

COMING SOON FROM A SCREEN NEAR YOU: THE CAMERA'S GAZE IN THE
AGE OF SURVEILLANCE

by

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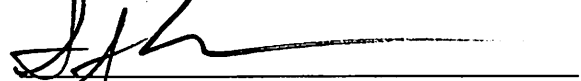
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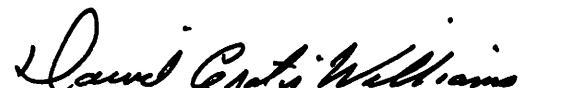
This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Stephen Charbonneau, School of Communication and Multimedia Studies, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.


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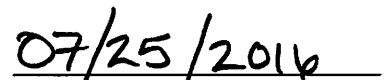

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ABSTRACT

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Within the past thirty years, privacy concerns among American citizens are rising with counter-terrorist surveillance going beyond targeting people of interest. These concerns are reflected in American cinema where many contemporary films have explored surveillance in society. The textual analyses presented in the thesis will focus on three such films, *Strange Days* (1995), *Southland Tales* (2005), and *Nightcrawler* (2014). Throughout this thesis, I examine how each of these films offers a unique, reflexive take on surveillance, adhering to generative mechanisms that evoke differing attitudes about surveillance through their form. My analysis draws on Laura Mulvey and Patricia Pisters' theories on the gaze to understand the politics of looking in contemporary surveillance cinema and highlight how cinematic scopophilia evolved into a networked perspective. My analysis suggests that the politics of surveillance cinema is reflected in these films as their differences mirror the changing perception of surveillance and the gaze over time.

DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to the author's family and friends who have been supportive along the way as they wrote this thesis, and their girlfriend, who the author thanks for being their inspiration to continue moving ahead and being there for them in their best and worst times.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Film has the capacity to grant viewers an opportunity to look out of a cinematic window into another life. It is within the borders of the screen that the viewer is able to relate their line of vision with what the camera captures, creating an illusion of bearing an omnipotent view over the subjects in the frame. Much of the research made on spectatorship has focused on the act of looking and how the camera's gaze at the subjects reflect on the spectator's gaze at the subjects that render them into objects of gratification. Other studies, however, have shown that there is also a returned gaze of the film object, and the mirror effect that allows film to act as a reflection of the viewer's desires can also give viewers the feeling of being watched and rendered as an object by the film image. This creates an unsettling dynamic between the viewer and the camera as the viewer can gain satisfaction from sharing the same voyeuristic gaze as the camera, but can also be, in turn, confronted on the artifice of this connection with the screen, rendering the viewer as an object intended to expose the audience's obsession with spectacle.

This desire to watch and anxiety of being watched is not exclusive to motion pictures as public and private spheres in high-tech societies have dealt with surveillance outreach issues that have compromised the privacy of civilians in an age where social media further propels average people into the public sphere. As surveillance concerns have become prevalent in our current cultural landscape, the film industry would

naturally be compelled to explore this subject and negotiate with the implication of having surveillance as part of our daily routine. Prominent films throughout the 20th century have explored surveillance, but with the advent of the Patriot Act and the NSA leaks, these as well as more contemporary films take on a new light as films that confront the act of surveillance as well as foretell an era where privacy is not a guarantee.

With a psychoanalytical approach to cinematography and spectatorship in mind, the approach that films take in immersing the viewer into the diegetic space take on a form similar to a voyeur's camera spying on the characters, capturing them at their most intimate and vulnerable moments as they move throughout a narrative. While many films intend on using such a format to construct a narrative that can keep the attention of a wide audience, films that have a focus on surveillance can bring to light these similarities as the narrative and film form can mirror the desires or anxieties of spying or being exposed. The films explored in this study approach the subject of surveillance from multiple directions that can either revel or shudder in the potential that new surveillance technology grants us in today's world. What is explored with this study is how these films call into question what role the spectator plays in sharing the camera's gaze as well as how film in general helps feed into the spectator's perception on the power of seeing and being seen. Through the theme of surveillance, these films are reflexive in their approach to the spectator's relationship to technology and cinema. Because gathering private information has become as easy as a web search, and the camera's effect of bringing the audience closer to the narrative recalls the viewer's desire to hold this information, it sheds light on the ubiquitousness of surveillance technology and how it is used both by the general populace and government agencies.

The relationship that civilians have with surveillance systems is complicated as the attitudes that people have towards it are as negative as they are positive. The criticism it receives is through the fear of being watched and the ability these systems have to compromise the privacies of the general public. However, while some have an overall hostility towards the idea of being observed, there is also a fascination that comes with the power dynamics between people and surveillance. Namely, much of our news coverage and entertainment taps into the desire to bear that look into the lives of others. In addition, this unsolicited attention is also pivotal in piquing a curiosity for seeking fame and notoriety as a way to benefit from mass exposure. These perspectives should be familiar to filmgoers as many films have captured this fear and interest of looking and being looked at from the curiosity and paranoia in *Blow Up* (1966) and *The Conversation* (1974) to the fascination of exposure with *The King of Comedy* (1982) and *Being John Malkovich* (1999). Films such as these have tapped into what is reflected through our media exposure by encapsulating the visual aspect of curiosity and fear by bringing the audience directly into the sight of the images to be gazed at.

SEEING AND BEING SEEN

Many films and television shows grant the audience the role of being watchful voyeurs, distant enough to view the events within the plot or program from vantage points. This, in turn, gives audiences the gratification of indulging themselves in the sight of those who are under the camera's point-of-view, whether they are aware of it or not. Specifically, reality television, network news, and late-night dramas within the past few decades have been direct in this approach to give the audience an eyewitness account of

the private affairs of the populace. In media scholar John Fiske's analysis of television culture, he notes that "Much of the pleasure of television realism comes from this sense of omniscience that it gives us" (Fiske, p. 1277). Fiske's essay breaks down how this omniscience is achieved by constructing a reality in which the camera work and visual codes are arranged so that by identifying with the camera's sight, we are able to position ourselves as the all-seeing eye of the camera that conducts surveillance over the narrative space. It gives us the power of observation and judgement over those within its reach. Journalist Christian Parenti's analysis on the popularity of surveillance in reality-based television addresses that having the power to observe infidelity in the show *Cheaters* is justified in that "the implication is clear: the honest have nothing to fear, and the guilty have only themselves to blame" (Parenti, p. 188). The implication from catching and scrutinizing perpetrators of misdeeds on reality television in relation to bearing the camera's gaze is that surveillance is necessary as it would grant us the power to indict the guilty for their misconduct, and grant the innocent assurance that they would have no problem being under a voyeuristic gaze as they have nothing they would need to hide.

There is also a contradictory sense of satisfaction that people get out of being watched where they do not just obtain desire from sharing the camera's gaze, but they also desire to be the one that is being desired. Audiences feel secure when they are able to identify with a strong figure, so naturally, within this desire to relate to this figure, there is also a desire to be acknowledged by the camera and the object on-screen to satisfy these demands for more relatable images. In his analysis of the impact that famous actors and actresses have on the spectator, John Ellis highlights that because stars of mainstream cinema intend on portraying ordinary characters that can relate to the audience yet are

regulated to an extraordinary existence in the realm of the film's diegesis, "desire is both permitted and encouraged, yet knows it cannot achieve any tangible form of satisfaction, except the satisfactions of looking" (Ellis, p. 602). Identification creates a new dynamic for studying surveillance as the importance placed on a person is determined by exposure, giving audiences the message that power comes from being looked at thoroughly. With cinema's power to briefly place the audience in the mind of another life that is granted significance through the camera's presence, it offers the camera's perspective as a vessel for audiences to identify themselves through. The camera's function in the three films thus serves to grant viewers access to the points-of-view of surveillance technology and give viewers access to the power behind the gaze.

FEAR OF OBJECTIFICATION

To the average moviegoer, identification and voyeurism in film spectatorship may seem like an innocuous act of following the camera's movements conveniently through a narrative from the protagonist's point-of-view. Voyeurism in film is not the active act of voyeurism that invades a person's privacy, but rather is a simulated act that allows the camera to pursue elements of the film narrative that would make it possible to both tell a story and keep the audience engaged with that the camera is capturing. However, film can manifest the subconscious desires of viewers through what the camera captures, and what the camera allows the audience to see can reveal the sinister, foreboding side of being watched and viewed as an object. Many have addressed the psychological and sociological implications that the camera can bear when using its gaze to render the people within its line of view into objects to be scanned and surveyed. This feeling of

uneasiness is often reverberated through female audiences who are constantly viewed by the camera under a violent or sexual gazes when trying to identify with female characters in the film. The gaze of the camera provides issues for identification when the camera's surveillance of the diegesis produces a bind where cinematic voyeurism is taken to a point where it strikes fear into the hearts of some viewers in an attempt to gratify others within a majority of the film's intended audience.

Female audiences are not the only ones within this bind, as male audiences face a fear of powerlessness and castration from being placed within this same gaze from an unknown vantage point. In this case, many films that highlight surveillance concerns tackle this issue where a power play between the audience and the text becomes an increasingly large concern upon the discovery that the image looks back. This is especially the case with films set in present day where characters are easily compromised by the networks and cameras that surround them and threaten their own personal space by breaching their private sphere. Wheeler Winston Dixon examines this discovery when he looks into the outlook that the camera has into the audience:

“If...we regard the camera as the transmitter of the gaze from the performer/character from personal interiority out into the depth of the audience, it becomes apparent that the cinematic gaze functions most pronouncedly from the zone of recorded space outward, and that each pose, each facial expression, each glance and gesture of the performer/character is an address of the audience, a gaze that challenges the viewer to return the gaze of the supposed ‘object’ of the camera’s scrutiny” (Dixon, p. 46)

When taking concerns about the gaze and objectification into consideration, this outward gaze towards the audience creates a conflict of interests where the audience is exposed by the camera in the same way the objects on-screen are exposed, and the audience's gaze at the objects captured by the camera is merely an illusion of power that the camera ultimately holds. Film spectatorship in itself captures this with darkly lit theaters that remind viewers consistently about proper etiquette when watching a film and the consequences of breaking said rules. Thus, both theaters and film itself become emblematic of surveillance as a whole where an omnipotent eye invisible to the audience oversees all within its crosshairs and provides benefits and consequences for those who choose to obey or disobey the dominant ideology. Similarly, objects such as smartphones, tablets, and computer screens have become an avenue both for gathering private information as well as watching movies. With the advent of streaming and digital downloads, many spectators are also watching the image from a much closer vantage point than the theater or television, setting the stage for a new way to watch these films as partaking in surveillance on devices created to make the process of finding information on a massive scale much simpler.

METHODOLOGY

My methodology for researching the presence of surveillance in cinema is a textual analysis of the films *Strange Days* (1995), *Southland Tales* (2006), and *Nightcrawler* (2014) that delves into the changes in how audiences viewed surveillance throughout the years as its use in national security and mass media has made viewers more wary about the omnipresence of surveillance technology in contemporary American

society. Each of these films touches base on the state of surveillance culture through the span of three different eras in America; the pre-9/11 Clinton administration, the birth of the Patriot Act under the Bush administration, and the advent of Wikileaks and the NSA leaks during the Obama administration. *Strange Days*' approach to surveillance is one of curiosity where the possibilities of being able to see, hear, and feel the most intimate details of other people's lives are as enticing and educational as it is dangerous.

Meanwhile, the post-9/11 setting of *Southland Tales* provides a landscape where the Patriot Act has been taken to its extreme, as surveillance has become society's backbone where privacies are compromised to protect the dominant ideology. *Nightcrawler*'s narrative provides a level of surveillance that is more familiar to us, yet equally as horrifying as the cartoonish degrees in *Southland Tales* with the news media clamoring to maximize viewership by giving them live footage of crime scenes and car accidents that would bring audiences up close and personal with private tragedies. Each of these films help encapsulate the interest and terror of the power exerted by surveillance systems through their content and form.

Highlighting the messages these films send on surveillance in American society requires textual analysis and literary review as key methods of addressing these issues. What makes a textual analysis crucial for a study on film form is the structure that film has as a medium that provides an audiovisual form of narrative that can be distilled through the meaning it conveys. In Roland Barthes' analysis of Honoré de Balzac's *Sarassine*, he sheds light on his methodology by stating, "to interpret the text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it." (Barthes, p. 5). Barthes' *S/Z* points out these

pluralities within the short story into five codes: hermeneutic code which provides a lingering question throughout the text, proairetic code which act as small, encompassing sequences within the narrative that work to build up to a potential resolution, the semic code which provides connotations to people, places, or objects that fleshes out the characters and text, symbolic code that reflects passages of the text to encompassing meanings outside of the narrative, and referential code that reflects on the knowledge and sciences addressed in a text. By analyzing these codes with the series of films in this study, it helps bring to light the facets of the film narrative, form, and semiotics that examine how surveillance manifests within visual and textual codes. The visuality of the text brings into consciousness the concepts that are explored in the films as it relates surveillance to its most visual aspect of being able to share the privilege of bearing the line of sight that the camera manifests through the screen. Whether it is from the vantage point of the camera, the script that addresses concerns of the gaze, or the overarching themes and messages that surround the film's context, performing a textual analysis of these films sheds light on why surveillance in each of the films is approached much differently based on context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

The concepts that are prevalent throughout this study predominantly cover psychoanalysis with much of the subject exploring the perceptions and reactions intended through sharing the camera's gaze. Psychoanalytical film theory is the backbone of my research as it can fully examine the relationship that people have with the screen and how vision plays a key role in providing audiences with an understanding of surveillance

technology as time goes by. Studying the gaze is be important to this topic as well with surveillance mirroring the camera's presence as a figure intended to expose private affairs to those who have the power to see what the camera reveals. To tie together how the gaze feeds into the audience's perception of a film, the study also explores identification and spectatorship as concepts that help feed into how the audience makes meaning out of these films. Where the audience positions themselves when watching film as well as how this position is reinforced and challenged through films that look into the consequences of surveillance in our highly technological society. Finally, examining the role that ideology plays in the construction of both the gaze as well as the spectators' identities explains what function the narrative plays in communicating what ideologies are present within the narrative, which values are reinforced or challenged, and what the audience is expected to think after the film ends. As a concept that has evolved within the past 30 years, this study aims to refine how the gaze is particularly used as an avenue to understand the elation and fear that the gaze holds and applying it to the contemporary case of mass surveillance where curiosity over what those in surveillance agencies see regularly breeds the curiosity, pleasure, and fright that is reproduced through cinema.

PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

Psychoanalytic theory provides the framework of my research as it also the framework of studying spectatorship and the viewer's cognition. Prior to the 1970's, psychoanalysis was used specifically to explore the conscious and unconscious within a person to explain behavior or phenomena, emerging through studies like Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud's works would prove to be highly influential to

psychoanalytical film studies as Harriet Margolis examines in her analysis of the spectator's mind. She clarifies that because psychoanalysis produced the concept of the subject as existing through a conscious and unconscious sphere, this means that we can discuss "the spectator as interacting with the cinema at both a conscious and unconscious level, we can describe the spectator as fluctuating between the two not necessarily rigid separated states" (Margolis, p. xii-xiii). As cinema is able to test and play around with the audience's expectation of reality and fantasy, we can then explain that what the audience takes in from a film is being examined through both the audience's physical projection of the images to their retina and the psychological projection of the ages to their subconscious interpretation of the events within the films. Thus, the connection between psychoanalysis and spectatorship creates a bond that allows film literature to explain the function that images have by indicating how a film communicates its meaning to the audience.

IDENTIFICATION AND SPECTATORSHIP

Studying films that flesh out our understanding of contemporary surveillance through spectatorship help viewers understand what cinematic voyeurism captures, and the role images play in evoking a curiosity or fear of watching and being watched. In the case of surveillance-themed films, the camera's way of evoking this desire for security is to acknowledge the audience through the narrative or object's awareness in the audience's presence. This is expressed through Patricia Pisters' studies on the neuro-image as the films explored in this study keep the viewer and the camera synonymous with one another, and the power behind the film's image relies on the

spectator's embodiment of the camera through their viewing experience. Reflexivity emerges from the screen to the audience by helping them recollect their position within the public consciousness, and their relationship with surveillance and political structures in America within the past three decades. The audience that is being acknowledged, however, depends on what ideology dominates this specific text and what the text does to signal that audience to notice their call. How the audience understands the concepts and themes transmitted through the screen depends on how the audience reads the film as a text, and what effects certain dimensions of the film's narrative have on viewers. Essentially, how they identify with the images onscreen determines what meaning is derived from the text, and their understanding of both their personal experiences and their experience with film provides a template for how they would read a film's message. This need to identify a reflection from inside of the film image matches the concept of the mirror image as detailed by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan as the moment in an infant's life when they are able to see their own reflection and must cope with the image they see in the mirror. This crisis in identification is further emphasized with Lacan's summary of the mirror stage as applied to the human psyche:

“The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation - and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic - and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development” (Lacan, p. 444)

Essentially, an identity crisis emerges from this reflection as they must be able to recognize that they are a part of this world with a physical manifestation of their identity, but also have to realize that this identity is determined by the reflection in the mirror, which is a reproduction of their identity through an image copying its identity. Using this model, we are able to understand that people learn about themselves and the world around them by reflecting their own appearance in relation to what they experience, granting them a sense of presence within the space they inhabit.

The mirror stage as self-actualization acts as a prerequisite for spectatorship as the viewer has already coincided with their identity as people who exist in the world around them and as conscious viewers who are aware that they will not see their reflection in the screen. However, because the viewer is already aware of the existence of objects and the self, they are still able to find a source of identification within a film where they can place themselves in the narrative without having to contemplate their position as a viewer or an object. Instead of looking to the image for identification, they instead identify with the camera that guides itself through the images and attaches itself to the perspective of the audience as all-perceiving observers. Christian Metz highlights this turning point in the role of the spectator when he notes that as the spectator “identifies with himself as look, the spectator can do no other than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at and whose stationing (= framing) determines the vanishing point” (Metz, p. 824). Through the spectator’s shared vantage point with the camera, we discover that as spectators identify with themselves when watching a film as they are outside of the mirror’s reflective projection, they also identify as the camera’s look as it is what produces the images that are reflected from camera to object and from

projector to screen. The spectator depends on the camera and projection to be able to establish a relation to the screen, and allow their line of vision to be shared with the cameras as they take on the identity of the camera lens. This shared identity with the camera that gives audiences the power of an all-perceiving observer is a reason why examining the role of identification and spectatorship is crucial to studying the power that surveillance holds as both a narrative tool and a cinematic technique to enthrall viewers.

THE GAZE

One of the consequences of the audience's shared vision with the camera is that the camera is then given the task of acting as the viewer's perspective as they navigate throughout a narrative and understanding the needs of the audience. As many films want viewers to be gratified from their experience with the screen, the camera is often dictated by what the audience desires to see and how much satisfaction they can achieve from certain images. This orientation that the audience has with the camera's shared sight brings out a line of vision known as the Gaze, in which the audience fully assumes their roles as the camera to seek gratification from the objects on-screen. Considering that film gives audiences a medium to observe the privacy of others lives, the gaze gives viewers incentive to view other people on-screen as objects and to embrace their newfound identity as the camera's gaze. In turn, this creates a dynamic in which the camera's vision, the audience's line of sight, is manipulated so that the film will be able to seek out that which they lack, and give rise to a fetishistic desire to look at that which is kept from them. Christian Metz addresses this fetish that emerges from the camera's gaze of those who it captures by highlighting that the desire of the gaze comes from the ability to look

into the private lives which are inaccessible, unseen, or inexperienced by members of the audience. In analyzing the drive that motivates viewers to seek out desire through the film image, he notes that “as opposed to other sexual drives, the perceiving drive’ – combining into one of the scopic drive and the invocatory drive, concretely represents the absence of its object in the distance at which it maintains it and which is part of its very definition: distance of the look, distance of listening ”(Metz, p. 828). Film hones in on the lack in many moviegoers’ minds as it navigates throughout the diegetic space of the film to focus on the unfulfilled desires that remain within the audience in a bid to satisfy these desires. However, the brief nature of film narrative makes sure that audiences are only temporarily satisfied with the catharsis of the gaze so that it may become unfulfilled once again and further intensify the power of objects within the camera’s gaze to give audiences more of a need to fulfill the lack they hold.

The objectification of human subjects is a trait that film provides as the camera’s look renders those within its sight into objects created to be arranged, viewed, and analyzed through the materiality of the film reel. This becomes emblematic of how sexuality is expressed in film since what the camera captures can turn out to be the product of a repressed, voyeuristic gaze that creates sexual allure from exposing the privacy and intimacy of those captured on film. Theorist Laura Mulvey had examined the gaze through the spectrum of psychoanalytic feminist theory to emphasize the gendered nature of the camera’s line of sight known as the “Male Gaze”. She discusses how the male gaze addresses the assumed perspective of the male that the audience must adopt to enjoy the phallogocentric presentation of the camera as a strong male figure and a seductive, alluring female body that is formed into an object intended to be scanned and

probed by the audience's gaze. Studying the camera's function as a tool for fetishistic voyeurism is key to shedding light on the subject of surveillance as the desire sought out by spying on others matches the audience's desire to be titillated by the screen's objects. Mulvey illuminates this point by addressing the two ways that the spectator uses the camera's look to view for pleasure:

“The first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen. Thus, in film terms, one implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like” (Mulvey, p.840-841).

The duality between the two sex drives that motivate the spectator's desire intensify the gaze by using the image not just to achieve sexual gratification from the eroticized and objectified people in the image, but also to find a way to insert themselves into the narrative by locating a point of identification within the image. Although, Mulvey has since evolved her concept of the gaze to expand on how we consume new media in *Death 24x a Second* in relation to how we experience films, her concepts on eroticism of the female body as well as eroticism of the private body are relevant to the topic of surveillance-themed films with movies like *Strange Days* tapping into the fetish and panic that comes with examining and experiencing people that have been objectified as a source of pleasure. As Mulvey's work has expanded her original hypothesis on the gaze, it furthers its relevance towards the way we see films like *Southland Tales* and

Nightcrawler as her newer readings work in tandem with the advancement of how surveillance is constructed on film to become more attached to the mechanical process of repetition and stillness in form.

Identification with the gaze in effect can be complicated as the viewer has taken on the role of the camera, but must also share vision at times with the more predominant characters on-screen. This means that the camera and the narrative expect you to view on the same level as the characters, indulging in those they are looking at, yet under the same level of observation that the audience partakes in when watching a film. When this dilemma is illuminated to the audience, it gives the audience a sense of unease as they are watching themselves being watched as objects exactly like those within the film image. As a result, this brings awareness to the concept of the film looking back at the audience, partaking in a gaze of its own to communicate to the audience their position as a spectator and as one with the camera and film objects. When recalling films that dare the viewer to look back such as Stuart Gordon's *Fortress* (1993), Dixon illustrates that the surveillance exerted by the warden of the film's maximum security prison played by Kurtwood Smith, who often intimidates the audience and characters with a heavy gaze "results in a projection of the self into the actor/viewer and the receptor/viewer becomes transparent, the transcendent instant in which we are controlled by the gaze of the screen, and the personages (real or constructed) inhabiting it" (Dixon 49). The end result transmits a feeling of menace and intimidation from Smith's character to the audience as the fear produced in the spectator comes from the power that film holds in treating the audience like as much of a prop for its narrative as the images in the film are, rendering the spectator as helpless and trapped in the narrative as the characters do within the walls of

the dystopian prison; only this time, the prison is within the viewer's subconscious. That sensation of being watched encompasses the main crux of surveillance films as the camera's objective in these films is to make viewers aware of the role that the camera plays by observing the characters within the narrative and the viewers who do not expect the camera's gaze to turn towards the viewer with as much ease as the look back would otherwise propose.

IDEOLOGY

Because a subconscious layer provides the audience a means of interpreting the messages produces within the film image, this means the film image was constructed specifically to evoke a set of meanings to the audience that is logical to the narrative and ideological to the audience. Freud's psychic apparatus that explains human behavior and mental functions was eventually applied to the cinematic apparatus of how viewers are positioned as subjects within the ideological representation of "reality" onscreen. The cinematic apparatus was explored by Jean Louis Baudry, who explained that "the spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees" (Baudry, p. 364). He attributes this to the camera which functions as a method of relaying the ideological images to the spectator, relating them to what they witness within the diegesis. As this brings the audience closer to the film by involving them with the narrative, it also involves them with the messages that are attributed to the images displayed and gives audiences the task of unpacking and relating the ideological images to their own experiences.

Ideology in cinema is used not only to communicate a set of beliefs and concepts of experience to the audience, but also to act as the driving force of the narrative in a manner where adopting the narrative's ideology becomes imperative to understanding the film. The study applies Jean Baudrillard's studies on simulacra to examine the function of cinema and escape in these films that highlight the relation that fantasy has as the reality of representation. What the film's narratives present as simulations of reality end up creating situations that allow reality to come at the audience in full force. Many imagine film as an escape from reality, but ideology is a variable that the audience brings into the films that remains active throughout a screening. In philosopher Slavoj Žižek's book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, he provides explanations to the active and latent functions of ideology in providing people with satisfaction in consumption, and how dream and reality help piece together concepts of ideology to create an active participant of its influence. Žižek further emphasizes the responsibility that people hold in their involvement with ideological formation by stating that "the function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel" (Žižek, p. 722). With ideology, fantasy becomes a product constructed as a conscious effort to incorporate subconscious desires into their reality and social relations to mask up the reality that does not support the existence of theirs.

This relationship people have with ideology becomes emblematic of the audiences relationship to cinema, as the images constructed do not act as a temporary hiding place to escape reality, but as a code that remains with us as a small yet significant contribution to our social reality. For example, the films within the study capture what Michel

Foucault calls “governmentality”, the idea that the dominant ideology is empowered by the idea that authority serves to protect the general public. While *Strange Days* targets this mostly in its ending where authority is needed to restore balance that is thrown off by the false authority of corrupt officers, *Southland Tales* demonstrates this highly with surveillance being seen as necessary for USIDent to protect America from terrorist attacks, and for public figures to achieve stardom and media attention. *Nightcrawler*’s use of governmentality is on a much lower scale, but ultimately serves to highlight the media’s push for the public to support being watched regularly to support the dominant ideology and protect the wealthy, upper class civilians through the public spectacle of urban crime. This manner of justification explains why ideology would be important to note when looking through surveillance cinema as surveillance-themed films use our understanding of reality to construct a reality that reinforces or rejects the principles that exist within our social reality such as whether spying on civilians is necessary or dangerous.

LITERARY REVIEW: SIGNIFICANCE OF THESIS

Analyzing the relation that surveillance has with cinema would be significant to applying familiar concepts to more contemporary issues, building on these older concepts by expanding them through implementing their use on more recent scholarly work, and fleshing out a newer field of study with surveillance culture playing a key role in how film narrative has been and will be constructed throughout the 21st century. Through the works of Laura Mulvey, I can further expand on spectator analysis as it examines how contemporary cinema is fond of honing in on the audience’s desires as they question, reinforce, and challenge the relationship between the screen and the spectator. This is

emphasized heavily through Patricia Pisters, as her research on the neuro-image provides the means to study how the spectator internalizes the camera's function as an embodied experience of the screen's projection. As a result, her readings would help explain the difference in each of the films' cinematography methods as the camera's perspective changes from the phrenological vantage point of the characters to the mechanical vantage point of surveillance equipment. Michel Foucault's lectures on governmentality provide the narrative context of my argument as the idea that people consent to authoritarian power based on what is perceived as their best interests seeps into the movies that follow *Strange Days* as the post 9/11 landscape of the two newer films in the study shift from using surveillance tools to combat the status quo to becoming assimilated into the visual representation of the status quo. Jean Baudrillard's theory on simulations provides another method of contrasting the films as *Strange Days* simulates reality through recording and replaying objective experiences is followed in *Southland Tales* and *Nightcrawler* with manipulating and constructing reality using viral video for the former and network news for the latter. Other authors examine the films head-on by commenting on their relevance to the time period they were released in and their relationship to prior academic texts.

