

left alone. They might say they desire privacy rather than publicity. But there are many ways of asserting an objection to surveillance, from 'a right to be left alone', as American lawyer Warren Brandeis famously put it, to demands for anonymity, confidentiality or the right at least to know what is known about oneself by a surveillant organization. In fact people respond in a variety of ways to what surveillance they know about, often complying, sometimes negotiating an arrangement that seems more equitable or at least more beneficial or less harmful to the subject, and occasionally resisting. This can be institutionalized in legal remedies or may be actively expressed in a social or political movement. Either way, what happens to personal data is becoming more central to the politics of information.

Finally, in chapter 9, we return again to issues of what ought to be made visible, especially under the rubric of 'transparency'. Because today's technology-assisted surveillance context seems to have an insatiable appetite for personal data, and because those data may be used in invasive as well as supportive ways and for negative as well as positive social sorting and discrimination, every effort should be made at every level to ensure that people know what is happening. It is not merely a question of data-subjects claiming their 'privacy rights' but, more importantly, of surveillant organizations revealing how they use personal data and, where possible, obtaining consent for their use.

7 Surveillance, Visibility and Popular Culture

We're the stars of CCTV
 Making movies out on the street
 Flashing blue lights, camera, action
 Watching my life, main attraction
 We're the stars of CCTV
 Can't you see the camera loves me?

Hard-Fi, 'Stars of CCTV' (2005)

How do we know what being under surveillance, or engaging in surveillance, is really like? Why do we experience surveillance in specific ways? It is possible that we have been deliberately watched or, worse, bugged or stalked, or that we have become aware of advertisements 'mysteriously' targeted at us. Equally it is possible that we have studied surveillance or taken advantage of privacy policies or data protection law to discover how we can find out what 'they' know about us or to contest some infringement of our 'information rights'. Far more likely, however, that we know about surveillance because we have read about it in a classic novel such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) or that we have seen a film depicting surveillance such as *Enemy of the State* (1998). Such movies and novels help us get our bearings on what surveillance is all about and – because they are usually negative, dystopian – give us a sense of the kind of world we wish to avoid.

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. So,

far from fearing exposure, in some contemporary media exposure is relished, sought and celebrated. So, far from the terrifying prospect of losing one's freedom and dignity (in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) or one's means of identification ('identity theft') (in the movie, *The Net*, 1995), police TV shows like *CSI* give uncritical credence to the view that CCTV cameras 'really work' and reality TV shows such as *Big Brother* make full, intimate visibility to watchers a commendable condition.

While many surveillance theorists have debated the Panopticon, until Thomas Mathiesen offered a parallel concept of 'synopticon' little had been made of the vast array of electronic media developing alongside surveillance technologies in the twentieth century (Mathiesen 1997). Mathiesen argues that the 'viewer society' in which we live is not merely a surveillance society, where the few watch the many, it is also a mass media society, where the many watch the few. And whatever panoptic effects may be found in contemporary culture, they have to be considered in relation to synoptic ones because the latter help to shape our experience of the former. Indeed, Mathiesen suggested, they work together. This may be seen, strikingly, in the TV footage of 9/11 (where the many watched the few), which helped to establish in public opinion the notion that more surveillance (where the few watch the many) is required if terrorism is to be combated successfully (Lyon 2003a: 19–20; 2006c). One might also add to Mathiesen's comments the thought that while some people may have read social science or philosophical work on surveillance, a much larger audience will have seen a surveillance movie, so knowing how surveillance is framed in popular cultural forms such as film should at least be a rough guide to public perceptions.

Another take on this question comments not so much on the parallel worlds of electronic media as on the ways in which the gaze is already implicated and explored in popular media, especially in film. For Norman Denzin, one way of understanding the 'cinematic society' is as a 'voyeur's gaze' (Denzin 1995). Starting with Foucault's comment that the 'voyeur's gaze' is 'an inspecting gaze' that each individual interiorizes until they exercise surveillance over themselves (Foucault 1980b: 155), Denzin argues that the 'voyeur is the iconic, postmodern self, a product of the cinematic gaze' (Denzin 1995: 1). Such 'voyeurism' is shared, of course, by cinema audiences. 'Voyeurism' is a social as well as an individual practice, implicating on-screen characters who view each other and who are in turn viewed by those in the audience.

Denzin asks several key questions about the gaze that has dominated some 1,200 Hollywood films from 1900 to 1995. Why are only certain individuals allowed to look at others? What motivates the gaze, whether perverse or socially valued? What purposes does the gaze serve in wider society? And what are the costs and consequences of the gaze for the individual and society? But like Foucault, who in somewhat cavalier fashion lumps together the peeping Tom with the spy, reporter, detective or sociologist, Denzin argues that the cinematic society constantly switches surveillance codes so that the person gazed upon is the person doing the gazing. So what, he asks, gives anyone – including social scientists – a licence to gaze?

