke*, it is of course the surveillant capacities of the motion picture camera that assures that, while the narrative may turn on misunderstanding, the technology and the spectator know all, and the joke is only on the characters within the film.

But this is certainly not always the case, and the misunderstandings and mistaken identities within narratives soon developed to also make the visual mastery of the camera the butt of the joke, as was done with the photography narratives mentioned above. One of the most famous instances of this is Porter's *What Happened in the Tunnel* (1903), which couples a narrative of sexual impropriety with a racial punch line: in this film, a white woman on a train who is being sexually harassed replaces herself with her black maid as the train goes through a tunnel and the screen goes dark—the white male aggressor finds himself kissing the black woman as the scene becomes visible again to both the characters in the film and the spectators. In this case, racial visibility and cinematic technology become one and the same, and the joke is predicated on the failure and then reestablishment of both. The use of cinematic narrative and technology in this film to symptomatize intersections of race, sexuality, and the visual field has been discussed in a variety of contexts, and within a discussion of surveillance it is clearly also salient insofar as it is race in particular that has been historically produced as visual through surveillance practices and technologies.[4]

The stakes of this become clearer if we return to the 'caught in the act' and chase films. In the context of the construction of the black image in early cinema, Jacqueline Stewart discusses at some length the film *A Nigger in the Woodpile* (1904), which establishes both narrativity and racialized criminality as part and parcel of the visible field offered by cinema. Beyond the general surveillant principles attending cinematic narration mentioned above, this film allows us to see the more complex relations between narrative and surveillance practice offered by cinema from its beginnings. As Stewart describes it,

> [*Nigger in the Woodpile*] hinges upon the disguise and exposure of acts of Black transgression, as well as white retaliation, as seen by the camera, the viewer, and the characters in the film. When the film opens, two white farmers know that Blacks have

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[3] The gender politics of the fact that it is the female image that seems to particularly trouble these technologies is also clearly worth further discussion.

[4] Some notable discussions of the film include Susan Courtney's work in *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race, 1903-1967* and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart's *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*.

been stealing their wood, even though they, and the viewer, have not yet witnessed this act; Black criminality is the already understood subtext of the action before a single Black figure has appeared … The film constructs a scenario around a common slang expression, 'a nigger in the woodpile,' and takes it beyond its colloquial usage. The saying … refers to a situation involving something suspicious and/or concealed. In the film bearing this title, there are, literally, two niggers (Black men) sneaking into a woodpile; as such, there is no need to narratively motivate their criminal actions. The 'niggers' presented in this film confirm the popular expression by embodying its literal and figurative meanings. These characters are not the only 'niggers in the woodpile' operating in the film—there is also the stick of dynamite the white farmers have concealed inside one of the logs to expose the thieves. Thus, *A Nigger in the Woodpile* plays with the stereotype of Black criminality by multiplying the meaning of the title to signify the identity of the criminals, the scene of the crime, and the means of their exposure and punishment. (2005: 39)

In the context of 'caught in the act' and chase films, Stewart's account of this particular film shows how much those tropes were operating alongside and through the construction of race in the United States. Stewart's description of the assumptions that go into an effective reading of the multiplication of meanings of the film's title is uncannily similar to a description of the historical surveillance and policing practices of the African-American population, which served to produce identifiable visual markers around black identity, establish surveillance around an assumption of black criminality, and use that surveillance to expose and discipline. In other words, the multiplication of meaning in the film, which becomes the narrative structure, is identical with the purposes and practices of surveillance, particularly in regards to the production of race, specifically the black subject.

Christian Parenti's history of surveillance in the United States makes it clear that the project of identification in this country, even preceding the visual technologies I am discussing, is a specifically racial one, initially emerging to assist in the monitoring and capture of escaped slaves:

> The *Gazette*… ran an average of 230 runaway notices a year during the eighteenth century, and all of them had one thing in common: they sought to identify people who, as slaves, supposedly had no identity. In other words, the master class was forced to develop not just methods of terror but also a haphazard system of identification and surveillance. The result was in many ways the imprint of modern everyday surveillance. (2003: 14)

Citing slave patrols, the slave pass, and wanted posters as the three key methods of monitoring and enforcement, Parenti demonstrates that the lineage of police enforcement and the production of bodies as informationally and visually identifiable is directly traceable to the production and maintenance of a slave economy (2003: 15). Surveillance is thus, at its origins, designed to produce identity along racial lines, while at the same time disavowing identity in order to maintain the racialized subject as object. As Stewart shows in her analysis of the film above, cinematic narratives organized around race were engaged in a similar project, producing the black figure as an identity that is without identity: a signifier upon which the narrative can turn.