SUMMARY

The main intention of my thesis is to use three examples of surveillance cinema from the 1990's onwards to argue that these films represent a growing awareness of surveillance in the United States, and a shift in perception about voyeurism and scopophilia from a theoretical standpoint. I propose that because these films highlight

elements of surveillance from the Internet's early years to our present era, each of the three hones in on specific aspects of our understanding of spying. The curiosity and personal investment in the voyeur expressed in *Strange Days* in 1995 contrasts with the fears of terrorist attacks in an elevated police state during a period of mass media pandemonium with 2006's *Southland Tales*, and the heightened importance of gathering information in today's age that relies on voyeurism to create new information in 2014's *Nightcrawler*. Although much of my research encapsulates the works of several writers and theorists, the theoretical framework of my thesis relies on the works of Laura Mulvey and Patricia Pisters to mark the contrast between how surveillance and scopophilia is presented to audiences. With Mulvey, I intend on honing in on how her positions on spectatorship have expanded and evolved to integrate her studies on the gaze into a new media environment that demonstrates scopophilia on the screen much differently than it did in 1970's film discourse. The gaze, while still seen as a concept of voyeuristic desire, has since been questioning what desire is attributed from a gaze with the emergence of new media where being watched and being able to watch are more of an expectation than a concern. Meanwhile, Pisters description of the neuro-image is summarized as a replacement of using acting alone as artificial vessel for memories with a "proliferation of screens, data, and information of contemporary globalized media culture" (Pisters, 197). Rather than relying on the body's experience of memory as the sole source of production for the film image, the image relies on the cluster of images produced from datalinks that replicate circuits in technology and the human mind. As a result, Pisters provides the linkage between the three films as they mark a change in capturing surveillance as characters in later works become more mechanical in their functionality

than past films that positioned the viewer in relation to a perspective outside of organization surveillance systems.

Because this study is from a theoretical viewpoint, much of the research is centered around the publications of Mulvey and Pisters as their ideas on spectatorship support my hypothesis on the viewer's role in surveillance cinema. Other theorist and authors are utilized to flesh out aspects of the films that mark the changes present in my hypothesis. Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality that is present in later films as a way to pinpoint narratives in which the general public's consents to privacy invasion for safety concerns. Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulations emphasizes the ambiguous state of reality where our understanding of media events and cultural occurrences are shaped in a way that gives viewers a simulated, hyperrealistic experience of reality. The films explore governmentality and simulation through a constantly changing understanding of surveillance as *Strange Days* highlights a world where the police force, while corrupt, has the potential to resolve conflict, and the SQUID, despite being a product that creates a simulated playback of a reality, utilizes the recording device to capture events as they occur in the real world. *Southland Tales*, however, marks a much different precedence as the film form mimics the mechanical algorithms of a mass surveillance system that captures images across Los Angeles, and paves the way for *Nightcrawler*, which examines using staged representation of reality in order to build the fear and intrigue that results in gathering the influence needed to sway public opinion and make viewers dependent on their images. While governmentality and simulation are often rooted in the historicism behind their contextual implementation throughout the years, they also represent a means to examine how they influence the film form, specifically

when exploring the growing prominence of mass surveillance where the camera's gaze is necessary to depict its presence in American society. Exploring the relationship that the gaze and the neuro-image have with society's simulated and hegemonic realities help support the argument that these films exemplify surveillance cinema's evolving form as viewers are positioned closer and closer to organization surveillance systems, forcing audiences to contextualize their own paradoxes behind the curiosity, desire, and fear attributed to cinematic scopophilia. In the process, this information can be used to analyze the correlation between how the films conceptualizes surveillance through the camera and how the spectator views the film, bringing their own reflexive experience of society with them while placing themselves in the perspective of the film's camera.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter II will be focusing on how *Strange Days*, focuses on the similarities and differences between capturing reality and experiences, and the desires of looking that centers around the male gaze with the film's use of voyeurism for erotic entertainment. Additionally, it will analyze how the gaze's desirable effect is turned against the viewers as the gaze begins to create feelings of disgust and anxiety over the feeling of watching and being watched, as well as show how the film's use of the voyeuristic look exemplifies the power that surveillance has to change public opinion based on the images they see. Chapter III involves *Southland Tales*, and how the film uses America during the War on Terror as the backdrop for a film about the power that mass surveillance holds over the camera, the lust for mass exposure attached to fame and stardom, and the inevitability of a surveillance society on the brink of collapse. Chapter IV will be about

the role the camera plays in *Nightcrawler* as it follows a sociopathic cameraman who digs through crime scenes and breaks into homes to get the best footage to present to the local news. Additionally, it uses the news format to construct stories from the crime scenes that give audiences a fearful and paranoid portrayal of their daily lives

II. RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW: THE GAZE OF *STRANGE DAYS*

INTRODUCTION

Temptation has an addictive quality that grants higher degrees of elation from the desire for an experience than the experience itself. The desires that can be obtained by surveillance technology and the troubling possibilities that arise from the ability to utilize this technology to invade privacy are explored thoroughly in *Strange Days*, directed by Kathryn Bigelow and written by James Cameron. The allure of experiencing the private lives of others is emphasized heavily in the film's posters that leave the tagline "You know you want it" as a promise to viewers that the film will provide them with the tantalizing opportunity to internalize the screen that peers into the intimate moments of a person's life. In the process, this allows the viewer to feel their sensations as they react to them in phrenological ecstasy as they experience a simulated feeling of reality. These relations mirror the curiosity and fascination for the emergence of new media technology throughout the early 1990's as new ways to experience recorded imagery and new methods of communication provided an endless degree of possibilities to a generation that was still growing accustomed to technology that would eventually shape our future interactions with society. Nevertheless, as Jeffery Middents notes in his article on the film, "the technology traps the viewer into the implicit dangers of the possibilities of near-future recording technology when the distanced screen is removed completely from the cinematic apparatus" (Middents 2004)". The gap that makes up the distance between

the viewer and the screen is let down to experience the enjoyment of becoming a part of the experience to feel what is presented in the camera. However, the film takes a sinister approach by taking the opportunity to use this same method to strike fear and discord into the audience by showing them the dangerous side to bearing the gaze. It is a film that encapsulates our reflexive relationship to film as a simulation of reality, how our relationship with both the camera and protagonist both titillates and antagonizes the audience through what the camera captures, and how we interpret the text based on our experiences with reality in mediated and non-mediated environments. As the thesis focuses on mass surveillance in cinema, and how they involve the audience's own reflexivity with surveillance in their ever-evolving technological environment, *Strange Days* uses the audience's knowledge of early Internet age technology and early 90's social strife to call into consciousness the relationship that the spectator has with voyeurism in a newly emerging mass media landscape.

Strange Days focuses on Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes), a former LAPD officer who works as a black market dealer that sells bootleg tapes for a simulation device known as the Superconducting Quantum Interference Device, or SQUID. In the film, the SQUID records experiences from the user's cerebral cortex and converts them into tapes that can be traded and viewed in playback, offering the chance for others to take the point-of-view of the user who recorded the event. What separates this from standard video, however, is that when a recording is played back on a SQUID's tape deck, it simulates the physical sensations of the user who recorded it, granting the viewer the same feelings, sensations, and desires as the person they are sharing perspectives with. In the midst of the oncoming New Year in 1999, Lenny is faced with a dilemma when the

tape is used to record a snuff film of his friend Iris' (Brigitte Bako) rape and murder, drawing Lenny and his friend Lornette "Mace" Maso (Angela Bassett) closer to a grand conspiracy that takes the SQUID's usage to a much more serious degree than Lenny could have imagined.

As the mysteries that surround Iris' death start to unfold, it peels back more layers that eventually reveal that it was the result of a synergy between two crooked cops needing to bury the evidence that they killed rapper Jeriko One (Glenn Plumber), record exec Philo Gant's (Michael Wincott) paranoia in betrayal, and Lenny's friend Max Peltier's (Tom Sizemore) affair with Lenny's rock star ex-girlfriend and Philo's current partner/boss Faith (Juliette Lewis). As a result, the SQUID technology is constantly re-appropriated as a voyeuristic escape from reality, "porno for wire junkies" as Mace calls it, and, most importantly, as a tool for surveillance. As the SQUID originates as government technology that replaced the wiretap and is considered illegal, Lenny's use of the SQUID near the beginning of the film is relatively basic in its simplicity to replicate pornography or thrill-seeking that doesn't become snuff. For Max, it becomes a method of torturing and antagonizing Lenny by turning the camera towards him, while Iris utilizes it to capture evidence that could be used by the criminal justice system to apprehend those responsible for Jeriko's death.

With this in mind, the film explores the possibilities of surveillance technology to delve into the private sphere, particularly in light of its entrenchment in the public sphere as society's infrastructure has been shaped by newly-developed technology. As the script was written in 1993 and the film was released in 1995, the Internet had yet to become as influential to our daily functions as they are today, so what is reflected in the film's

content relating to surveillance technology's ubiquitous presence is out of a morbid curiosity of what it would be like to have access to a switchboard containing the lives of others. The SQUID's capabilities throughout the film give audiences the opportunity to share this curiosity by sharing the camera's perspective, offering a way for audiences to see firsthand the benefits and consequences of having the ability to access people's lives through a voyeuristic lens. As Catherine Zimmer discusses in an article for the film, she explains that "by establishing narrative connectivity between absolute subjective experience and the use of representational media in surveillance and racial formations, the film asks us to trace the possible intersections of individually embodied experience and systematic intervention in technologies of mediation and political structuring." (Zimmer 2010). The theme of reality and memory in the film expresses how our experience with the environment we live in and our understanding of history with regards to national security and civil rights infractions gives context to our experiences in the present and significance to the act of seeing in our contemporary sociopolitical landscape. This chapter will focus extensively on applying Pisters' study on the neuro-image with the viewer's perspective of the SQUID's functionality in capturing and experiencing reality through simulation as well as Mulvey's perspective on the power that repetition has in building the bond that viewers have with the camera. Mulvey's earlier research is also relevant to *Strange Days* as her older analysis on the viewer's response to cinematic voyeurism and the male gaze explains how the film brings both desire and anxiety to the camera's gaze. Additionally, the power that vision has in evoking social memory and provoking a response in the viewer also encompasses the theme of *Strange Days* as a film

focusing on how the viewer experiences reality and narrative through their relationship with an evolving new media landscape that finds new ways to experience society..

FILMING THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Much of the narrative is filmed from outside of the characters perspectives where the audience sees the events unfold through the characters' emotions and actions captured by the camera. The camera, however, adopts the camera's look through the SQUID head-set, portrayed through a first person perspective as an apparatus to give audiences the same experience the characters have when they watch a "tape". These tapes simulate the point-of-view and sensations of the person that filmed the tape's content, resulting in the film's camera simulating the phenomenological experience of the tapes in first-person. Patricia Pisters analysis of the neuro-image reflects on the effect that the SQUID has on the spectator as she states that "we no longer consider cinema as an illusion of reality but rather in terms of the 'reality of illusion'" (Pisters, 71). This particular belief follows throughout the film as the camera's function does not separate the viewer from the narrative nor does it construct itself in a way that the film would feel as if it was constructed for the audience's entertainment. Instead, the film ties the camera directly to the characters' actions and emotions, creating cinematography that is responsive to what actions characters would take and how they are feeling in the present moment. As the characters who watch the tape are seeing and feeling a completely different experience from their own, the viewer must take on the role of both the camera and the character wearing the SQUID in these segments to make sense of what they are watching and the sensations that the characters feel during the simulation. Watching the tapes becomes an

exercise for the film's characters and audience alike as a function that relies on their reflexive understanding of reality to experience reality through simulation.

The film illustrates to the audience the relationship between the camera and the viewer by having them experience the first-person interaction that the characters have with the SQUID technology. In these segments, the camera takes on the role of the SQUID, simulating the feeling of experiencing what was captured on the tapes firsthand. The human embodiment of the camera's gaze becomes a fascination in and out of the film narrative as we are able to feel the characters' wonderment, fear, and excitement as the camera navigates through every tape through a modified steadicam that brings the camera's gaze close enough to the viewer and characters' eyes that it feels like you are there experiencing what they do. Through this eye-line match while the SQUID technology is used, the film acknowledges the desires that the viewer shares with those who are fascinated and enamored with the SQUID that allows them to get so close to the action unfolding in the tapes. Christian Metz explains that as the spectator places their identification in the film narrative as the camera's look, "the spectator can do no other than identify with the camera too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at and whose stationing (= framing) determines the vanishing point" (Metz 824). As a result, the narrative restages this observation by placing the camera's sight as the characters' points of view, the SQUID head-set, and the cinematic camera that captures the narrative. While the spectator must also place themselves in the protagonists' perspectives in order to have some mediation within the narrative, the camera acts as a component to the spectator's identification as they must place themselves in both the protagonists and the camera that follows them. Because *Strange Days* ties the camera

often to the protagonist's point-of-view as they seek out desire from indulging in the gaze that the SQUID provides, it gives the audiences a pathway to use the camera's gaze to use this surveillance technology to satisfy the same desires held by Lenny through sharing the gratification and sensations that he receives from the SQUID's view.

This concept is played around with in the film's distribution and presentation as many outlets of watching the film comment on the accessibility and immersion presented to viewers. One teaser trailer shows Lenny staring directly into the camera in a close-up shot as he sells the SQUID experience directly to the viewer using the same tactics he did with a lawyer near the beginning of the film, but with the added inclusion of dynamic text on the screen to sell you on his product in the same manner as a nightly infomercial. The film itself is given the same selling points as the SQUID within the teaser as Lenny's proposal is set up to promise the viewers he is directly staring at with the same list of possibilities granted to those who plug into the SQUID. The movie theater you would see the film or teaser trailer in provides another dynamic to this as the images are projected in a wide view in the theaters dark, narrow setting. The projector also adds a dimension to the presentation since it acts as an "an apparatus the spectator has behind him, at the back of his head, that is, precisely where phantasy locates the 'focus' for all vision" (Metz, 824). With the spectator identifying with the images on screen through the camera's gaze, the spectator must also identify with the apparatus that projects the images that represent identity with the viewer becoming the camera, the projector that broadcasts what the camera captured, and the screen that reflects the camera's images back to the viewer.

MECHANICAL AUGMENTATION OF SIGHT AND THOUGHT

Playback plays an interesting role in the narrative as the SQUID runs as a device that functions as a second eye that allows users to experience another person's life, and yet the tapes act as the cerebral equivalent of a film reel, playing through an experience in its entirety like a film until it reaches its climax. Although there is no rewind function, yet the tapes function in the same manner as portable VHS tapes that can be replayed continuously, creating an avenue to harbor an obsession with the voyeuristic nature of these tapes to replay an experience continuously. This is how Lenny feeds into his own desires as he keeps his infatuation with Faith alive by replaying his intimate home movies repeatedly to tap into a dangerous breed of voyeurism that inspires him to continue to try and meet with Faith to get her back. In one rendezvous, in which we can only see Lenny and Faith through a mirror's reflection, she comments that she enjoys films more than playback as "the music comes up, there's credits, and you always know when it's over". The theater experience is one in which the act of seeing is highly immersive and transcendental in the spectator's embodiment of the camera, but there is a temporal aspect to theaters as its duration has a complete trajectory with a definite start and finish, ending with the dark lights turning on as a signal for the audience to leave in time to clean up. There might be repeat showings in theaters, but it is not meant to last as a film will get pulled from the theater to make room for newer productions that will net more money.