A further perspective on popular culture and surveillance is provided by Gary T. Marx (1996), whose analysis of a number of media is very suggestive. He suggests that a kind of *verstehen* – or sympathetic understanding of intentions and contexts – of surveillance experiences can be gleaned from popular media. I shall not replicate his telling comments on song lyrics and cartoons here – except for one – but it is worth noting his overall approach to the topic. The one exception is Marx's parallel text on the song by The Police, 'Every Breath You Take', in which he sees the title line as breathalyser, 'every move you make' as motion detector, 'every bond you break' as polygraph, and 'every step you take' as electronic monitoring. His analysis continues to the end of the song.

Marx argues that cultural analysis can help us understand the *experience* of being watched, or being a watcher, and also what sorts of values inform our understandings of surveillance technologies. More particularly, he says that these media help us see and understand new surveillance developments; that they remind us about power relations and struggles over meaning; that in contexts where egalitarianism and democracy are valued, surveillance practices are viewed cautiously but that the same technologies may be viewed differently depending on whether they are involved in care or control; and that looking at popular culture suggests new fields for social research, because both are concerned with the need to go 'beneath surface realities and to question conventions' (Marx 1996: 231).

In what follows, we explore the place of surveillance in popular culture and the place of popular culture in surveillance. While surveillance offers popular culture some of its dominant themes, our experience of surveillance is itself shaped in part by popular culture.

Thus, on the one hand, we have to examine what sorts of surveillance are portrayed in novels, films, song lyrics and other media, and how these may interact with extraordinary or everyday kinds of surveillance, with what consequences; and, on the other, it is necessary to look at how popular culture influences surveillance. In some obvious ways, ideas may be gleaned from mass media, such as the perhaps classic case of how a Spiderman comic strip inspired the electronic tagging of offenders (Lyon 1994), but in less evident ways, long-running TV shows such as *Big Brother* may not only normalize exposure but also open the door to further commercial surveillance of kinds that are far from apparent to its subjects.

In order to survey the terrain of surveillance in popular media (and vice versa) I shall deal with different kinds of media, in order, even though there may be considerable overlap in some important respects. Novels may become films, for instance, and take on a life that they never had in, or a different kind of life from, the text version. The aim is to ask how surveillance is portrayed in popular culture and thus how this might be thought to affect public perceptions of and interactions with surveillance. I draw on the work of a number of writers who have discussed these themes, both social scientists who examine the media and specialists such as literary, film and cultural theorists.

Defining surveillance studies: the novel

Sociologists and other social scientists frequently use metaphors and similes borrowed from elsewhere as descriptive and explanatory concepts. The idea of social *stratification*, for example, comes from the geological notion of the layering of rocks, and social *mobility* is loaned from kinetics, where actual physical movement is in mind. In fact, in the work of James Rule, the whole novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* functions as a kind of 'ideal type' situation, a worst-case scenario against which other, less dire, situations are measured (Rule 1973). The political nightmare depicted in that novel is seen as a 'total surveillance society' and its various constitutive features are explored in relation to actual social practices and processes of surveillance in the USA and Europe, such that the analyst can judge 'how far' these societies have progressed towards the 'ideal type'. It is a telling mode of analysis because it doubles as a political warning of 'what could happen' if certain trends are permitted to continue. However, like 'stratification'

(which could imply a rock-like resistance to change), the use of the novel as a conceptual trope could be misleading.

There is little doubt that the overwhelmingly popular metaphors for surveillance in the twentieth century came from George Orwell. In Western democracies, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is standard fare in high school and students have understood the novel variously as an attack on state socialism (especially during the Cold War years) or, as Orwell probably intended, as a warning about the totalitarian potentials of any modern bureaucratic nation-state. Orwell rightly foresaw that state power would be augmented by electronic means and depicted life under the looming, intrusive 'telescreen' to indicate this. He also connected this with ironic changes in language (the 'Ministry of Truth', or 'Minitrue', for example, deals with government propaganda) to show how cultural change, rather than mere subjection to the state, is pursued in Oceania.

The surveillance system of Oceania relies on both audio and visual data. As long as the novel's chief protagonist, Winston Smith, 'remained in the field of vision which the metal plaque [of the telescreen] commanded, he could be seen as well as heard' (Orwell 1954: 6). In many respects, Orwell was prescient. Data have become highly malleable; profiles are sought; new technologies make surveillance less and less perceptible; fear is engendered by uncertainty; human dignity (of which privacy may be one component) is threatened; and social division is fostered ('proles' are excluded; Party members are included; see Lyon 1994: 60).

At the same time, one has to go a long way beyond Orwell to understand surveillance today. Subtle dataveillance based on the body is more important than either visual or audio surveillance; many other agencies than the state are obviously involved in control (there were other agencies in Orwell's time, too, but their role is now palpable); and huge improvements have been made in the storage, transmission and retrieval of data. So Orwell's dystopic vision is valuable but dated in some respects. His work deserves ongoing attention because he discerned the ever-present possibility of totalitarian controls and because he countered it with a strong – ontological – view of human dignity. But more is needed today.