However, the multiplicity of meanings that Stewart addresses in her analysis of *Nigger in the Woodpile* suggests that even in a film that explicitly seeks to establish and punish the black subject, the narrative production of criminality and discipline is predicated on meanings being multiplied, and thus, in many ways, destabilized. As the repeated tropes of early cinema testify, the production of identity through surveillance narratives often betrays how deeply ambiguous the visual field is, thus undermining the logic

of both race and visual surveillance simultaneously.[5] Close analysis of these narrative devices, themselves so intimately connected to the production of the purposes and capacities of surveillance, thus should serve to expose the logic (both functional and failed) of surveillance practice in some of its highly specific forms.

Cinema Studies, Surveillance Studies

Despite the historically specific and political implications of the kinds of surveillance narratives I have been discussing, the predominance of theories of the look and gaze as the privileged accounts of what it means to watch has organized most discussions of surveillance narrative around scopophilia, voyeurism, identification, and other either psychoanalytic accounts or refutations of those accounts. Work on visibility and the act of looking has become increasingly theoretically complex, and yet the overarching treatment of surveillance issues in the film studies discipline has remained committed to psychoanalytic conceptions of voyeurism as the model for the study of this abiding—though frequently mutating—narrative and stylistic trope.

Even in work that clearly seeks to account for the diversity of surveillance narratives, and the multiplicity of media formations that have become a part of cinematic visibilities, the temptation to theoretically distill these narrative dynamics down to the now almost traditional account of voyeurism remains strong. John Turner's 1998 article, 'Collapsing the Interior/Exterior Distinction: Surveillance, Spectacle, and Suspense in Popular Cinema,' for instance, begins to trace the intersection of surveillance and narrative structure in a number of promising ways, arguing that

> the films that address the practice of surveillance or use of surveillance technologies in their narratives do so as an opportunity to celebrate the spectacle elements invested in surveillance or to integrate the use of surveillance as a narratival device to promote suspense and subsequently, violence. (1998: 94)

Building on Guy Debord's account of spectacle, Turner looks at the structure of cinematic narrative around surveillance and highlights some of the truly complex formations at work therein:

> In those films that incorporate surveillance functions in their narrative, we are treated to an image of distance, speed, ubiquity, and simultaneity—all qualities of the spectacle as well,' going on to state that 'spectacle and surveillance are collapsed onto one another as an effective disciplinary apparatus—a set of techniques for the management of bodies, the management of attention, and for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities. (1998: 96)

Through the incorporation of Debord and the implicit invocation of Foucault, Turner here points towards several aspects of surveillance narrative that exceed the explanatory code of scopophilic pleasure, and yet somewhat surprisingly, Turner's ultimate point seems to be that the complexity of all the technological and narrative dynamics accumulating around surveillance *are* being reduced to that code:

> By mixing the activity of invasive monitoring devices with entertainment, Hollywood cinema and television productions gloss over the collective anxieties about being spied upon and reduce it to the seductive emotion of voyeuristic delight. (1998: 107)

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[5] I discuss this ambiguity around race and the visual field in surveillance narratives more fully in my forthcoming essay, 'Caught on Tape?: The Politics of Video in the New Torture Film,' in *Horror after 9/11*.

There is of course a certain inarguable element to this point—surveillance has become very pleasurably spectacularized through cinema, television, and now the internet—but this general conclusion eclipses a number of the more specific points that Turner raises around the contiguous functions of narrative and surveillance that could prove extremely revealing in terms of the political and material formations of each. What seems to be one of the most 'seductive' elements here, in the final analysis, is the use of voyeurism as a consolidating theoretical device.