With this in mind, Lenny's obsession with tapes that capture his desires become a commentary on memory and desire as the metaphorical materiality of the human experience and desire is achieved through the physical materiality of audiovisual tapes that replicate phrenological stimulation. His need to re-experience the past through

SQUID tapes has more in common with playback devices such as the VHS tapes and VCR recorders that allow the viewer the opportunity to hold the theater experience from the comfort of their own homes anytime they want and record televised programs on tapes that let you relive the broadcast any time you wish. The need to relive memories and moments comes at full circle with newer modes of watching video such as through DVD copies, digital downloads that can be watched on cell phones and tablets, and streaming sites that give you access to a “switchboard of souls” that gives you new ways to watch film. To watch *Strange Days* at a theater gives you an immersive experience that takes you into the film, but to be able to watch *Strange Days* from a portable device like a tablet and smartphone puts the SQUID device into perspective as both they give the spectator a convenient avenue to relive their favorite videos by watching through a closer view to the screen. Watching a film that captures voyeuristic delights with a device that you can take around with you shines light on the addictive nature of such a gaze by feeding into a steady need to embody memories from an easily accessible medium that takes you face-to-face with the screen that takes you into a fantasy world.

DESIRE OF LOOKING THROUGH THE MALE GAZE

Throughout the film, viewing the tapes the SQUID has to offer is spun as tasting “the forbidden fruit” by giving people the opportunity to briefly live out fantasies such as robbing liquor stores and sexual experimentation. The SQUID scenes are filmed by shifting the gaze directly to the viewer and the audience, so when Lenny is selling people on the chance to see that which they cannot have, Lenny is offering the audience the chance to become a part of the voyeuristic experience by positioning their vision as the

camera's vision to tap into their desire for the gaze that is indulged by film form. It is fitting, then, that Lenny's expertise is in spectacle akin to the movie experience as he prides himself in tapes that tap into the pursuit for lust and adrenaline in a safe space. More specifically, much of the clips are pornographic and explore the aspects of sexuality that are otherwise repressed both in film and in reality. The tapes, thus, are embodiments of this repression in Western society and Hollywood cinema as sexual expression has been rendered down to spectatorship that can only replicate sexual activity through visual stimulation. With sight, it is the imagination that creates most of our eroticism as the Lenny notes that the brain is an important sex organ with its ability to create arousal. Middents argues, however that "if the brain is the most important sexual organ and "playback" stimulates cortical activity, these clips become a form of masturbation: pornography, only better." (Middents 2004). Despite Lenny's insistence that it is not just an enhanced version of the television experience, it plays into the curiosity, scopophilia, and hedonism that the entertainment industry aspires to capture.

By positioning the SQUID as interactive films that indulge in the gaze presented in Hollywood cinema, there is also a message in the dangers in harboring an obsession with the image. Throughout the film, Lenny watches clips of Faith to feed into his infatuation with her using clips of their intimate moments he recorded when they were together. However, this becomes a negative aspect of Lenny's character as his friends and enemies either deride him for his infatuation with past emotions or use his indulgence in visual pleasures from the past against him when they need to lure him into a trap. When looking at audiences for erotic materials, Mulvey notes that "at its extreme, it can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms, whose only

sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other” (Mulvey, 839). While this is relatively outdated when applied to an audience that is able to have a better grasp of the material, this would definitely apply to Lenny’s dependence on the SQUID to keep his feelings for Faith alive when the tapes embody a possessive lust he has towards watching and feeling Faith. This is the case with one scene where the audience sees Lenny partake in his own clips for the first time to reveal that he had recorded his relationship with Faith for his own personal use. The camera switches constantly between Lenny’s point-of-view where he is making love to Faith in a beachside resort and the real world where the audience sees Lenny’s pleasure. While the audience is invited to share Lenny’s pleasure while they share his vision as he makes love to Faith, they are also left to critique Lenny for indulging in a fantasy as he chases after an ex-girlfriend who wants nothing to do with him. While Mulvey’s earlier look at the gaze fleshes out a basic understanding of desire evoked from positioning the camera’s line of sight towards private spaces, her newer research explains how Lenny seeks out these images as she writes that “the desire to possess and hold the elusive image led to repeated viewing, a return to the cinema to watch the same film over and over again” (Mulvey, 161). With this understanding of connecting to an image through repetition, Lenny’s relationship with Faith exists purely within the realm of the SQUID’s cinematic fantasy as he projects his contact with the SQUID and the satisfaction he gets from its gaze onto his failed relationship with Faith. When Mace finally calls Lenny out on feeding into this toxic relationship with Faith through his tapes, she is calling attention to the toxicity of Lenny’s sole expression of love for Faith through his desire to obtain

gratification from watching her constantly in videos, projecting his own feelings of lust into his idea for affection.

DISGUST AND FEAR IN THE GAZE

The desire that Lenny seeks out through his personal use of the SQUID mirrors back to the audience's own gratification they get from watching eroticism on film as their voyeuristic fixation is used as a tool against both Lenny and the viewer by rerouting their desire towards a sinister path. The film implicates the viewer for being as responsible as Lenny is for assuming that the gaze that is exemplified by the SQUID's brand of voyeurism is a harmless escape into a world of desire. This is accomplished through the shift in tone that the SQUID tapes take on as their aim ultimately is no longer to titillate, but to show to Lenny and the audience the potential that cinematic voyeurism has in its ability to horrify, stalk, and expose.

The film takes a more sinister turn when Lenny is given an envelope from an unknown source that shows in full detail the rape and murder of his friend Iris. When Lenny first sees what is going on, he assumes that it is a part of a breaking-and-entering fantasy, continuing to be under the belief that the tapes deal in entertainment. However, it ends up escalating as he discovers the person filming the tape is stalking Iris, forcing Lenny to watch in horror as his friend is pinned down and tasered. Even though the audience identifies with the camera and must watch Iris' murder from the killer's point of view, the audience also has to channel their reaction to the tape with Lenny's reaction as the camera shifts between the killer's point-of-view and Lenny writhing in his seat as he watches. Additionally, the audience's alignment with the gaze is called into question

through the sensations that Lenny feels as he watches it. Before Iris is killed, the murderer puts the SQUID on her so that the killer, and by proxy, Lenny, can feel what Iris feels as she is raped and killed. Middents highlights how he saw audiences watching Iris' death and how their reaction was "extremely uncomfortable, as if the viewing audience were experiencing Iris's pain, not the killer's pleasure." (Middents 2004). While one of the earlier erotic SQUID tapes would indulge bearing the gaze, it is through a much uglier scenario when the erotic gaze turns itself on the viewer as desire is replaced with pain and fear, making audience feel how the victims of such a gaze feel. The killer's acknowledgement in the misery that Lenny and Iris will feel to the camera shows audiences how the power of the gaze can be used to torment and antagonize the spectators by placing them within the same sphere of sensation that the killer feels, further positioning the audience and Lenny as accomplices to the pleasure the killer feels in the scene. As a result, the film challenges the concept of the gaze by showing to audiences the more demented side to having access to a "switchboard of souls" that lets you peer into the deepest recesses of a person's mind no matter how twisted they end up being. It addresses how the fetishization of voyeurism through this gaze creates a harmful, antisocial view of humanity by staring into the subjects with the intent to probe them to satiate one's desires.

In the process of showing how the gaze is used to send aftershocks in the viewer by participating in the act, the film also aims to give viewers the fear of being watched as well. As Lenny is sent more tapes by the anonymous threat, they become increasingly unnerving as they close in on his personal life and probe his own privacy. In one tape, Lenny watches as the man sneaks into his apartment and taunts him by gently brushing a

box cutter against Lenny's throat while he sleeps. Even though we see from the man's perspective once again, we assume the role of Lenny after Iris' death made it clear that we are meant to feel what he feels, so the villain's antagonism through his usage of the SQUID mocks both Lenny and the audience for using the device's adrenaline rush to stalk his victims and play games with them under his gaze. It closes the distance between the screen and the viewer to show them the consequences of the interaction they have in reveling in the gaze by having the image mock and threaten to engulf the viewer as he is partaking in the gaze.

The paranoia lies also in that Lenny, who was once selling experiences as objects is now being rendered into an object himself as the tapes he is sent by the villain aims to envelope the private lives of Lenny and his friends. At first, he is just pushing a product distanced from himself that he can view from afar, but the videos he is sent are unnerving as he has become both a product and the target consumer of himself through the villain's gaze. In his analysis of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation*, Norman Denzin notes that the reason why the main character, Harry (Gene Hackman), goes on a paranoid state of panic by the end of the film is that he becomes aware of "the fact that somebody else has bugged his apartment: he has been turned into a commodity, into the producer of a set of experiences that somebody else can capture and sell" (Denzin 175). Just as Harry's investigation and curiosity of a crime becomes a weapon that is used against him to make him as consumable as the material he records, Lenny's consumption of the SQUID's recording technology make him the perfect target to be consumed by someone who has always had their eye on Lenny. What makes this point increasingly unnerving is that the man who used the device to taunt Lenny and kill Iris is revealed to be Max, Lenny's

closest friend who knows him as much as he knows himself. Similarly, Faith cites Lenny as an inspiration to aiding Max in his plot to use the SQUID against Lenny and Philo by claiming that she developed a taste for being watched from him. He is not only being objectified, but he is objectified by those close enough with him to know what would send him over the edge, just as the camera objectifies the audience by manipulating the gaze to be used against them.

THE POWER OF VISION

Mace, who heavily disapproves of the SQUID's existence in general, is the most disturbed with what she finds when she first looks through the device as she sees the full extent of how the device could be used to capture the truth. When Mace is first convinced to experience the SQUID, it is to watch the tape that Iris recorded that caught the moment that Jeriko One was killed, only to find out that he was murdered along with a bandmate by two police officers, Steckler (Vincent D'Onofrio) and Engelman (William Fichtner), during a traffic stop. Mace's recoil from the disgust she feels watching the tape creates an impulse to use the tape to expose the two cops to the public and let them know about the truth behind Jeriko's death. Ultimately, the SQUID's uses as a simulation device for escapism is left in a much different light not just from the snuff films left by the killer, but also from its use to capture the reality of Jeriko One's demise as a set-up between his producer and the police force. As the SQUID's capabilities are fleshed out throughout the film, it mirrors Baudrillard's warning of simulation as he explains that "in this impossibility of isolating the process of simulation must be seen the whole thrust of an order that can only see and understand in terms of some reality, because it can function

nowhere else” (Baudrillard, 373). The simulation of feeling that is replicated with the SQUID is heavily rooted in reality as much of the clips film reality as experienced through the recording device, but whereas much of Lenny’s dealings are with real events that provide the framework of a simulated experience, ultimately the SQUID is still a recording device to capture reality through the simulation of experience. This means that much of the experience the audience has with police brutality videos mirrors the SQUID’s implementation in Iris’ point-of-view, creating a simulated sense of horror in a situation that is much too real for the audience considering the timeliness of the Rodney King beating. While the film constantly recollects social history during the early 1990’s in the lieu of civil unrest from police brutality cases, the importance using filmed footage as evidence to expose this level of corruption rings true especially in the 2010’s. With video evidence of the deaths of Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray at the hands of police officers in the collective consciousness of our current media landscape, capturing police brutality on film for mass exposure has become important. Catherine Zimmer highlights how filming police brutality, much like how Jeriko’s death was captured in the film, is “arguably an ongoing threat to one-sided surveillance culture, especially with the increasing economic availability of digital video, and now even more with the increased possibilities of distribution provided by internet video-sharing sites.” (Zimmer 2010). With all of the technology at the hands of authority, especially considering the SQUID as a tool for government surveillance, the tape containing Jeriko’s death is seen as the film taking the gaze back as it looks back at those that wield access to surveillance tech, reflecting a mirror back at the cops that killed Jeriko for everyone to see. Even though it was released in 1995, the push to make sure that the

police are held accountable for brutality by giving the country the look into police procedures is all the more relevant in an era where we learned the most about the police's reaction to protests in Ferguson, MO through face-to-face confrontations with brutality, SWAT units, and tear gas through video footage on social media.

One scene, in particular, that offers reflexive discourse on our social history at the time of the film's production is when a riot breaks out at the New Year's Eve party after Steckler and Engelman convince the police force to beat Mace for allegedly threatening the two. Despite the lack of the SQUID's presence, the third-person camera that captures the police brutality Mace receives offers a moment of meditation for the audience to reflect on the spectatorial nature of how we see the beating from the perspectives of the witnesses. As witnesses rush the officers to start an uprising against their authority, the camera catches the pandemonium as it embodies those compelled to fight against authority as a result of seeing corruption as it happens within the public sphere in front of their own eyes. The public nature of both how the audience sees Mace's beating as well as the crowd's outrage aims to have the audience reflect on social issues at the time such as the Rodney King beating and the 1992 Los Angeles riots that happened as a result of the acquittal of the officers involved in his beating. In the process, *Strange Days* wants viewers to reflect on the power that vision has in these two current events by getting "invested in playing out a series of temporally discrete events into a single experience, embodied this time most fully by the film's viewers as we survey the scene from in, above, and around the unfolding circumstances" (Zimmer, 2010). The film's ending even mirrors the rush for white authority figures to restore order and balance by having the police commissioner call to arrest Steckler and Engelman but not before Engelman

commits suicide and Steckler is killed by a hail of police gunfire, ensuring the people that the system works even though Mace's attackers were not given any punishment. The film's final moments, thus, condense the 1992 police brutality case and ensuing riots through a series of images that reflect on how we react when we see injustice dealt by authority figures with our own line of vision, bringing perspective into the film's themes of social memory and the power of sight. In addition, it also reveals how spectatorship implicates the viewer by placing them behind the wall of the camera's gaze, helpless to stop the events unfolding behind the camera's line of vision. At the same time, this line of sight acts as a call to arms as viewership is crucial to being educated about the injustices seen in videos such as the King footage, and spectatorship, thus creates a sense of urgency to change society so that there would not be another opportunity to see any more police brutality cases in the community. The film aims to use its ending to express the power that watching has as the stakes continue to skyrocket as increased viewership means more people have seen and understood what it would take for them to shape the future and make sure that society is not going to brush aside brutality in favor of the status quo.