Some see in Franz Kafka a writer who intuited lucidly the realities of contemporary surveillance, despite the fact that he was writing well before Orwell (Kafka died in 1924; Orwell in 1950). For Daniel Solove,

for example, 'Big Brother' has outlived his usefulness as a metaphor. Today, he avers, we are heading towards 'a more mindless process – of bureaucratic indifference, arbitrary errors, and dehumanization – a world that is beginning to resemble Kafka's vision in *The Trial*' (Solove 2004: 55). Kafka's novels contain shadowy figures who are 'in the know' because they have access to the files and whose enigmatic activities keep their suspects in a constant state of anxiety because they do not know the nature of the charges against them. Indeed, they don't know why they have been picked up, on the basis of what evidence, which department is detaining them, how long they will be kept in the dark, or what will be the consequences of making one or another kind of statement. There is clearly information on them, but they have no access to it, let alone to recourse or redress.

The advantage of the Kafkaesque metaphors, argues Solove, is that attention is deflected from the malign person of Big Brother and towards the sense of being in a maze. Solove's intention is broader than one of correctly discerning literary relevance. Legal scholars and legislators, he argues, should worry less about the wrongful disclosure of confidential information to a personified 'Big Brother'. Instead, they would do well to be more concerned with regulating what public and private information may be collected and processed by commercial or government databases, how they might be secured, and how successive transfer to other databases should be limited. If this could at least in part be achieved by rethinking surveillance metaphors, then, avers Solove, the effort would be worthwhile.

Other authors have provided metaphors, insights and also plausible literary treatments of totalitarian situations. Two such are Philip K. Dick and Margaret Atwood, and they are worth mentioning not only because they each deal with wider issues – of humanness, for example – but also because their work hints at important dimensions of surveillance not touched on by Orwell or Kafka. Dick's work has some of the 'maze' features of Kafka's, but also connects this with technological fantasies (not to mention hallucinogenic drugs) such as identification by eye-type in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968; turned into the film, *Bladerunner*, 1982). As for Atwood, her dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) explores the gender dimensions of a totalitarian world. State control of the means of reproduction is chosen as the answer to falling birthrates, and thus men and medicine feature as the powerful surveillers in the novel. Indeed, as Pamela Cooper points out, in the 1990 film

version the audience is also drawn in to the surveillance, which brings home the point even more poignantly (Cooper 1995).

Novels are an important source of metaphor and simile, then, and help to alert us to significant dimensions of surveillance as well as helping the reader imaginatively to get inside characters who are either the surveillers or, more frequently, the surveilled. However, in the twenty-first century it is probably true to say that the novel is being supplanted by the film as a means of understanding surveillance. But while the very medium of film may provide surveillance insights unavailable elsewhere, it is likely that the key question of the surveillance metaphor, rightly raised by Solove and others, will still have to be sought in literary contexts.

The surveillant turn: watching movies

The term 'watching movies' is perhaps a misnomer, especially as the classic surveillance movie – *The Conversation* (1974) – is actually about audio surveillance, primarily, and only secondarily about 'watching'. But this 'listening movie' is a classic in the sense that it explores some of the deepest psychology of surveillance and it does so through a striking role-reversal. The surveillance expert discovers that he himself is under surveillance, but despite his expertise he cannot find out how he is being bugged. Harry Caul, a San Francisco wiretapper, who is meticulous about keeping his work and his private life apart, is seen surreptitiously recording the conversation of a couple in Union Park. Starting to think that they're involved in a murder plot, he tries some sleuthing himself, only to get fully entangled in their drama and to find himself caught on the horns of dilemmas about 'public' and 'private' life. He can no longer imagine that surveillance is a mere clinical 'science'. He eventually takes his own apartment to pieces to try to find the bug, never dreaming that it is in his saxophone (or is it?).

This subtle interplay between the role of surveiller as detached technical expert and the role of the uncertain, unnerved subject who realizes he is under surveillance underscores the importance of considering both together in surveillance studies. The systems expert, who takes a classic bureaucratic position of seeking efficiency in the smoothly functioning machine, stands in stark contrast with the surveilled subject, who is coming apart at the seams by the end of the movie, for which the deliberate and systematic destruction of his

home is a trope. The growing awareness of being surveilled is accompanied by an inner change of mood in which the first role – of a detached observer, just doing his job – is jettisoned for a judicious but spare moral critique of the very possibility that surveillance could be neutral.

As Thomas Levin points out, however, *The Conversation* also marks a turning point in films dealing with surveillance. Whereas previous films included surveillance as a theme, *The Conversation* engages surveillance structurally. It is 'the movie's primary narrative concern' (Levin 2002: 582). Surveillance makes the story possible. Levin also observes, however, that surveillance does not become generally central to a whole range of films until the 1990s. It starts to appear with several films that feature prominently the role of CCTV cameras – *Thelma and Louise* (1991), *Sliver* (1993), *Snake Eyes* (1998) – but emerges decisively with Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (1998). Here the synopticon and the Panopticon are mixed again, as the (mass) viewers take the role of the surveillance operator – the audience is told exactly which device, 'button-cam', 'crane-cam', is in use at which moment – to watch the lone soul, Truman, gradually come to the realization that he is under 24/7 scrutiny. It might be terrifying were it not for the fact that we're also reassured that everything is occurring in a giant studio – it's not the 'real world' after all.