Norman Denzin's book, *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze* (1995), comes closest to being a comprehensive text on the subject of surveillance-themed cinema, what he calls 'reflexive-voyeuristic cinema' (2), and yet, as his title and description suggest, the characterization of a cinema and a society of voyeurism keeps his book closely linked to accounts that conflate surveillant structures with voyeuristic ones. And though Denzin's account of voyeurism is extremely complex and well researched, giving an overview of accounts of the gaze from Sartre to Mulvey, Merleau-Ponty to Foucault, the very breadth of the account, as well as his exploration of a variety of political and social structures around both cinema and surveillance, makes his ultimate use of the individual voyeur as the privileged structural model somewhat questionable both theoretically and organizationally. Thus, even with the numerous compelling claims the book makes about the historical production of the voyeur as a 'new social type' through cinematic narrative (1995: 15), the text ultimately seems predicated on the cinema studies formula that suggests that the voyeuristic look and the structures of surveillance practice are one and the same.

Even in a study that departs somewhat from this model, Wheeler Winston Dixon's chapter 'Surveillance in the Cinema,' in his book *It Looks at You*, few surveillance narratives are mentioned, and the chapter is primarily focused on the manner in which actors gaze at the camera and thus the film appears to return the gaze of the spectator. Dixon makes a number of salient points about the reciprocity of the cinematic look, discussing the cinematic phenomenon as part and parcel of a broader panopticism, ultimately making the absolutely necessary observation that so much attention has been paid to the spectator's gaze at the film that little attention has been paid to the way that the film itself incorporates the viewer through its own gaze. While Dixon's point, that this gaze subjects the spectator to the 'same sort of reciprocal surveillance that is experienced between prisoners and guards, a state that leads the viewer, inevitably, to look within her/himself,' might be overstating the correlation of cinematic experience with a panoptic structure, he makes the important phenomenological point that the power dynamics of the cinematic look must be considered within a series of material structures of surveillance within the cinematic domain (Dixon 1995: 17). The discussion, for instance, of surveillance of the audience in movie theatres by surveillance cameras, smoke detectors, and trailers reminding moviegoers of the rules of spectatorship reminds us that 'every aspect of the reception experience in the cinema is monitored, seen by the unseen, a space of fabulation that masquerades as semiprivate, when it is, in fact, part of the public sphere,' and thus is suggestive of a number of extra-textual ways that cinema and surveillance intersect (1995: 46). However, the specificity of narrative construction in relation to surveillance technologies and practices, and close analysis of individual cinematic surveillance narratives, is not part of the project, and thus the dynamics at play between narratives and these extra-textual factors remains underexplored.

Thomas Levin, from the angle of cinema studies, has gone the furthest in exploring the more structurally specific manners in which cinematic narrative has formed itself around what he terms 'rhetorics of surveillance,' and argues that 'cinematic narration could be said, in many cases, to have effectively become synonymous with surveillant enunciation as such' (2002: 582). And while Levin's argument that the cinematic move away from merely a 'thematic to a *structural* engagement of surveillance,' is not at first glance distinct from Turner's analysis of how surveillance becomes spectacle, Levin's focus on the use of 'real time' surveillance structures within cinematic narrative to argue that 'cinema has displaced an impoverished spatial rhetoric of photo-chemical indexicality with a thoroughly contemporary, and equally semiotically "motivated" rhetoric of *temporal indexicality*' goes considerably further in exploring how the very particular functions of surveillance and the structures of cinematic narrative are informing each other

to the degree that we might begin to understand not merely that surveillance and popular entertainment intersect, but how they might be seen to be mutual structuring (2002: 582, 592).