CONCLUSION

Strange Days creates a reflexive experience that relates the closeness the audience has with the screen to society's fascination with surveillance technology, and relates the conflict of surveillance technology's omnipresence to a personal, psychological level that fuses the mind and camera. Using the SQUID as a hub to watch and feel experiences firsthand, it has the audience think reflexively about the immersive nature of

spectatorship and how media outlets cater to the audience's voyeuristic desires. In the process, the film shows audiences the consequences of specular pleasure as it can be used as a weapon to invade a person's privacy and antagonize them by making them objects to be observed and fetishized. Additionally, this cost is inscribed in our social history as the camera's vision is used to call to attention our troubled social history with the SQUID's functions capturing police brutality and the film's finale. With these two acting as catalysts for social uprising, audiences must take into consideration how spectatorship is an important tool in both upholding and resisting law enforcement as the dominant gaze can be used both to quell social upheaval as well as to combat against positions of power with the truth as caught on camera. Although 20 years have passed since *Strange Days* was released, the surveillance concerns that have risen in the midst of the Patriot Act, the sophistication of internet technology, and the exposure of numerous police brutality cases make the film's messages on the desire to control memory and experience all the more relevant to this day. At the same time, the fantastical nature of the SQUID technology acknowledges the organic nature of human interaction much more than further examples of surveillance cinema. The camera aims to use the SQUID to build a deeper connection with Lenny since the camera, while taking on the position of the mechanical SQUID, reflects the images that Lenny either aims to seek out or is tormented into watching. This creates a more basic implementation of Mulvey and Pisters' texts as the former's emphasis on the gaze and repetition is purely from the embodiment of the camera that Lenny imposes on the SQUID as the camera takes on an organic approach to Lenny's experiences by following his interaction with the device and reality. Meanwhile, Pisters' examination of the "reality of illusion" covers more of what

the SQUID represents in relation to the camera rather than the full narrative as the viewer relates with the characters as their minds become melded with the SQUID's projections of reality, resulting in the viewer being aligned with how the device makes the characters feel. This marks a contrast with how the future of surveillance cinema unfolds as many later films, while still featuring protagonists and characters that maintain control over the camera's gaze, benefit what the surveillance camera's capture more so than the human experience of these surveillance systems. This eventually becomes a catalyst for films during post-9/11 cinema which approach camerawork from the position of organizational authority as characters are left to identify with the power that propels the camera towards its target.

III. PIMPING THE MEMORY GOSPEL: UBIQUITY IN *SOUTHLAND TALES*

INTRODUCTION

The date is July 4, 2005. A Texan family is having an outdoor barbeque as one of the children walks around the party with a camcorder. The Fourth of July celebration is going normally, until a loud boom shakes up the block, causing the child to rush outside to figure out what was going on. Instead of fireworks, the camera captures a mushroom cloud erupting from the distance, signaling a nuclear attack on U.S. soil. From this point forward, the world will undergo drastic changes that will culminate in the world's explosive end. This is how director Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales* begins and ends; "not with a whimper, but with a bang," as many foretell throughout the narrative, paraphrasing T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*. The 2006 film takes place during the 2008 presidential elections and is centered on the re-emergence of Boxer Santaros (Dwayne Johnson), a Hollywood actor who is married to the Republican candidate's daughter and co-wrote the screenplay *The Power* alongside his socialite girlfriend, Krysta "Krysta Now" Kapowski (Sarah Michelle Geller). This screenplay foretells the end of the world as well as the events that happen within the film such as the world's deceleration brought on by Fluid Karma, an alternative fuel source run on the ocean's currents created by Baron von Westphalen (Wallace Shawn). The screenplay becomes a premonition of moments to come as he joins UPU2 officer and spy for the Neo-Marxist organization Roland Taverner (Sean William Scott) to ride along for research for his screenplay. When

a staged police shooting from the Neo-Marxists to sway the outcome of the 2008 election goes awry, Roland runs off to find his missing twin brother/clone, while Boxer finds himself caught up in a conspiracy between conservative leadership and the Neo-Marxists. In the DVD special feature, *USIDent TV: Surveilling the Southland*, director Richard Kelly sums up the film as political satire that attempts to “approach the issue of how divided our country is right now and how we might respond to such a crisis in a very bad way” (Kelly, 2006). As a result, the film’s main concern is reflecting on the Bush administration’s decisions such as declaring the War on Terror and signing the Patriot Act by taking them to their logical extremes and giving audiences a self-reflexive look at how they are both divided in political ideology yet united in their desire to intensify national security after 9/11.

Southland Tales encapsulates the post-9/11 period of the film’s release with America’s involvement with the War on Terror and the Iraq War escalating to the point where national security, fear-mongering, and hedonistic entertainment made up our media landscape. Although the film takes place in Los Angeles, California, the most we see of the surroundings is through surveillance footage of the scenic locations to go along with narrative, which is told through narration by Iraq War vet Pilot Abilene (Justin Timberlake) and a series of news stories displayed within a panopticon of screens. With much of the film’s emphasis placed on showing a panorama of screens, the film wants to express our mediated experience of seeking out information through our understanding of reality that is filtered through the images that surround us, piecing them all together into a collage of what popular media defines as reality. Our understanding of reality, however, can become muddled by the amount of information that is circulated throughout the

narrative. In analyzing the feed of information the film provides, Patricia Pisters places the film as "part of a transmedial logic, whereby different versions of the story are scattered like debris in media culture at large; as such, they are part of an open and growing network that contains both powerful and banal versions" (Pisters, 4050-4076). It is through the collage of clashing imagery and the film's sense of information overload that we are able to create a larger picture out of how we see the media of the 2000's in which images of global conflict fit perfectly with reality television and hedonistic entertainment. The wide array of screens also reflect on how we are being watched as the television screens we watch throughout the film look back at the civilians throughout the film as USIDent, the film world's equivalent of the National Security Agency during the Patriot Act's inception, captures the narrative and the city surrounding the narrative. There is a strange, perverse kind of pleasure that is evoked though out the film as the spectatorial nature of entertainment pervade outlets of social policy and mass media, rendering the act of viewing as an active effort to seek out erotic desires and anticipate an impending doomsday. At the same time, the act of being watched is sought out as a way to bring attention to these desires and perils as mass exposure disperses these concepts at a wide enough scale to shape public opinion. In the process, this act of taking on the look of both people watching television programs and the USIDent officers watching surveillance footage brings a sense of awareness to the governmentality of public opinion during this period in time as people are more willing to consent to a surveillance state as a result of national security crises both in the film narrative and in the real world's current events.

Although *Southland Tales* focuses on a combination of several different themes, all colliding together into one cohesive portrait of post-9/11 America, it is the growing concerns about the need for government supervision and the media's circulation of this message that acts as the backbone of the film's plot. The hovering presence of USIDent, the Neo-Marxist wing, and Pilot Abilene in the narrative reflects on the chaotic information feed that circulates throughout the media, government, and Southland that overwhelms the spectator. USIDent itself plays dual roles in the narrative; one as the in-universe equivalent of the Patriot Act, reflecting on the audience's understanding of national security in post-9/11 America by intensifying the law to its highest degree, and another as the camera's line of sight, giving audience the chance to take an active role in the surveillance activities and feel the same desires the employees would by getting invested in the footage their screens display. In a universe where so many people are being watched, the film also expresses the hierarchy of those in power based on who is watching them, creating an impulse for characters to be watched. Characters aspire to be exposed as power is granted in the media to those who have the spotlight on them, so throughout the film, celebrities and political groups are aiming to have the cameras pointed to them exclusively to gain a large amount of attention and influence despite the fact that everybody is being watched on camera. The gloomier side of having the ability to capture a steady feed of information and images comes from the implication that there is inevitability in being watched as a trade-off for having a secure nation, so people must either aim to be exposed by those watching or seek to obtain the power to watch others. While Mulvey's text reflects on the bond that the viewer has with surveillance technology in the film as a result of the audience and camera sharing its line of sight with

the film's surveillance systems, Pisters helps place this into the perspective of the film as she pinpoints how the film's positioning of the audience and camera provide the viewer with an alignment with mass surveillance. Because *Southland Tales* surrounds its characters with a multitude of cameras and screens, what the audience must do with the film image is to use it as a reflexive look at the relationship between their position as spectators of the characters' pursuit to expose and be exposed, and their position as people living in a post-9/11 nation where surveillance concerns have been emerging as a result of civilians being watched for the sake of national security.

Ultimately, the film relates the spectator's desire in watching and being watched as the characters in the narrative, creating an understanding that USIDent exists because of the demand that the general populace has to being placed under the government's watch to avoid any potential attacks on U.S. soil. Steven Shaviro highlights the expanding role of new media's presence in relation to the film's media landscape and moving-image format to address the format the film takes as the camera adopts the functions of mass media and surveillance systems in the narrative. Meanwhile, Patricia Pisters' application of the neuro-image to the film lends to the understanding of the film's mass surveillance format as a way to involve the spectator in not just looking from the gaze that USIDent and the Neo-Marxists partake in, but also being watched from that gaze and feeling the camera's presence. Mulvey's later publications expand on this as the centralization of USIDent to the camera the audience's experience the film from draws the viewer into an embodiment of the mechanical processes behind mass surveillance technology that Pisters mentions. The film also speaks to the politics of reflexivity as the film recalls social memory between 2001 and 2006 as a period where mass surveillance

and mass media emerge as ways to keep Americans informed about the War on Terror, lending to the film's narrative a social history that reflects on the chaotic and pervasive camera. What reflexivity accomplishes with *Southland Tales* is commenting on the pleasures and perils of government supervision, where safety from foreign threats that continuously emerge through network news ends up being the harbinger to U.S. civilians being watched as well to prevent domestic threats. Michel Foucault's analysis of governmentality lends insight on this bond as the viewer is positioned in a way that places them within a myriad of cameras that were expected to watch them as a result of the burgeoning need for government intervention from the threats brought on by the War on Terror. As a result of the paranoia captured in the film form's embodiment of USIDent that fuels the constant feeling of being threatened by terrorist attacks, the viewer is left to reflect on the idea that being watched and giving others the power to watch them will keep them safe from harm's way, forming their dependency on having the gaze on them.

USIDENT AND NEO-MARXISTS

Southland Tales begins by establishing an alternate history in which the United States is attacked by a nuclear strike, prompting the Bush administration to establish much stricter policies on national security. This culminates in a new government bureau tasked to keep tabs on U.S. civilians and act as the central intelligence-gathering hub of the Homeland Security Department known as USIDent. Because the film positions USIDent as the Patriot Act taken to its most extreme heights, the agency takes on the roles that would ordinarily go to law enforcement as everything from state of emergencies to meter parking violations are policed through mass surveillance USIDent

serves as an umbrella agency that allocates its power throughout numerous federal and state departments from UPU 1 to 5, reaching as far as the SWAT, FBI, TSA, INTERPOL, and the President. The office routes any information caught on cameras planted throughout cities nationwide to ensure that the law is being upheld to its highest degree. USIDent monitors people regularly through filming them on camera, looking over their Internet communication, recording phone calls, wiretapping, requiring visas for interstate travel, and many other methods to publicize the private sphere. Any suspected terrorists or lawbreakers are to be shot dead by the nearest police officers. What the presence of USIDent serves to express about the narrative and about our relationship to American society is that there are many facets of privacy that have been relinquished with the consent of the people in return for both security and expression.

Surveillance and exposure in the narrative becomes synonymous not just with the authoritarian figures of USIDent and conservative leadership, but also with the Neo-Marxists, an extreme-left terrorist group that aims to use USIDeath, the counter-surveillance technology they use to spy on civilians and circulate viral videos to sway influence away from the Republican party. Their use of USIDeath is one of the many similarities that the Neo-Marxists has with USIDent, and as the film goes on, their distinctions begin to blur as Neo-Marxist members start working alongside police officers for ulterior agendas involving the continued accumulation of secretly filmed footage from both sides. Throughout the latter half of the film, this is expressed through the negotiations between USIDent and the Neo-Marxists to figure out how to use both footage of police brutality as well as a tape that captures Boxer and Krysta sharing a romantic tete-a-tete. This lends to an idea shared in Jean Baudrillard's studies as he

examines the Watergate scandal and concludes that “it is not a scandal to be denounced according to moral and economic rationality, but a challenge to take up according to symbolic law” (Baudrillard, 371). Much of the film places a heavy importance on the impact of scandal, and ultimately, much of the scandals concocted throughout the film are a result of the sense of importance that is given to them, resulting in the stakes being raised high for how the police brutality and sex tapes will be used by USIDent and USIDeath.

With this in mind, *Southland Tales* portrays an America that is so overwhelmed with cameras and screens that in order to carry any influence, you will need to control the eyes of your followers and find new methods of benefiting from wielding the gaze’s power. The lengths that surveillance can reach gets to a point where even the Neo-Marxists need to collect private information as a way to enhance their influence. Slavoj Zizek describes the cynical distance people take from ideology is one of the many ways “to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, we are still doing them” (Zizek 721). The Neo-Marxist campaign against the conservative government, while vitriolic, ends up ultimately parroting the government’s approach to surveillance as USIDeath tracks people down, provides their own information with privately filmed material, and creating ad campaigns to hone in on the fears of privacy invasion. This quality that is shared between the two organizations is highlighted through Foucault as he states that “universal peace will not be the consequence of unification in a temporal or spiritual empire, but, if things actually work out, it will be the way in which different states are able to co-exist with each other according to a balance that prevents one dominating the

others” (Foucault, 342). While this would describe the USIDent policies of fear-mongering in a bid to have the general public consent to being watched, it is just as relevant to the Neo-Marxist’s desires to be freed from USIDent’s gaze as they propose to create a peaceful future not through co-existence, but rather from competing and using their own technology to replicate the success behind USIDent’s policies. Despite being on the opposite spectrum of conservative policies, the Neo-Marxist movement in the film shares the same structure as USIDent to recreate the system of governmentality that presents itself to the general public in a bid to use fear as an endorsement for their own ideas. Thus, surveillance becomes a crucial tool to sway public opinion on the side of either consenting to stricter national security to prevent terrorist attacks or to be appalled by Orwellian nature of USIDent enough to change the outcome of an election.