What does seem more like the real world, however, is Mike Figgis's *Time Code* (2000), which takes the surveillant imaginary even further into the cinema than is the case with some more celebrated movies (such as *Minority Report* [2002] or *Enemy of the State* [1998]). While others rely heavily on CCTV images as a feature of the plot, *Time Code* brings the typical category of TV (time) into the realm normally under the sign of space (cinema) (see Doane 2002). The screen is divided into four segments, each of which contains a ninety-minute tracking shot of one character, followed in 'real time'. Once again the viewer becomes a surveillance operator, although the only choice offered is which segment to focus on (rather than PTZ – pan, tilt, zoom – or single image tracking). Time, as Levin says, is the 'key, or the code' to following and to understanding this film (Levin 2002: 593), but it does help, in a general way, to comprehend how difficult it is to watch several screen segments simultaneously (cf. Dubbeld 2004; Norris and Armstrong 1999) and thus what this might mean for routine CCTV operatives.

If *The Conversation* marked a watershed in surveillance films, it did so in part because of its emphasis on surveillance technologies. Though they appear crude in the twenty-first century, the audio-bugs are a crucial component of the psychological probing of the movie. It is precisely because the bug in Caul's apartment is so tiny that it can be secreted in a place that frustrates his panicking search. Turning the technological tables on Caul prompts his rethinking the question of how far he can remain a clinically uncontaminated 'expert'. But by the time the surveillance movie has become a frequent offering, in the 1990s, technological questions are synonymous with the 'new surveillance'. While the obvious danger this raises is technological determinism – surveillance is technology-driven rather than being the product of socio-technical processes – some other, more subtle questions are also raised by this emphasis. There is a general issue – from *The Conversation*, among others – of how far technologies can ever be 'neutral' instruments, but also of how far new technologies enable cultural shifts, such as that towards pre-emptive rather than reactive surveillance (which features strongly in *Minority Report*).

The question of 'new surveillance' is picked up in Tony Scott's *Enemy of the State*, which not only updates *The Conversation* technologically but also uses the same actor (Gene Hackman) and includes some footage from the original 1974 movie. But as Light notes, the update is not accompanied by a greater concern with the nuances of technology, nor is the psychological depth of *The Conversation* matched in *Enemy* either (Light 2002: 32). In a sense the later movie is parasitic on the earlier, because the surveillor becomes the surveilled and because questions of 'privacy' are revisited once again (it may even be the case that the lead characters of the two movies are intended to be one and the same person).

Yet the apparent philosophical or sociological shallowness of *Enemy* may be telling for other reasons. The movie makes much of the technological sophistication of computer, database and advanced communication devices and networks, almost as if the presence of high technology speaks for itself, somehow guaranteeing its own effectiveness. This is actually a very significant attitude, especially in the American context, where belief in the efficacy of technological 'solutions' far outstrips any evidence that technical devices can be relied upon to provide 'security' (see, *inter alia*, Mosco 2004 and O'Harrow 2005 for a critique of technological dependence). And as

Light comments, the message of *Enemy* seems merely to be (the disingenuous one from the perspective of *The Conversation*) that surveillance technologies may be dangerous 'in the wrong hands'.

Light goes on to propose, and I concur, that considerably more depth may be found in the no less thorough technological update embodied in Wim Wenders' *The End of Violence* (1997). This film is pitted with irony and, like some other Wenders products, is also a complex mystery plot with many levels of meaning. There is, for instance, the irony that the state-of-the-art surveillance equipment is housed in a disused observatory (it now looks down on LA rather than up to the stars), an irony deepened by the fact that the equipment is not tidily contained. There is also synoptic-panoptic irony in the fact that the observatory is on Mt Hollywood. But the treatment offered in *End* is subtle, ambiguous and profound. Ray Bering (the surveillance expert played by Gabriel Byrne) is himself ambivalent about the efficacy of 'modern technology' and dubious about the capacities of some police camera systems because of their potential gratuitously to invade private or anonymous spaces. He also recoils, embarrassed, from the voyeuristic role offered to him when he sees on his screen a blonde woman crying in her apartment.

End foregrounds critical questions about surveillance technologies, as Ray Bering struggles (as Light puts it) 'with the potential for this technology to create amoral distance between himself and others' (Light 2002: 48). He wonders not only about his own involvement in setting up the system, but also about the possibilities of becoming inured to the ethical problems in later generations of the same software. The film also makes evident the fact of technical limitations; the systems cannot be perfect. Specifically, satellite images are distorted by cloud cover and human figures are not unambiguously recognizable. Lastly, Bering's father appears in the plot as someone for whom new technologies are superfluous, rather than indispensable. He sticks doggedly with his old typewriter rather than switching to a computer. But the film as a whole raises a further surveillance conundrum, discerned by Light: if we really could use surveillance to create a perfectly safe world, might it not do so at the cost of undermining the very personal autonomy and integrity that it was supposed to protect (Light 2002: 50)? Some of the moral and political as well as the technical limits of surveillance are seen clearly in this film.