And while cinema theorists have frequently neglected to attend to the vicissitudes of surveillance culture that simultaneously diversify and consolidate the kinds of subjects emerging in narratives of surveillance, surveillance theorists have not ignored the voyeuristic pleasures that constitute a portion of surveillance cultures. David Lyon has argued that

> surveillance—which at its social and etymological core is about watching—is easily accepted because all sorts of watching have become commonplace within a 'viewer society,' encouraged by the culture of TV and cinema,' highlighting how enmeshed surveillance and entertainment have become. (2006: 36)

Though I would argue that the 'viewer society' of cinema and television are as much structured by surveillance practice as *vice versa*, Lyon's point that the relations we have to each are somewhat inseparable demonstrates the need for theoretical intersections as well. Parenti's history of American surveillance includes a chapter on 'Voyeurism and Security Culture,' intriguingly tying together reality television shows, narrative cinema such as *Panic Room* (2002), and the home security industry; though Parenti's account of reality television shows is rather simplistically judgmental ('All pander to our voyeurism and other base appetites'), as with Lyon, Parenti recognizes the obvious structural and discursive ties between media narrative and the broader politics of surveillance (2003: 185). But here we see again that even within a historical discussion of surveillance, voyeurism frequently emerges as a given—a 'base' instinct to be capitalized upon to further cement socio-political power formations, rather than itself a historical phenomenon. A more in-depth consideration of the relations between narrative cinema and surveillance practice—between cinema studies and surveillance studies—can offer up the material specificities of each to understand how, for instance, voyeurism does not just become a political tool, but historically emerges (and re-emerges) as a political project.

I thus want to briefly review the canonical treatment of the surveillance narrative *Rear Window* (1954) and also show how such a cinematic narrative highlighted the ways that personal pathologies of voyeurism, and the study of narratives of voyeurism, are always informed by the historical uses of technologies, and the political and institutionalized stagings of surveillance technique. Demonstrating that the multiple theoretical reworkings of such a film almost always introduce scopophilic desire and political context as an and/or formulation, I want to argue for an analysis that explores the contiguous relations between those structures as a way to understand the historical production of surveillance culture.

With Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, what Robert Stam calls the 'paradigmatic instance' of an 'allegory of spectatorship,' we are offered what for film studies has been a reflexive meditation on what it means to watch, both personally and on a social level (1995: 43). Given that the film situates its protagonist, L.B. 'Jeff' Jefferies, as a binocular-wielding invalid who becomes more interested in surveying his neighbours than in his physically present girlfriend, the film would seem to be the perfect example of the pathologized model of voyeuristic watching, as evidenced by Laura Mulvey's seminal account of the film in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' as well as a number of feminist analyses of the film that followed (1999).[6] My concern is not actually to dispute that reading of this film. Of more consequence to me are the always gestured toward but incompletely explored intersections between the psychoanalysis of the spectatorial subject that emerges here, and the more explicitly politicized and historical formations at work. Going further with Stam's account of the film, for instance, we see him beginning his analysis by comparing Jefferies' position watching the windows of his neighbours to that of Christian Metz's cinematic spectator, providing a compelling account of the structural similarities between the film's main character and the

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[6] Also cf. Tania Modleski's 'The Master's Dollhouse,' in *The Women Who Knew Too Much*: *Hitchcock and Feminist Theory.*

film's spectator, and thus the basis for what he considers the film's critique of voyeurism through its progressive 'shattering of illusory distance' required for voyeuristic pleasure (Stam 1995: 50). But tellingly, Stam also notes the structural similarity of Jefferies to that of a 'warden … in a private panopticon' (1995: 48). What gets elided here in between the invocations of the psychoanalytic model and the Foucaldian reference are the relations and distinctions between these formulations. Foucault is dropped as soon as he is mentioned, as if the panoptic model simply reinforced that of the voyeuristic, without any account of the differing stakes and how subjects are produced in those different accounts. Because the power relations of the panoptic model would seem at first glance to map fairly easily onto the voyeuristic model, the complexities of the social dynamics produced through Foucault's account of the panopticon become reduced to the scopophilic structure that cannot contain those dynamics, either in the political specificity that Foucault originally described, or the narrative and imagery of urban community that *Rear Window* addresses.[7] As such, while Stam's account remains as a persuasive account of the film's allegories of cinematic spectatorship, it is also extremely symptomatic of how cinema studies' readings of surveillance narrative have overwhelmingly tended to distill surveillance into voyeurism, even as there has seemed to be an awareness that the structural devices at work are more diverse.