Because of the clash between the government and Neo-Marxist faction, the film’s structure is further distanced from an organic source of identification as the camera embodies both USIDent’s command center and USIDeath’s broadcasts. As a result, the spectator is drawn into the perspective of machines as the viewer’s reflexive capabilities operate much like media technology in processing the meaning behind each of the source’s cluster of images within the historical context of post-9/11 media. Mulvey highlights the change in perspectives in newer films as she explains that “with the weakening of character identification, vicarious control over the plot is replaced by another kind of power as the spectator gains immediate control over the image. No longer the driving force of the movie, the star succumbs to stillness and repetition” (Mulvey, 170). *Southland Tales* exemplifies this structure as a film that, as a result of focusing on the perspective of surveillance systems within the United States, replicates the

mechanisms that make up the entertainment media cycle with the main protagonists being merely objects stuck within their universe as they try to understand their reality as the world comes to its end. The spectator, instead, is left to their own devices as the film drives the viewers towards the media events and cultural behavior the surveillance cameras capture as they are left to watch as the characters grow anxious about being powerless to a force that watches over them.

BEING WATCHED

Because *Southland Tales* places emphasis on the ubiquitous nature of media and surveillance in contemporary American society, scenes will be interspersed with television sets, surveillance monitors, computer monitors, and news coverage, much of which envelope the whole screen and involve the viewer as much as the characters. The command center of USIDent's director Nana Mae Frost (Miranda Richardson) makes up a majority of our understanding of the surveillance that occurs in the film as we see a panel of screens that she overlooks. Each of these screens feature a myriad of different images from locations of cameras that overlook Los Angeles and coverage from USIDent's newsfeed to events occurring within the narrative and entertainment channels. While USIDent's offices serve as the database for the videos and media coverage depicted in the film, it bleeds into the film's form itself as much of the story is told through frames of surveillance camera footage, news reels, and narration that fleshes out our understanding of what is happening in the southland. The myriad of screens gives context to much of the apocalyptic fear circulating in the lieu of the upcoming election alongside entertainment news, reports of violence, and interviews with Pilot on the

experiments done on Iraq War veterans and the influence that Fluid Karma holds within the government. In this universe, the multitude of screens reflects on the expanding mediasphere that underscores new media's role in driving private matters into the public sphere as Pisters explains that the shift "to a spectator embedded or immersed in an audiovisual environment in which filmmaker and camera, characters and spectators, world and screens are all circling and questioning each other and in which we have to ask ourselves constantly: Where is the screen? How do I relate to it? What does it make me see, feel, grasp, do?" (Pisters, pp. 71). The audience's connection to the screen, as suggested by Pisters, is through the embodied brain that attaches itself to the camera's gaze. However, while *Strange Days* uses the camera to directly embody the spectator's vision with the character's line of sight, *Southland Tales* places audiences from the predominant view of surveillance cameras, computer monitors, and television sets throughout the city. To bear the gaze by embodying the screen in *Southland Tales* means to embody both the multiple surveillance systems that wraps itself around Los Angeles as well as the mass media systems that circulate the apocalyptic culture of a 2008 America. By becoming these screens, the audience is able to see what USIDent sees and what mass media circulates, thus creating a relationship where the viewer is bombarded with so many screens and so many images to compile and decipher. Eventually, these images all end up creating a collage that address our relationship to technology and surveillance in our present day Internet age as we have grown so accustomed to having access to a plethora of media outlets and information sources that the audience will have to relate themselves to the camera as if they are watching the narrative unfold through USIDent.

What makes the camera effective in expressing the relationship between the viewer and the media is that much of the film's scenes are comprised of footage captured by USIDent. In the agency's control room, Nana Mae, along with the audience, is able to watch multiple videos that are either broadcast on television or are secretly shot from surveillance cameras and officers that are filming around Los Angeles. Throughout the film, we see many segments that are also being shown on the USIDent screens such as news reports shedding light on events happening around town, Krysta Now's talk show and music video for "Teen Horniness is Not a Crime", political advertisements in support Bobby Frost, and hidden cameras that dive into the public and private spaces of civilians all across Los Angeles from beach parties to airport bathrooms. Production designer Alec Hammond discusses on the DVD documentary how his concept for how the USIDent control room was designed to keep the presence of USIDent in mind when watching the scenes as "some of the footage Nana will be looking at through the course of the film will be the playback of that footage, so it'll have a handheld feel, basically being recorded by undercover agents who are just out all over the place" (Hammond, 2006). With access to a plethora of surveillance feeds across the city, Nana Mae has access to multiple locations filmed from multiple points of view, granting her the opportunity to watch events unfold with a bird's-eye view and through the perspectives of undercover agents spread throughout the city. The viewer uses this information to place themselves among those benefiting from UPU 5 access to surveillance monitors, granting a clearer understanding of the extent of which government surveillance gathers information using the gaze. The power of the gaze, hence, comes from the capability to wield the tools necessary to probe the spaces that give viewers the information needed to understand their world.

As mentioned earlier, this is a film where many of the key players are watching one another, either keeping tabs on what other characters are doing or to make sure that the messages they aim to send with mass exposure is being distributed properly. This is evident through the cameras that are not from the perspective of Nana Mae; police turrets, camcorders, footage that wasn't filmed specifically for USIDent's servers. We are able to see the scopes from police turrets such as the one that Pilot navigates as he surveys the beach and uses later in the film to fire at a suspected threat to Boxer. The camera grants the audience the ability to see where power is allocated to as to who is able to carry the gaze along with them, especially with Pilot's sniper lens as his position as the narrator serves as the mediator between the audience and the text. The other officer's sniper lenses only give you the impression of how far USIDent's influence and line of sight casts its power over the city, but the omnipotent gaze of the lens wielded by Pilot gives his line of vision authority within the text as the person that controls the narrative with his knowledge of the nation's impending doom.

In addition, the camera that Boxer carries around with him for research becomes significant to the plot as it reveals the same power of vision that is seen in *Strange Days* with Jeriko's death. The footage that Boxer captures of a police shooting, much like the footage Iris captured of Jeriko being shot by the police, has the viewer acknowledge the weight behind bearing the gaze that implicates the viewer by giving them the experience of witnessing an event revealing terrifying abuses of authority. Boxer, interested in filming Roland's police routine that the neo-Marxists aim to stage as a ride-along, wants to make sure that he films every detail so that he can use the footage as research for his screenplay. In the process, the audience sees from a cinematic perspective of Boxer and

Roland as well as the perspective of Boxer's camera as he looks at Roland and follows him throughout the neighborhood. The audience must then place themselves within Boxer's point-of-view as he is as curious and left in the dark about the mysteriousness of Roland and the unusual nature of the film's world as the audience, further cementing the confusion he feels as Roland goes along with the character of the racist cop that the neo-Marxists want him to play. The staged disturbance call acts as a turning point in the film as Veronica "Dream" Mung (Amy Pohler) and Dion Element (Wood Harris), who were meant to pretend they were shot by Roland, are actually shot dead by Bart (Jon Lovitz), a police officer working alongside Zora (Cheri Oteri), who turns a staged shooting into a real one. The aftershock of the staged events sharp turn into a situation that becomes much too real reverberates through Boxer, who was initially holding the camera to show himself, and the audience what the spectator initially thought would be a safe simulation created to shape public opinion. The audience's recoil matches Boxer's after he captures on camera Bart's shooting of Dion and Dream. We see from Boxer's camera initially as he follows the officers into the house Dion and Dream fight in, but the camera shifts back into this view when the two are shot, signaling Boxer's point-of-view as he is helpless to stop the situation from becoming a reality. The audiences, and Boxer's horror, are reflected back on them as Bart takes away Boxer's camera to aim its line of vision on Boxer. We identify with the camera, yet relate more to Boxer's shock, so what we see is more of a reflection of ourselves as objects of the camera as Boxer twiddles his fingers with an anxious expression, twitching as he looks towards Roland and runs off. If Bart taking away Boxer's camera for his own uses reflects on authority figures like USIDent aiming to take control of the gaze's power over others, Boxer's reaction is the audience's

reaction that they are not safe under the confines of the gaze and the line of vision they once partook in is now staring back at them, bringing awareness to the public nature of private affairs in the 21st century.

Experience of such a recoil is what makes the taped recording of the shootings so valuable to many of the film's key players as the ability for people to share this experience of terror is what gives the video the power to sway public opinion. Giving audience the feeling of being in person to witness such an action carries a strength with it that does not come out as strongly when USIDent captures a neo-Marxist compound getting raided or the downtown riots that ensue as a result of the video's leak. Pisters highlights the differences between the spanning view of a central surveillance figure and the selective view of the controlling eye as the latter "does not depend so much on seeing (after all, CCTV images are fuzzy, often flecks indeed) but on socioalgorithmic processes: "date, time, location, status, speed, choice, amount, accomplices" can all form a pattern that allows perspectival mobilization of data as evidence (149)" (Pisters, 2036-2038). The fluidity of the digital era's access to the eye gives people enough access to skylines and beachfronts that raising attention requires viral videos of extramarital affairs and police brutality to remind people of their own sense of perception unmediated by diagrams and scrolling text. The film brings back the brutality of reality by turning the camera back at the viewer and forcing them to relate their own experience of both mass media and film in a post-9/11 society to the sight of gratuitous violence and sexuality.

MASS EXPOSURE: MEDIA AND STARDOM

The narrative keeps tabs on the characters and any of the scandals or events that shape them through how they are depicted on camera and how their messages are circulated through the media. Because many of the characters are celebrities and public figures, their main outlet of expression and influence is through mass media exposure, granting significance to being subjected to the gaze while also partaking in it. Boxer's disappearance is given importance with ties to Republican Senator Bobby Frost (Holmes Osbourne) as the husband of his daughter Madeline (Mandy Moore), Krysta is given heavy exposure as a result of her celebrity currency as a talk show host, adult film star, and media mogul, and Pilot was an actor before being wounded in the Iraq War by Roland, granting him media coverage for his experiences overseas. Society's fixation on celebrity culture plays a key role in how we experience the narrative as the cameras, while aiming to capture everything in sight, hone in on those in the entertainment industry, granting their exposure to be as significant to society as global conflict. Dr. Katarina Kuntzler (Zelda Rubenstein), one of the members of Baron's entourage, notes that the reason Boxer was ultimately chosen to travel through a rift in the space time continuum because his "celebrity and...political ties proved to be an irresistible combination". This concept of movie stars as desirable as attention grabbers made it necessary for Baron to use Boxer's combined celebrity status and political affiliations as a means of exposing his technology as capable of creating alternative fuel. This is in line with Mulvey's exploration of star power as a source of movement as she notes that celebrity brings an illusion of movement to the camera's stillness through the audience's interaction with the screen since "however energetic a star's movement might seem to be,

behind it lies an intensely controlled stillness and an ability to pose for the camera” (Mulvey, 162). The spectator’s line of vision is honed in on by the camera as the focus on a star’s performance brings out the latent energy behind their iconicity. The camera expresses this irresistibility of media figures like Boxer Santaros, Krysta Now, and Pilot Abeline through their omnipresence through the narrative as crucial to the media landscape throughout the 2008 election. John Ellis looks into the desire that stardom evokes in viewers by analyzing that “the phenomenon of stardom relies on the photo effect for its full expression; it is equally a summary of the photo effect, making explicit the relationship between the photographic and the realm of desire” (Ellis, 602). The realm of desire that is attributed to images of powerful public figures creates an insatiable hunger for the spotlight, attributing the ability to capture the eyes of the general public to the gaze set upon them. In the process, the film captures the desire to chase after the gaze and to be looked at, giving viewers a very questionable feeling of seeing the appeal of being exposed and yet feeling terrified by being watched by a surveillance society.

The screen’s direction towards stardom also becomes the catalyst for the neo-Marxists’ plot to sway public opinion with tapes of the “staged” deaths of movie stars Dion and Dream at the hands of police officers and a sex tape with Boxer and Krysta. The need to be seen and to expose with the gaze is key to how information is spread throughout in the film, and mass exposure can only be obtained with self-promotion through media campaigns and viral video. In a study on the gaze in reality television, Mark Andrejevic states that the goal of reality TV “is to provide one possible interpretation of an emerging pattern in the reception and portrayal of contemporary forms of commercial surveillance and to demonstrate the fruitfulness of this

interpretation as a means of thinking about shifting cultural and economic patterns in the information age” (Andrejevic, 96). Many of the characters see mass exposure and mass surveillance as necessary tools to shift and shape public opinion. As such, it is no surprise that the two videos that becomes crucial to the neo-Marxists’ advancement are both viral videos that give the viewer an eyewitness look at both sex and death, two patterns that have emerged in the media as a result of both World War III and the excess of Krysta Now’s reality talk show. In the process, USIDent’s mass surveillance, media coverage, and the tapes all come together as a way to use and manipulate the personal interests of many of the characters, using the gaze as a powerful tool to shape the public perception of the nation. As Shaviro discusses the self-reflexive nature of how surveillance is shaped into a participatory space for exposure, he notes that “the greatest success of what Michel Foucault calls governmentality comes about, not when a certain type of behavior is forcibly imposed upon people, but when people can be ‘incentivized’ to impose this behavior willingly upon one another, and upon themselves.” (Shaviro, 68-69).

Governmentality paves the way for understanding the construct of mass media in the film, as manipulation at the hands of USIDent, USIDeath, and popular television programs form a bind where the general public is given an incentive to being under the watchful eye of the government, whether it is for fame and notoriety or for national security concerns. Being watched, as it turns out, means the cameras are always on you, so when you are in a position of power, as many of the characters in the film display, you have the capabilities to signal an audience by keeping yourself laid bare for your message to be sent through multiple channels. The audience’s recognition of the characters relies on the images circulated of the characters in the film, but they must also relate themselves

to the camera and their surroundings in reality, so when the camera looks back at the audience, it turns this idea of self-promotion on its back as the audience only benefits from the gaze by being the bearers of the gaze and not those who thrive from its stare. It is through this that the audience sees the absurdity of the power that is obtained by being under the gaze and the lengths that the characters go to place themselves under the eye of the camera.