The same cannot be said – at least in the same way – for *Minority Report* (2002), which returns us to the centre of the gee-whiz world of

what Light calls 'techno-geeks'. This film relies on the rather unlikely characters of 'pre-cogs', three female figures whose apparent ESP permits their use by the 'Pre-Crime Department' to detect murders before they occur, in mid-twenty-first-century Chicago. (Perhaps the 'unlikeliness' of the characters is meant as a warning that such pre-emptive dreams are hollow, but the seriousness with which the rest of the surveillance technology panoply is taken suggests otherwise.) Steven Spielberg, the director, carefully researched the up-and-coming surveillance technologies, such as RFID, in order to create his 'state-of-the-art' film.

What was striking about *Minority Report*, however, was its timing. Like *The Conversation*, whose audiotape storyline coincided eerily with the early 1970s Watergate scandal – the air is heavy with suspicion and paranoia – one could be forgiven for concluding that *Minority Report* was made for the Homeland Security era following 9/11. Seeing surveillance as a means of predicting, pre-empting and preventing undesirable behaviour was not a new idea. But it gathered momentum as it gripped the anxious public imagination in the months directly after the attacks on America.

Minority Report certainly does critically question the ubiquity of surveillance devices, from CCTV cameras to internet surveillance and beyond. So despite the clichés, there are some interesting oblique comments on being constantly in the gaze. The very idea of pre-emptive surveillance, based in the early twentieth century on simulation (discussed effectively first by Baudrillard [1983] and then by Bogard [1996]), lies behind many justifications for establishing new systems (even though, following the London bombings of 2005, it was once again the forensic, after-the-event use of CCTV for identifying the perpetrators that produced popular fascination).

Two other features of the film are worthy of mention. One is the increasingly interactive character of surveillance. The more ubiquitous computing becomes a reality, the more human interaction with devices triggers checking, monitoring and recording. Thus 'Mr Matsumoto' is hailed by name as he passes an RFID-enabled manikin that invites him to purchase some product for which no doubt his socio-economic status and geo-demographic markers classify him. The other feature, related with this, is the product and brand placement littering the movie. What was parodied in *The Truman Show* is an unremarkable commonplace in *Minority Report*. Again, the

connections between police and consumer surveillance in the film echo those burgeoning in the post-9/11 world.

If categorization is a minor theme in *Minority Report*, it shifts to a major dimension in *Gattaca* (1997). Written and directed by the screenwriter of *The Truman Show* (Andrew Niccol), *Gattaca* is about a society in which not class, caste or merit but genetics determines social outcomes. The corporation that gives the movie its name highlights the letters G, A, T, C as the four components of DNA; rule is achieved through this code. Vincent, whose 'faith birth' condemns him to life as an office cleaner, is determined to overcome his genetic classification as 'in-valid'. He finds Jerome, a member of the genetic elite of 'valids', who was so badly injured in a car crash that he is confined to a wheelchair. Vincent takes on Jerome's identity, for a price, and uses his genetic make-up to fake his way into his chosen career. This movie questions genetic engineering by reminding audiences that genetic futures are merely probabilities and predispositions, yet fate may hang on them.

Information is central to several of these films, but in the case of *Gattaca* the information is genetic. It is a true work of science fiction in the sense that it extrapolates from present trends, and contains none of the science fantasy elements such as the 'pre-cogs' in *Minority Report*. As Dorothy Nelkin and Lori Andrews warn, DNA samples are more than just a source of identification: 'Revealing information about health and predisposition, they can expose a person to workplace or insurance discrimination, creating categories of those "at risk." And they can be used to reinforce race or ethnic stereotypes' (Nelkin and Andrews 2003: 95). Nor is this an empty warning. The UK boasts the world's largest DNA database and police are steadily gaining more powers to retain DNA profiles as well as the biological samples themselves. In 2004 police were empowered to take samples from anyone arrested on suspicion of a 'recordable offence'. Fears are expressed that because the police have a disproportionate number of samples from minorities, this could produce skewed accounts of their activities, and negative discrimination against them (Gosline 2005).

In these and other movies, it is apparent that contemporary surveillance is already well understood, even though the social or political analyst may wish to ask further questions. As Peter Marks shows, current films go far beyond Orwell, and not just by taking account of new technologies. They also offer a 'variety of complex and nuanced

accounts that range over entertainment, genetic scrutiny, new forms of access and exclusion and the use of social sorting to create social and cultural hierarchies' (Marks 2005: 236). In addition, they look at 'terrorism, body screening, government and corporate surveillance and the effect of surveillance on those undertaking surveillance, not only on those under scrutiny'. They examine complicity as well as resistance.

For Marks, there are illuminating and even emancipatory aspects to this. He concurs with the classic argument about dystopias, that they are intended to engender not despair but determination to ensure they are not fulfilled (and, similarly, that utopias are intended to prompt negative contrasts with the present such that aspects of the utopia are translated into political goals¹). Marks maintains that films like those discussed here, so far from reducing audiences to passivity and pessimism, 'have a built in counter-narrative that can inspire us to question and resist negative trends while critically assessing any changes presented as positive' (Marks 2005: 236). He goes on: '[T]his informed skepticism is vital in a contemporary world where the reference points of acceptable and unacceptable surveillance are highly fluid.'