The work on the film that builds on and/or departs from the more foundational accounts of Mulvey and Stam tend to dispute primarily the film's versions and meanings of voyeurism and scopophilia. Barton Palmer revisited the theme early on by suggesting that even if *Rear Window* is undoubtedly a film about spectatorship and voyeurism, it also is a narrative that moves Jeff 'inexorably toward action' and that 'Jeff's voyeurism … may be seen as an initial stage in a therapeutic project which delivers him to the joys and responsibilities, however ironically undermined, of full adult life,' and Lawrence Howe has recently complicated prior accounts of the film's approach to the act of watching by arguing that the film 'is as much about scopophobia as it is about scopophilia' (Palmer 1986: 8; Howe 2008: 17). All these authors gesture toward the issues of 'social order' and political context, and their analyses significantly complicate how the act of watching in *Rear Window* (and in general) might be understood.

And yet it is striking that, across more than twenty years of scholarship, while the logic and lessons of the film's account of voyeurism and scopophilia might be under interrogation, the logic of addressing the film through the pathological version of voyeurism seems relatively undisturbed by a consideration of the historical production of surveillance culture in the United States, both as presented in cinema and in the larger social arena. Even George Toles, who makes the move toward addressing multiple critical discourses accessing and accessible through *Rear Window*, remains markedly resistant to suggesting the contexts and intersections between the film's (and its critics') discursive modes (1989).[8] Armond White seeks to explicitly reveal some of the political underpinnings of the film in 'Eternal Vigilance in *Rear Window*,' when he states that the film is a 'social study, relevant to issues of individual survival in the modern world—to how citizens cope with the difficult of dehumanizing structures of social life' (1999: 119).

Examining many of the social dynamics of the time, White brings to light the essentially political nature of Hitchcock's film, and connects *Rear Window* to the changing values and concerns around surveillance in later films such as *Blow-up* and *The Conversation*. Arguing that 'the basic trajectory of the film … is to expose and then to explore the tension between private and public, interior and exterior, the individual and the community,' White highlights how much this film reflects the political concerns of its time, concerns

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[7] Denzin's reading of *Rear Window* in *The Cinematic Society* borrows from Stam and similarly introduces the individual voyeur's look and Foucault's panopticon as models perfectly consistent with one another, though Denzin goes a bit further into the historical context of the film by discussing how the voyeur in this film is produced in relation to the 'impoverished, anomic character of mid-century urban American life' and the disappearance of community (1995: 118, 123).

[8] Somewhat remarkably, even Toles' compelling rehearsal of a Marxist, 'political,' analysis of the film focuses on the material structure of Jefferies' voyeurism presented within the film, rather than also the specificity of the historical conditions out of which the film emerged.

that resonate strongly with the production of surveillance practice (1999: 120). But in this essay which, importantly, actually focuses on the politics of *Rear Window* as well as surveillance-themed films that follow it, what tends to fall to the wayside is an analysis of the discourse of voyeurism that does indeed predominate both the film and the critical work on the film—White's impulse is to read the psychologizing of characters as allegory for social/political formations.[9] For White, though the politics are clearly historically material, in Hitchcock's film (and the films of Brian De Palma that quote Hitchcock so frequently) 'seeing' is a metaphor for human experience, rather than also a material formation (though he does later refer to vision as a 'crucial physical act'), and integral to the historical production of the visible field as part of the specific American political economy (1999: 133, 137). This is all to say that the psychoanalytically focused essays tend to eclipse the politics of the film, the historical/political accounts ignore the complexity of the ways subjectivity is being constructed, and even in analyses that raise both the political and the pathological models, the dynamics between the two are rarely explored as contiguous formations.

One significant exception to this is Robert Corber's 'Resisting History: *Rear Window* and the Limits of the Postwar Settlement,' which insists, beyond that we must account for the pathological *and* the political, that 'the psychologizing of political behavior … enabled … the establishment of the postwar settlement known as the liberal consensus' (1992: 126). Looking at the film's construction of voyeurism not in addition to or alongside the film's political context, but as dynamically interdependent, Corber argues:

> [*Rear Window*] readily admits that its technology facilitated the systematic repression of basic civil liberties (the right to free speech, the freedom of association) as a way of reclaiming that technology for the postwar settlement. Implicit in the film's 'confession' of its own tainted past is a critique of McCarthyism. The film pathologizes Jeff's constant surveillance of his neighbors by suggesting that he suffers from an arrested sexual development. By alluding to the McCarthy witch hunts in this way, the film repudiates its own 'fellow traveling.' Although it cannot deny that in the past the cinematic apparatus lent its technology to the national security state, it can recuperate that technology for the liberal consensus by indirectly attacking the government surveillance of suspected Communists, homosexuals, and lesbians as a form of psychopathology. (1992: 128)

Corber effectively argues that the pathological model is not an and/or position vis-à-vis politics, but a necessarily contiguous and historically specific construction:

> Hitchcock's film tries to show that under the scopic regime of the national security state voyeurism had become a surveillance practice. Jeff's voyeuristic practices are rooted in the establishment of a national security apparatus that legitimated the use of the camera for intruding on the privacy of others. His abuse of voyeuristic pleasure is directly related to a set of specific social conditions in which privacy had become politicized. (1992: 139).

Even further, Corber demonstrates the extremely complex dynamics at play in the construction of the individual, the security state, and liberal America through the narrativized formation of watching:

> The opening shots try to distinguish the voyeuristic economy of the filmic text from the scopic regime of the national security state by returning voyeuristic desire to the spectator's own psychical structures. In attributing Jeff's corrupt use of the camera to the

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[9] For instance, in his reading of De Palma's *Sisters* (1973), White states that 'Danielle's psychological split imputes peril to 1970s social complacency. Her lack of consciousness—her strict opposition of social and antisocial being as characterized by her alter ego Siamese twin Dominique—proves malevolent' (1999: 131).

rise of McCarthyism, the film tries to show that voyeuristic desire can be rehabilitated for the liberal consensus. (1992: 140)

Though I would argue that the film's relation to political surveillance practice is more ambivalent,[10] Corber's formulation of the interdependent dynamics of politics and pathology is an extremely instructive model for considering the construction of political and individualized subjects in the cinematic surveillance narratives that have both preceded and followed *Rear Window*. Corber goes on in his essay to show how both the cinematic experience and the specificity of the film's narrative work to organize private relations through an essentially politicized circuit of watching:

> In trying to insert the male heterosexual spectator into a voyeuristic subject position that is not political, it enacts the very collapse of the distinction between the public and private spheres it seeks to reverse. The only way in which the male heterosexual spectator can treat Lisa as an object of private consumption is in the public space of the darkened auditorium. Moreover, because Jeff and Lisa's relationship enacts the liberal consensus on a private level, it functions as an extension of the public sphere. It guarantees their free and spontaneous consent to the postwar settlement by fostering rational, enlightened debate about their common good. Thus, the film suggests that the political identity of the liberal subject *should* wholly saturate its humanity, for if the subject's humanity did not coincide perfectly with its political identity, then it might make political claims based on its identity as a gendered and/or racialized subject. For the liberals to maintain their hegemonic control over American culture, the liberal subject has to act as a political agent in the private, as well as in the public, sphere. (1992: 147)

Not only does this account demonstrate the historical import of the way surveillance is culturally processed, but in showing how the false dichotomy of pathology versus politics serves to structure relations between public and private space, it demonstrates why the psychoanalytic version of voyeur narratives not only functions alongside the social and political context of surveillance, but that the two mutually construct one another. Corber's argument about the relations in the film's narrative between pathological voyeurism and politically tinged surveillance highlights a significant instance of how we might view the discourse of voyeurism—especially as narrated in popular culture—as intimately related to the construction of politically specific subjects.

Rear Window is certainly not the only surveillance-themed film whose theoretical treatment presents this set of terms. Careful review of another such seminal film, Coppola's *The Conversation*, reveals a similar dynamic between historically material surveillance practices, technologies of cinematic narration, and discourses on personal pathology. These dynamics continue in the numerous examples of more contemporary films with which I began this essay, and prove extremely instructive in terms of the technological and political diversities currently in play. And certainly, and although it is not my focus here, televisual formations have even stronger associations with surveillance than cinematic ones, given the fact that video technologies more so than cinematic technologies constitute moving image surveillance, and reality television has become the marker of the consumer culture organized around surveillance.