The incentive to being within the sphere of governmentality comes in *Southland Tales* through the pursuit of fame. In the film, characters who are circulated throughout the mass media are able to use their influence to further their own agendas, using the gaze to form powerful messages around their image with the desire to shape public opinion how they see fit. Incentive to be watched by the government is given through strict police activity and political advertisements pressing the idea that being lax on privacy will let terrorists into the country. One advertisement that the Frost campaign released to have voters say no to Proposition 69, a law that would lessen surveillance's outreach on the general populace, has a man with a rifle being watched as he cocks his gun and shoots a target, addressing the audience by saying "you think your personal privacy is more important than protecting my family from terrorists? Well guess again. If the government won't stop them, I will". With government exposure, the image that they tap into is the idea of having the fear of the unknown become influential to their base. Additionally, the neo-Marxist cells use their exposure to create a brand for themselves by creating viral media to help rig the vote and change public perception through both the staged police shooting and through advertisements for thumb-donation drives to change the election's outcome. Celebrity plays the most crucial role as much of the narrative's media is

influenced by the large amounts of celebrity coverage that flood the TV screens with looks into their private lives and personal ideologies. Krysta Now, in particular, is one of the more popular celebrities with a steady feed of content and products released such as a hit reality talk show discussing politics and the porn industry, clothing, perfumes, and energy drinks. Through the camera, this is expressed by her omnipresent appearance as she appears frequently among the personalities in the USIDent command center's panorama of screens and uses her star power to push her presence into the camera's line of sight. In relation to Pisters' concept of the neuroimage, she highlights in relation to the experimental video *Evidence Locker* (2004) that director "Jill Magid does not evade or overload the surveillance apparatus (by 'breaking out'), but she 'breaks in' through overexposure and through the creation of personal links to an impersonal mechanism" (Pisters, 122). Pisters analysis here mirrors much of the characters in the film that seek out surveillance as a means of exposure to sway public opinion their way and control how surveillance is used by their own accord. By placing the emphasis on Krysta's exposure, the camera positions itself consistently in Krysta's presence as the viewer is given such a large amount of information on Krysta, while updates on every detail of her life are shared with the public. Privacy is non-existent for such a popular celebrity to the point where even her private life with Boxer is filmed and used as evidence to change public opinion. When discussing her character, Sarah Michelle Geller describes Krysta as "an interesting representative for this disposable culture that we live in of late and this sort of tabloid frenzy, this need to know every aspect of everyone's life, and to be involved in all these different lives" (Geller, 2006). As many of the screens in the film are capturing Krysta Now's program and music videos, her personal information is dispersed

through mass media, giving audiences the same feeling that celebrity culture enables where people are so fascinated with public figures that they want to feel as if they are there with them, entitled to personal information on their private life in order to fantasize living life among them as a family of sorts. When Krysta tells her friend Fortunio (Will Sasso) that “deep down inside, everyone wishes they were a porn star”, it comes off as silly as quoting a scientific study that claims “the future is going to be far more futuristic than they originally predicted”, but it is actually a much serious note that is downplayed because of the ridiculousness of it. While the futuristic claim mirrors the dramatic changes that the future will have on the world, the porn star line mirrors the desperate need for exposure that many of the characters try to pursue. What makes this exposure so desirable turns out to be the sense of familiarity and closeness as a result of a highly publicized celebrity culture that makes the stars feel as if they are right there in your living room.

One important aspect of the film to keep in mind is the conscious decision to have a cast of actors and actresses who were often typecast based on their most recognizable roles. Many of the film’s actors and actresses are famous for one specific role or type of character, but are not cast often outside of their area of expertise and are pigeonholed into the roles that made them pop culture icons in the past or present. The viewer is left to recall these past roles as well as the cast of comedic actors in a film that has them dial their roles down for subtler, dramatic performances, harkening back to the idea that our celebrity culture relies on our familiarity with the stars. The artificial relationship mass media builds between the average person and celebrities is evoked as the cast’s fame is used to have the actors perform roles that play with the audience’s expectations of the

actors they know and love. What the film calls into question is the activity we do in our daily lives that peers into the lives of famous celebrities by applying it to the stars of the film who act the complete opposite of their public persona that the viewer would expect them to carry on.

While Dwayne, Seann, Sarah, and other cast members are placed in roles outside of their often type-casted roles or their public persona, one of the more jarring casting decisions in the film was given to pop star Justin Timberlake who plays Iraq War veteran Pilot Abeline. Pilot is deeply-scarred, physically and psychologically, from the war as he watches over the cast through surveillance turrets, gets intoxicated off of Fluid Karma, and acts as the narrator who is aware of the film's mysteries, and foreshadows the grim fate of the world's demise through poetry and Biblical scripture. The end result is transforming a pop star significant to American pop culture as a symbol for the radiant youth expressed in contemporary hit radio stations that would play Justin's music into the symbol of a young man returning from the conflict overseas as a damaged veteran whose encounter with friendly fire left him with scars that leave a large gash in his face and chest. One scene in particular that evokes this juxtaposition between Pilot Abilene and Justin Timberlake is one in which Pilot collapses from a Fluid Karma injection, waking up in a music video hallucination as he lip-sync's The Killers' song "All These Things That I've Done" The film recalls the audience's familiarity with the music video format as it positions Pilot walking around within the confines of an arcade with a beer in hand as nurses twirl around him and kick their legs in synch with The Killers' song. The camera follows him around the arcade as he acknowledges the camera directly, staring back at the audience as he waves his dogtags and beer in front of the camera, barely

following the synchronized routine of the nurses, winking after one nurse gives him a seductive dance, and giving the camera the middle finger. What starts out as a jovial celebration of excess and bravado common with pop videos is shifts dramatically in mood as he pours the remaining beer on his head, crushing the can and staring at the camera with his cocky smirk changing into a look of shock and disbelief as the music fades out. Shaviro describes the scene in relation to the film in its entirety as “utterly extraneous as narrative, but it works as a kind of affective focal point, bringing to a head the feelings of displacement and distraught confusion that have drifted throughout the film, and touched nearly all the characters” (Shaviro, 83). It is intended to take the viewer out of the on-going narrative quickly by diving into Pilot’s hallucinations, yet works as a part of a cohesive collage that brings reflexivity back into the fold as audiences bring their experiences of a post-9/11 society into the film. The world of the music video is a fantasy that taps into the hedonistic subconscious of the viewer as the performer and viewer interact with one another to have a shared experience within the music video’s diegesis. While many of Justin’s music videos aim to give the audience the sensation of being at a party or dancefloor either dancing or seducing women, this music video has audiences observe the deterioration of hedonistic fantasy as Pilot’s joyful celebration dissolves before him, leaving him with the pain, agony, and confusion the war left him in. Pilot’s hallucination sequence relates back to both the confusion that the characters feel in the midst of global conflict and the confrontation between star and viewer as the camera provides an outlet where Pilot, and, by extension, Justin Timberlake, remind the viewer of the fragility of the screen as the thirst to know every detail of a celebrity’s life

opens the viewer up to shaken up when the familiar becomes obscured and confusion settles in.

APATHY AND INEVITABILITY

The sense of being watched also comes from how the few characters that have a grasp of what will happen in the future have complete control on orchestrating the world's end. Pilot, who acts as the film's narrator, has the information needed to tell us even at the beginning of the film that the world will come to its imminent demise, already instilling the theme of inevitability to the audience as the explosive finale of the world's fate is already determined. Baron's assistants, Serpentine (Bai Ling) and Katarina, are also aware of this as they intend on using both Baron's desire to topple Capitalism through his renewable energy and the time-travel experiments that cloned Boxer and Roland to accelerate the end of the world. The rest of the cast is left with the inevitable climb towards the end, save for the vague hints to Boxer that his screenplay will come true. The audience, as a result, is left in the dark, denied any information to take control over the gaze or prevent the world's disastrous end from happening.

The cast, while left in the dark about how the world will truly end, are all involved with its demise as Boxer's predictions continue to become true in front of his eyes, Baron's technology continues to decelerate the world's movement, and global conflict continues to sap away lives and resources. In analyzing the media's lack of discussion about the consequences of climate change, Mark Andrejevic notes that even though we are aware that the issues are caused by factors controlled by our consumption, "we are left to adapt to the results of our own actions as if they were not our own, but

external natural conditions foisted upon us” (Andrejevic, 2006). By emphasizing a lack of control over the powers that influence environmental deterioration, it shifts the conversation away from how it can be prevented, and moves it towards how can we distract from these consequences so they do not follow us. This reflects the logic behind constructing ideology as it is, “not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic real kernel” (Žižek, 722). In the case of *Southland Tales*, mass media is the social reality as the political battlefield that surrounds global conflict and security concerns plays out through a surveillance society that explains that being watched is protection from what will harm the United States, ignoring the dangerous impact Fluid Karma’s accumulation will have on the world.

CONCLUSION

Southland Tales captures the fear and excess in post-9/11 America through a surveillance perspective that presents a nation shaken with the threat of impending doom despite consenting to mass surveillance to prevent such calamity. The viewers are expected to relate the images captured by USIDent with images that prevail throughout contemporary culture’s media landscape as it confronts viewers on accepting the overreach of mass surveillance, and highlight the fears and desires that the public has regarding their own personal safety in times of turmoil. It also call attention to the spectatorial nature of our public and private lives in the lieu of the Patriot Act as much of the media seen in both the film and reality creates a theatrical depiction of the private lives of U.S. citizens. Through the USIDent command center, the viewer is able to benefit

through their mass surveillance network as much of the plot material we see is from footage captured by these surveillance cameras and UPU officers. As the camera takes on the identity of USIDent, the audience is left to identify with the cameras that broadcast public and private life throughout USIDent's headquarters. Pisters' examination of the neuro-image's synergy between mind and machine solidifies this idea as the film expects the spectator to adopt this look, rendering their own perception of the images in the same scope as USIDent. This would, in turn, enhance the spectator's understanding that the role they play when watching the film is to give it a reflexive reading, and use USIDent's line of vision and flurry of images to compile them all into one cohesive image of the mass media market in an age of mass surveillance. Mulvey suggests that the spectator's relationship to the human body is further distorted as a result of the viewer's distance from character identification, rendering the viewer more in-line with USIDent and USIDeath than the main protagonists. Additionally, Mulvey examines that this distance is what heightens the fascination with star power as the film also relates its mass surveillance society with the addiction that media outlets and viewers have for celebrity culture. The importance of fame for influence is expressed in the film through many of the movie stars and public figures of the narrative as they aim to expose their own private lives of and espouse their personal beliefs as a way for the public to relate to them. In the process, there is a central theme of inevitability as the ubiquitous presence of surveillance follows everyone throughout the film and the concept that there is no stopping the end is only heightening the extreme lengths the government goes to militarize the nation. This feeling of inevitability is reflected in its presentation as the frame presents a collage of different images ranging from public and private spaces to advertisements, news

programs, and reality television. These seemingly unrelated images create a combination that encapsulates an era that can be defined by omnipresent surveillance, the hunger the public has for stardom through exploiting themselves to the public, and an addiction to watching and being watched that is displayed through the audiovisual nature of broadcast media and viral video that become tools for a battlefield to decide who gets to wield the power behind the camera's gaze. Though the film touches on the aftereffects of the Patriot Act by positioning the camera as an important tool for national security and social change, the widespread voyeurism that is displayed in *Southland Tales* remains relevant to this day as Patriot Act continue to be enacted and controversial leaks of the NSA's intel-gathering practices mirror the worries that audiences have of facing a security system like USIDent. The resonance that the film has with national security practices that exist in the present day also reflect on our media consumption today as many films, television shows, and news programs aim to tap into the desire to gather information and insight on the experiences that others feel. While *Southland Tales* was created with the mentality of capturing the media landscape of the mid aughts, what is ultimately expressed remains relevant to the fear and desire that the public has towards the power behind the camera.

IV. TRAVIS BICKLE WITH A CAMERA: THE INVASIVE *NIGHTCRAWLER*

INTRODUCTION

“If you want to win the lottery you've got to make money to get a ticket.” This is the motto of Louis “Lou” Bloom (Jake Gyllenhaal), the ruthless freelancer who leads Dan Gilroy’s 2014 directorial debut *Nightcrawler*. On his way home in Los Angeles from a failed job interview at a scrapyard, Lou stumbles upon a car crash being filmed by “stringers”, self-made cameramen who record accidents and crime scenes to news stations. At this point, he foregoes his original plan of making money from stolen goods in favor of a new business plan that involves using a camcorder and a police scanner to chase after crime scenes and sell the footage to Nina Romina (Rene Russo), the morning news director of Channel 6 news, who demands from Lou the most shocking, grotesque footage he can find to grab viewers. From then on, his goal is not to gain recognition and attention for what he records, but use his persuasion skills and the demented lengths he goes for the right shot to expand his horizons and become an unstoppable force who pries his way into every crime scene and dictates the information that is dispersed to the public. Along the way, he aims to seduce Nina and become close enough with the Channel 6 news anchors and crew to be seen as an employee at the station, competes with rival stringer, Joe Loder (Bill Paxton), who unwittingly inspires Lou to overtake him as the more prominent stringer in the city, and hires a young assistant, Rick (Riz Ahmed), whose desperation for money and nervous streak result in Lou constantly questioning his

work ethic and loyalty. In Lou's pursuit for the most violent crime scenes for the highest profit, he tampers with crime scenes, invades private spaces, risks the lives of those around him, and earns the ire of the LAPD for illegally recording crime scenes he invaded and manipulating on-going investigations regardless of how many people are hurt or killed in the process.

One of the film's main intentions is to visualize the more hawkish side of network news and display how the murkier side of mass media rewards those who go above and beyond to disregard common decency and obtain results as efficiently as possible. The obsession with recording is allied with a psychosocial state of detachment from human emotion. The desire for shock value and spectacle within television news coverage at the expense of the terrified yet curious viewers at home is embodied through the character of Nina, and as her station sees more success with the stories that dig further into depravity, she becomes more excited by the prospect of shaping the news stories the way that they are presented to her. Director Dan Gilroy, who addresses the message of the film as an analysis on the climate of fear circulated through television news, has said "it's certainly an indictment of local television news, but I'd like to cast a wider net in the sense that all of us really watch these images. I would hope that maybe a viewer would take it further and maybe go, 'Why do I watch these images and how many of these images do I want to put into my own spirit?'" (Gilroy, 2014). Although *Nightcrawler* acts as a response to television news and critiques the sensationalist stories that aim to create fear from violent destruction and urban crime in the suburbs, it also reflects on the desire that viewers at home have to carry this fear with them. The film proposes that the fear circulated through media reflects on the suburban audience's own insecurities about the comfort they are

currently living under. Television news outlets like Channel 6 News create a market for information catered to this demographic as Lou helps establish simulations of urban crime, reflecting on theorist Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulations* and his analysis on the artifice that reality can portray through the filter of network news. By offering viewers a reality outside of their own that captures the breaking point of suburban, white neighborhoods, they are warned that their safety could be in jeopardy without a constant sense of protection through the watchful eye of network news. Much like how the general public in *Southland Tales* conforms to the USIDent surveillance agency in a bid to prevent acts of terrorism, Lou's aspirations are to keep his line of sight on crime wherever and whenever he can to expose to the general populace. Viewers find fear in what they see from the simulation that network news provides, but solace in exposing it widely and constructing a scapegoat to act as a solvable problem.