Part of the question about 'watching movies' or surveillance films, then, is how far they are really 'about' surveillance. The high-tech surveillance thriller may glory in state-of-the-art devices encountered by movie characters but give little sense of the huge growth in everyday life of social discrimination produced by their mundane counterparts. And even a classic like *The Conversation*, though admittedly structured by surveillance, could be said to explore the subtle and delicate psychology of surveillance, or even its ethics, rather than its large-scale social and political implications. Similarly, the Cannes and Toronto prize-winning *Red Road* (2006) is certainly structured by, but not necessarily 'about', surveillance. Although the central character, Jackie, is a Glasgow CCTV operator, and the plot hinges on how her personal life becomes entangled with someone she sees on one of her screens, it is hard to imagine that this movie will offer the 'informed scepticism' of an Orwell or a Kafka, or of more surveillance-evaluative films.

There may be oblique and subtle criticisms of mass surveillance here, as Mike Nellis suggests, but what it amounts to is that we should not take too seriously the technological apparatus: 'Far from being omniscient, the few who watch the many, unseen and from a distance, have in fact no real understanding of what is really, humanly, going on

in front of their eyes.¹² Scanned streetscapes show surfaces; most of what matters is missing. Although *Red Road* touches briefly on some possible but controversial benefits of CCTV – crime prevention – and some problems of the abuse of CCTV systems, this is not its main point. Indeed, Nellis suggests that Andrea Arnold's otherwise sophisticated and beautiful film could be read as a shrug towards surveillance, just because surveillance 'misses the point' about the deep and daily realities of life. True, CCTV is portrayed as a fact of life, which apparently is how many in the UK experience it. But it seems that audiences will have to wait for the movie that says more than 'get over it!'

Domesticating Big Brother

If the classic surveillance novels depict life under the oppressive gaze, and the 'cinematic society' unmasks the voyeuristic desire to watch, then the advent of 'reality TV' turns the lens once more to focus on the desire to be watched. The ironies here are manifold. As if it were not enough that the fearsome figure of Big Brother should become absorbing, escapist entertainment and that visibility should become an enjoyable 'trip' rather than a 'trap' (as Foucault's discussion of the Panopticon conceived it), reality TV also reverses the conventional notion that there are sacrosanct 'private' spaces in bathrooms and bedrooms; these are now 'public' in all their banal, mundane and earthy glory. But the irony is really only available to those with an historical sense of the sea-change from post-World War II worries to postmodern parody.

Although reality TV is by definition not part of *cinematic* society, Denzin's comments on the latter help frame the former (and in any case, the convergence and integration of 'new media' in the early twenty-first century cast doubt on the categories that contain only one *kind* of medium). Denzin suggests that 'primitive-realist' cinema of the early twentieth century introduced the screen voyeur in ways suited to the more local capitalism of the time; modernist cinema kept the gaze alive but distanced from everyday life, although the voyeur was parodied in 'late modern' times. But 'with the postmodern the gaze is openly acknowledged, and its presence everywhere, including in the living room, is treated as commonplace' (Denzin 1995: 9). These words were written before *Big Brother* made its debut, but their relevance to

that genre is evident. Indeed, they are arguably so in ways that go beyond what Denzin explores, especially in relation to the postmodern affinity with the multinational-consumerist phase of capitalism.

For Vincent Pecora, 'reality TV elaborates surveillance as a sublime object of desire' rather than a means of social regulation and discipline (although he also distinguishes it – mistakenly, I think – from the 'ever deeper penetration of market research into our lives'; Pecora 2002: 348). Pecora discerns a connection between, on the one hand, the 1930s Collège de France experiments aimed at understanding through community participation in 'sociological experiment' and, on the other, the surveillance-driven game shows of reality TV. He claims, plausibly, that they simulate sociological 'laboratories', display the normative conditions of collective solidarity, explore nostalgically the rituals of social ostracism and see how far individuals will go in manipulating group loyalty to achieve success (Pecora 2002: 353). However, while Pecora sees in reality TV some strong strands of narcissism (echoing its 'orgy of capitalist self-promotion'), he goes beyond Christopher Lasch's critique by that name (Lasch 1991).

Pecora links the desires of reality TV with those of 'enlightened social theory': a consequence of the 'demand to make the socially hidden visible, to expose the secret workings of individual choice and group authority and to create the increasingly transparent life-world that philosophers from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Jürgen Habermas have held up as an ideal' (Pecora 2002: 355). Moreover, what increasingly restrictive academic ethics reviews would prohibit is paraded as possible and desirable in reality TV. Pecora intriguingly suggests that while the desire for transparency will not necessarily drive the development of more surveillance, the desire for surveillance may have the paradoxical side-effect of turning us into real-time participants in a social psychology experiment where we are both test subjects and clinical observers. Foucault's Panopticon meets Baudrillard's hyperreality.

Such an elite perspective is brought down to earth by John McGrath, however, who argues that in contemporary societies we inhabit more and more a 'surveillance space' that is beyond 'public' and 'private' (McGrath 2004). Moreover, this space is one in which 'performative effects' (see Butler 1993) are produced that constitute identities. McGrath maintains that crime control is the key ideology justifying the use of surveillance technologies in public space, and that as such surveillance spaces have emerged, so they generate a variety

of (performative) behaviours. But so, for that matter, do surveillance art works, the genre that has appeared since the 1990s in art galleries, installations and in street theatre (e.g. the work of David Rokeby or Julia Scher). McGrath also discusses counter-surveillance activities, suggesting that these show both what deliberate responses achieve (and their limits) and the ways in which responses to surveillance space are not controllable by any single surveillance source.