My focus on cinema seeks not to detract from the clearer relation of television and video to surveillance or to conflate television and cinema, but to historicize the narrative and technological trends, and to show how the narrative codes of filmmaking that precede the televisual have influenced the processing of the

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[10] Certainly there is a critique of Jeff's surveillance but he is, after all, correct in his eventual suspicions that one of his neighbours has murdered his wife and in his desire to regulate the spaces of his neighbours, and the film organizes its personalized resolutions around a forensic legitimization of his otherwise pathological pursuits.

technologies and serial forms that followed. In doing so I think we might also historicize some of the recent narrative trends that would otherwise be read as insistently 'post-9/11,' and to show the way that narrative and stylistic analysis within cinema and media studies might function in concert with political philosophy and surveillance studies. A historical approach to the cinema of surveillance reveals a great deal about the uses of narrative as a political and ideological technology.

Ultimately I would argue that cinematic (and televisual) 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-centred media, but themselves as *practices* of surveillance. The subject/object relations so consistent in discussions of surveillance within film studies must necessarily become complicated by thinking through how the very notion of the 'subject' within a visual dynamic is being formulated and reformulated, not only through surveillance practices but in surveillance narratives as well. And in the realm of surveillance studies, a view to the historical development of these more involved narratives of surveillance, in conjunction with the emergence of cinematic narration as organizing and organized by the logic of surveillance practice, suggests that narratological considerations might usefully offer themselves to the detailed, material attention given to surveillance outside of the cinematic sphere.

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Filmography

A Desperate Poaching Affray (Dir. William Haggar, 1903)
Bad Boys' Joke on the Nurse, The (Edison Company, 1901)
Blow-up (Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966)
Body of Lies (Dir. Ridley Scott, 2008)
Bourne Ultimatum, The (Dir. Paul Greengrass, 2007)
Burglar's Slide for Life, The (Edison Company, 1905)
Caché (Dir. Michael Haneke, 2005)
Captivity (Dir. Roland Joffé, 2007)
Chicken Thieves, The (Edison Company, 1897)
Conversation, The (Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1974)
Déjà vu (Dir. Tony Scott, 2006)
District 9 (Dir. Neill Blomkamp, 2009)
Divorce, The (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1903)
Eagle Eye (Dir. D.J. Caruso, 2008)
End of Violence, The (Dir. Wim Wenders, 1997)
Enemy of the State (Dir. Tony Scott, 1998)
Getting Evidence (Dir. Edwin S. Porter, 1906)
Grandma and the Bad Boys (Edison Company, 1900)
Great Train Robbery, The (Edison Company, 1903)
Interrupted Lovers (Edison Company, 1896)
Kleptomaniac, The (Dir. Edwin S. Porter, 1905)
Lives of Others, The (Dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006)
Lost Highway (Dir. David Lynch, 1997)
Minority Report (Dir. Steven Spielberg, 2002)
Naughty Grandpa and the Field Glass (Edison Company, 1902)
Nigger in the Woodpile, A (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1904)
Old Maid Having Her Picture Taken, The (Edison Company, 1901)
Panic Room (Dir. David Fincher, 2002)
Photographing a Female Crook (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1904)
Rising Sun (Dir. Philip Kaufman, 1993)
Rear Window (Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1954)
Saw 1-6 (Various Directors, 2003-2009)
Sliver (Dir. Philip Noyce, 1993)
Snake Eyes (Dir. Brian De Palma, 1998)
La sortie des usine Lumière [*Workers Leaving the Factory*] (Lumière Brothers, 1895)
Stop Thief! (Dir. James Williamson, 1901)
Strange Days (Dir. Kathryn Bigelow, 1995)
Surveillance (Dir. Jennifer Lynch, 2008)
Tenderloin at Night (Edison Company, 1899)
Unappreciated Joke, The (Dir. Edwin S. Porter, 1903)
Untraceable (Dir. Gregory Hoblit, 2008)
Vantage Point (Dir. Pete Travis, 2008)
Westinghouse Works Collection (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co., 1904)
What Happened in the Tunnel (Dir. Edwin S. Porter, 1903)
Why Mrs. Jones Got a Divorce (Edison Company, 1900)
Wire, The (Various Directors 2002-2008)