As for *Big Brother*, McGrath holds that the kinds of desires for surveillance expressed in and promoted by these reality TV shows are becoming more important than crime control ideologies for justifying surveillance expansion. The on-camera performances function as a kind of analogy with the ways in which everyone has increasingly to come to terms with surveillance space. In the end, however, McGrath insists that today's surveillance spaces are very different from those worst-case scenarios that so preoccupied Orwell. As he says, '[T]he trashiness, repetitiveness and the occasional unexpectedness of this game show reminds us that, unlike Orwell's totalitarian eye, the many Big Brothers of our society can be submitted to partially and conditionally, can be played with and perverted. Unlike Winston Smith, we are not necessarily conceding defeat or loss of self when we admit to loving Big Brother' (McGrath 2004: ix).

Perhaps something else may be lost, however, that is left unmentioned by McGrath? For neither he nor Vincent Pecora mention the rather obvious relevance of the ratings – and thus of advertising – to the success of the *Big Brother* shows and their numerous spin-offs. While the spontaneity and unpredictability of surveillance space performances is a handy antidote to the over-determined spectre of surveillance as control, the imbrication of TV participants (on screen or in front of it) in the world of multinational-consumerist capitalism can hardly be irrelevant. For Mark Andrejevic, reality TV glamorizes surveillance, presenting it as hip and cool, a way into the world of wealth and celebrity (Andrejevic 2004a). It feels good to be watched, evidently, and as *Big Brother's* Josh says, 'everyone should have an audience'.

In a sense, warns Andrejevic, reality TV fulfils the democratic promise of the emerging interactive economy, turning passive cultural consumers into active ones who can star on shows or vote on their outcomes. To Andrejevic, the real winners on these shows are the marketers, the corporations who have a high level of interest in seeing surveillance sold as soft and benign. The shows encourage the idea

that self-revelation is innocent, even as customer relationship marketing seeks new ways of inducing people to self-reveal to them. What passes as 'self-expression' is actually re-interpreted as a kind of work in which consumers are unwittingly recruited to 'being watched' in ways that are primarily of benefit to those who 'watch' them. Such a perspective certainly fits with Denzin's comments about entertainment genres roughly paralleling economic developments, but it also could inspire objections based on the idea that those enamoured of reality TV are mere unwitting dupes of a capitalist conspiracy. While this debate is still open, it is worth recalling McGrath's comments about performativity. They hint that it is a mistake to think that all those involved in *Big Brother* either as participants or as viewers have similar motives. Or should one assume what Andrejevic implies: that the programme's aficionados simply 'love' Big Brother to their own loss?

Cultures of surveillance

Surveillance in modern times has become a phenomenon that affects everyday life and thus it has also become the stuff of popular culture, cropping up in novels, songs, films and other media and venues. As such, our understanding of surveillance is in part shaped by these popular media, from being sensitized by literary metaphors to vicariously sharing the vision of those who peep, snoop, observe and gaze. But because this is so, those popular media affect in turn the surveillance that they depict, as consumers of media are also subjects of surveillance.

Contemporary surveillance occurs in contexts that are already media-saturated. Electronic means of entertainment, leisure and even education operate alongside the media of surveillance and indeed are sometimes part of a two-way exchange. In film, novels and television, surveillance situations and processes are portrayed and analysed, and beyond those the internet provides games and spaces where surveillance may be explored as well as experienced. How they do this is worth examining carefully; as we have seen, some help us grapple with the 'gaze' more intelligently, some help the gaze drift out of focus. Some aid critique, some, complacency. In the worlds of theme parks, shopping malls and for that matter online computer games, too, surveillance is not merely an external process but something participatory.

The overlapping and cross-cutting cultures of surveillance may be reinforced and normalized by their interactions with entertainment media.

While the interactivity of TV may have important surveillance repercussions, as yet only at an early stage of analysis, interactivity takes on other dimensions in the world of surveillance games. No doubt other leisure sites exist that are marked by high surveillance levels, such that the experience of enjoyment and fun comes to be associated with monitoring and control. But this is certainly explicit in the case of games. As Anders Albrechtslund and Lynsey Dubbeld remark: 'In many computer and video games, surveillance, i.e. the tracking and tracing of people through data-processing technologies, became an intrinsic part of the gameplay' (Albrechtslund and Dubbeld 2005: 218).

Albrechtslund and Dubbeld comment on internet games such as the *Guardian's* 'Blair Watch Project', which gave prizes for photos of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair that would be displayed online, and on the online *Monopoly Live* game. Players imagine a 'real' London in which the game takes place, but it also involves 18 real London cabs as movers. Earlier games include *The Sentinel* (1986), which is a power struggle about controlling 'synthoids' that are under the Sentinel's gaze, or *Sims* (2000), in which a virtual doll house is controlled and cared for by the all-seeing player. Albrechtslund and Dubbeld note that so far from these games questioning the legitimacy of surveillance practices, surveillance is never even problematized. Rather, the games simply make surveillance fun. That it can be such ought at least to be acknowledged by serious surveillance scholars, even if it is lamented for other reasons.

As we have seen, the domestication of the dreaded Big Brother in reality TV thus has surveillance consequences well beyond what 'domestication' initially suggests. As Mathiesen argues, the TV 'synopticon' where the many watch the few parallels and reproduces the 'Panopticon' where the few watch the many (Mathiesen 1997). The spectacle that Foucault thought had been superseded is actually crucial to the effectiveness of some of its supposed disciplinary replacements. And as Andrejevic shows, not only do many 'expressive' TV shows encourage display and visibility, but also all kinds of 'interactivity' (such as voting on reality TV) help to expand the consumption of goods and services as well as TV itself (Andrejevic 2004a).

This point is underscored by Serra Tinic (2006), who offers a timely reminder that the TV audience – media consumption – is itself highly

monitored and likely to become more so. Interactive television (ITV), currently represented by companies such as TiVo and Replay, promises to circumvent all the timing inconveniences of conventional television and also to give opportunities to delete commercials. What seems to be audience empowerment and the personalization of televisual worlds has another side, argues Tinic. This theme is picked up as well in the more recent work of Mark Andrejevic (2007), who highlights the ways in which the interactivity of emerging computer- and TV-based entertainment technologies has increasingly significant surveillance dimensions.

The personalization of interactive television works both ways, as data from viewing preferences are fed right back to the TV companies, without having to be aggregated, as in the traditional ratings. It is a difference machine, a panoptic sort – all the more so in the integrated future when, using the same equipment, subscribers will watch their chosen shows, surf the Web, message friends and bank online. Synergy and Claritas are already providing psychographic audience profiles to complement data gleaned from enhanced ITV (Tinic 2006: 315). Whether this is exactly what will emerge in this volatile field is unclear, but Tinic's work surely indicates a likely path, given present trends in consumer surveillance.

Surveillance and entertainment media all depend today on electronic infrastructures in which the many 'watch' the few and the few 'watch' the many, both literally and literarily, but always in ways mediated by technologies. This is yet another reason why the outcomes of surveillance cannot simply be extrapolated from the supposed capacities of new surveillance technologies or from the apparent power of the agency deploying them, even if this is the mighty Department of Homeland Security.

Studying popular culture may help us learn about surveillance in more than one sense. On the one hand, insights into the inner workings of surveillance may be gleaned from popular culture. Today's media are subtly aware of ways in which surveillance has moved on a long way from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. On the other, it is worth investigating how popular culture may facilitate further surveillance. It is clearly a mistake to assume that the imaginative world of film or TV exists in an entirely separate realm from everyday reality. They feed off and inform each other increasingly in a media-saturated environment. In the end, the efficacy of surveillance measures themselves

may depend in part on how they are understood by their subjects, which by any measure must relate in some ways to popular culture.

While it would be a mistake to ignore the contribution of popular culture to understanding surveillance, there are decided limits to what can be said. Much work remains to be done in exploring the connections, some of which may turn out to be important in ways that we cannot guess at today. The growth rate of new systems for blogging and interactive sharing of ideas and images on the internet – systems such as YouTube and its cognates – alone means that this field of study is likely to be a growth area. Beyond this, of course, questions of how to interpret audience interest and ratings will always be in dispute. And just as it is risky to rely on the technical limits of surveillance systems to protect people from their potentially negative effects, so it would be foolish to imagine that anything definitive let alone optimistic could be said about the chances of popular media contributing to a thoroughgoing assessment of contemporary surveillance. This is why we turn next to an analysis of modes of questioning and resisting surveillance and then to some ethical resources for offering some fresh ways forward. Issues of surveillance are too significant merely to be confronted indirectly.

8 Struggles over Surveillance

Humans are wonderfully inventive at finding ways to beat control systems and to avoid observation.

Gary T. Marx (2003: 372)

Surveillance may serve various purposes, from entitlement and easing entry to coercion and control. It may even serve more than one purpose at once. Entitlements, for instance, require registration, a process that is equally used to limit and control access. This applies to everything from registering for an email account to registering as a refugee at a national border. In order to work, however, many surveillance processes depend on the involvement, witting or not, of those who are surveilled. In the example given, registration represents one moment of such involvement. The persons surveilled are not merely subject to surveillance but subjects of surveillance. They will approach situations as diverse as email or refugee registration with expectations, hopes, fears and caution. In those contexts where surveillance is perceived as or has the effect of control, the fact that its subjects interact and react with surveillance means that its effects are mitigated or magnified in part in relation to their involvement.

Another way of putting this is that ordinary people find myriad ways of coping with surveillance – resigning themselves to it, finding modes of settlement that retain some dignity or freedom, or, on occasion, openly objecting to the gaze in whatever shape it takes. Some of these struggles over surveillance are carried out in isolation as individuals switch off devices, falsify identifying information, hide their faces from the camera or otherwise dissimulate. (One of the earliest uses of the word 'dissimulation', in the mid-fifteenth century, refers to the tactics used by small birds to evade the sight of their larger predators.) Other struggles are undertaken in concert with others, either directly against