This desire for a watchful eye comes in the form of Lou, a dangerous, yet reliable stringer whose lack of ethical reasoning and moral character drive him to get the most grisly footage he can get by any means he can accomplish them. As earlier stated, he represents the audacity that it takes to get ahead in the news industry, providing an outlet for exposing the private surroundings of any crime scene he comes across and giving both executives and Channel 6 audiences the fear and viewership that the network can benefit from. Because Lou's footage ends up granting him high enough esteem where he would become impervious to the authority set by law enforcement and standards & practices, Lou's success gives him the power of bearing his gaze over the general populace and to see him and his footage means that he is staring directly back at you, captivating you to his footage and holding the audience's sense of fear in his grip. As

Detective Frontieri (Michael Hyatt) storms out of an interrogation about the footage Lou obtain of the film's final chase sequence, Lou tells her that his job is to capture everything regardless if it is his assistant's death and states that "I'd like to think if you're seeing me you're having the worst day of your life." Although the ending is unrealistic in the sense that he is able to get away with all of the crime he is responsible for in the process of staging a deadly shootout, it acts to create a particular message about the absurdity of the media industry as Lou's tampering ends up creating real consequences that he is able to bypass. Lou's triumph is not only because he is depraved enough to probe for and manipulate any footage he sends out to the news station, but also that the news station's structure and demands cater to the sociopathic desires, granting him success and prestige from how far he and the station are willing to go for viewership. By this logic, filming and watching are both in alliance with a form of alienation and madness where the participatory panopticon creates a forum where spectatorship indulges in the same hunger that Lou feeds into as he scours the streets of Los Angeles for the grittiest content.

The focus of this chapter is to discuss the role of the camera and voyeurism in *Nightcrawler*, reflecting on the messages they send to fears of surveillance technology and mass media exposure in contemporary society. As a film exploring the world of the local news, the roles of the camera, cinematography, and framing is significant as they present the power that the camera holds to construct another reality from the images captured and cut into a televised event. The camera's vision also has us understand Lou as its erratic behavior, its eye-line match, and its relation to the look back gives the viewer the sense that Lou has control over what television audiences in the narrative and

the film's audience sees, rendering any moments of self-reflection to be terrifying. Although Lou is a vessel for the audience to place themselves into, his cold and calculated demeanor as well as the voyeuristic line of vision he controls with his camcorder in the narrative and his eyes towards the camera, Lou is using the film's camera to give the audience the uneasiness of feeling like they are being watched as heavily as the news that Channel 6 reports. The dedication that Nina shows to have access to the most violent and scandalous stories is supportive of how the film is shot as the demands the news station places on Lou only feeds his appetite further as he is given the green light to probe the most grisly crime scenes and invade these private spaces to drive them into the public sphere of morning news coverage. With this in mind, focusing on the method of delivery for news stories both reflexively in the viewer's own experience with the morning news and within the narrative is also necessary to explain the addiction to fear that Gilroy aimed to bring out with the camerawork and commentary of news events that feed on the temptation to have the media as the community's watchdog to expose and divulge in the lives of the city's residents.

Mulvey's concept of the death drive brings out the layer of the film where the fascination and the fear from the camera's gaze and the news station's ratings come from the opportunity to replay life and death on a cycle that does not end until more of Lou's footage is submitted to create the next cycle. Her perspective also provides insight on the stillness and repetition of the image as the camera orients itself with Lou's gaze by constantly showing Lou staring towards the direction of his prospects with wide, unblinking eyes. Pisters' material approaches the relationship the camera has with the mass media format, resulting in audiences absorbing the functionality of Lou's footage

and news broadcasts in between the camera's orientation towards Lou's perspective in a tightly-knit bond. What *Nightcrawler* aims to encapsulate with all of these components is the dangerous effect that the camera can have in centralizing the gaze as Lou's drive creates a hazardous relationship between the camera and audience as Lou's power over the camera's line of sight casts its vision over the spectator, shining an objectifying gaze over the viewer as much as the gaze Lou has on the crime scenes. Additionally, it encapsulates the political economy of network news where Lou's success comes from his ability to tap into the fears of the city's wealthy suburbs and gauging the station's target demographic with violent depictions of local urban crime. Because of the camera's focus on navigating through Lou's violent filming spree, it draws viewers into the notion that enables his success is the mass media landscape of today that places emphasis on watching the every move of suburbanites under the pretense of protecting them from inner city violence.

CAMERA AND EYEWITNESS SURVEILLANCE

Starting from the introduction, there are moments in the film where the camera focuses intently on long shots of the scenery in Los Angeles. Much of these moments set the scene for the film, as they are shot in the evening in empty public spaces that feel abandoned and barren despite being set in a heavily populated metropolitan city. This landscape, along with many shots of the night sky, plays on a reoccurring motif throughout the film that positions Lou as a hungry coyote seeking out his prey. This motif resonates well with these shots as we are given a sense of what Lou is seeking out based on the camera's movement, and when it's at its most stationary, it focuses on getting a

wide view of the background that Lou plans on invading. The emptier spaces of the beginning have more of a resonance with the last scene in the film when the film's only crane shot is used to rise over an intersection where Lou's company, Video News Productions, expands with several interns as two of the new trucks are driven out into the distance. Using the comparison that Gilroy makes between Lou at this point in time and a spreading "virus" in the DVD commentary, the film's scenery begins to transform from an undisturbed city to a town that is about to be ravaged and probed by Lou's methods of news gathering. The camera's position above the city in both situations bring awareness to the idea that because the camera follows Lou's perspective during the entire film, the camera, as the audience's passageway into the narrative, is representative to Lou's pursuit for influence in the city as he is no longer merely observing, but is overtaking the city. Metz examines how the audience is able to decipher meaning from the omnipotent presence of the camera as it ascends beyond their reach as he states that when it comes to using the camera as an eye, "the explanation is that he has no need to turn it really, he has turned it in his all-seeing capacity, his identification with the movement of the camera being that of a transcendental, not an empirical subject" (Metz, 824). As the audience must experience the city through the camera and through Lou's perspective, Lou's presence goes beyond any physical cameras that he controls, and that the presence of cameras near and away from Lou still carries his lingering presence in every shot. The flurry of images that make up the viewer's understanding of the ambition and overreach that Lou aspires to have relates to what Pisters discusses relating to new media's relation to the camera. In her analysis, she states that "the new cinematic regime of digital culture points to the fact that the screen is that thin membrane between world and brain and that

the meditated image produces all kinds of invisible powers, exceeding the classic regime of the representable visible world” (Pisters, 1393). The camera’s aim to capture images spanning across the city calls into consciousness the extent of the power that the camera and news media has to influence the city. Lou’s ambition, thus, is marked through this aim to have his perspective and line of sight cover Los Angeles as he uses the camera to achieve success in an industry that demands to surround the city in its gaze. The night sky, the moon, and the nearly empty city carry some semblance of Lou’s pursuit even when he is not within the diegetic space, and they aim to symbolize his eventual takeover of the Los Angeles streets as a stringer.

A majority of the film’s camera follows Lou around as he moves about, drives, and captures footage using his camcorder. When the camera is stationary, Lou is either standing still in the frame, shown at a distance, focused on something in his line of vision, or staring directly towards the camera. When Lou is present on-screen, his eyes remain wide open to the point where it looks like he is watching everything within his surroundings, rendering the camera’s wide view of his surroundings as ubiquitous as his line of sight. When Lou is honing in on his objectives, the camera will follow him in several Steadicam shots as the camera’s sight shows what Lou is directing his camcorder towards from behind him. As the camera follows him in these scenes, the viewer can only get a small glimpse of what he is capturing so that rather than the camera being a vessel to have the same amount of answers that Lou, the viewer is only given insight on the excitement and pleasure he gets from the images he captures from his camcorder’s screen attachment. This degree of spectatorial interaction is covered in Mulvey’s research as she notes “the spectator’s look, now interactive and detached from a collective audience, can

search for the look of the camera while also asserting control over the look within the fiction” (Mulvey, 190). This provides a different degree of pleasure to the viewer as their perspective interacts with the environment that Lou scans with his camcorder. In one scene, Lou tracks down an overturned vehicle and as he is pushed away by a witness trying to contact 911, Lou sees an opportunity to film the accident, and drag the victim’s body forward to create a more cinematic shot for the news. During this sequence, the camera and score reacts to Lou’s emotions it slowly circles him, following his movements as the camera shakes about, slowly zooms in to his excited feels as he rushes to keep himself composed while filming the shot, and moves according to his walking pattern. The camera does not so much pull away, but it is a curious camera that pans across only slightly while Lou is trying to get every detail with his camcorder before the police arrive. This is a reoccurring technique within the scenes where Lou is recording his material as the film’s camera aims to only give us a slight understanding of the crimes that Lou films as the priority is set on capturing his anxiousness, excitement, and hunger as the camera’s sight follows him as he films the news stories. In short, the camera pursues what he pursues.

In the process, this creates a sense of distance between the viewer and Lou’s surroundings as only Lou is given full access to the violence that he captures. The camera, while following Lou, obscures a lot of the stories that Lou films as the grotesque nature of the accidents or murders is often either cut out of the frame or is only visible from the small screen on Lou’s camcorder. This proves to be an effective way to keep the focus specifically on the desire Lou obtains from what he films as the audience is cut out from any sense of comfort or desire that would come from seeing what Lou sees directly.

In particular, this is exemplified in the scene where Lou films the inside of a family's home where he finds that they were all shot and killed by two suspects. The audience sees the carnage inside of the home, but because the camera stays on Lou and his camcorder, the camera's slow navigation only circles around Lou, and leaves the audience with only a vague idea of what the bodies look like based on the blood trails left behind and what the bodies look like from the corner of the camera. In relation to the effective framing of the gaze, Metz notes "what defines the specifically cinematic scopic regime is not so much the distance kept, the 'keeping' itself (first figure of the lack, common of all voyeurism), as the absence of the object seen" (Metz, 829). The power that comes from this scene is not from the ability to see inside of a gory shooting inside of a private home, but the fact that the satisfaction that would be obtained from carrying this gaze is only transmitted through the character and not the audience. Lou is the only person to indulge in the gaze, leaving the audience with merely hints of how gruesome it must have been for Lou to be excited about capturing it. The fact that closest the camera gets to a body is when Lou looks down to see a man still coughing from a bullet to the chest is further proof that the camera's intention is to have audiences feel attached and controlled by Lou regardless if they can place their identity into him or regulate themselves as a third party, detached and horrified at the extent of Lou's depravity.

Some scenes in the film aim to reflect back on the viewers as characters stare back at the camera. This look back is demonstrated the almost entirely by Lou, who acknowledges the cameras and reflections that look to him with malice and rage. When he is at his most volatile is when he gets back to his home after failing to get any material from a local plane crash that would have impressed Nina. The camera shows his

reflection as he looks into his medicine cabinet mirror, but as he sees his own reflection, he has a fit of rage where he shakes the mirror, kicks the wall, and slams the open medicine cabinet shut as the mirror shatters. Lou's aggression comes out at its highest when the gaze is on him, and the mirror's self-critiquing look back highlights this sense of aggression especially as the film goes on and the film reflects on the viewer's consumption habits. Lou's lost sense of control only benefits him by fueling his drive to commit more heinous crimes to get the right footage, specifically when after he breaks the mirror, he cuts the breaks on Joe's work van, giving him a chance to use his aggressive streak to cause harm and create a news story of his own. Much like in the teaser trailer of *Strange Days*, *Nightcrawler*'s first look teaser trailer depicts Lou addressing the camera directly to deliver his job interview pitch he gives at the beginning of the film. However, he switches locations several times as he gives the monologue from the diner to the newsroom, but as they show him behind the news desk, he gets increasingly agitated in his speech. At the point where he tells the construction worker his motto about the lottery, he repeats his motto in every location he tells it until it ends at him yelling "to buy a ticket!" Although this is a trailer, it fleshes out that sense of fury that he has of the camera being directly on him by giving him a more abrasive tone as he talks in front of a camera from the news desk. It helps further the idea that as Lou gets closer to any form of self-reflexive understanding, he does not feel any fear from the camera's gaze, but his agitation and fury creates a bind that forces his gaze onto the viewer as he acknowledges the fourth wall as a means of unsettling the viewer.

This sense of disturbance is the most poignant when Lou and Nina watch the tape where Lou records Rick dying from a criminal's gunshot. The two look at the screen

where Lou's camera inches closer and closer to Rick as he stares back at the camera, horrified that Lou set him up to die as a part of the news story. As Rick turns his head to look at the camera, the video is paused as Nina looks to Lou in astonishment at how much she enjoyed the clip. Lou and Nina have a conversation about the price of the clips as Rick continues to stare directly into the audience, and as they are celebrating at how great the footage turned out, his eyes remain in the frame, looking back at the viewer. Alluding back to Lou's philosophy that "a proper frame not only draws the eye into a picture, but keeps it there longer, dissolving the barrier between the subject and the outside of the frame," the frame which captures Rick's terror of having been tricked by Lou resonates the most as an expression of how devoid of morality Lou and Nina are by the end of the film. The frame in which Rick's posthumous stare is centered in the background reflects Mulvey's analysis of the death drive as she states that "in the act of halting the flow of the film, then returning it to movement and vitality, the possessive spectator inherits the long-standing fascination with the human body's mutation from animate to inanimate and vice versa" (Mulvey, 176). The gesture Rick is performing in the background is in tune with the rest of the recordings that Lou submits to the news station as they recapture the point of death for the crime scene victims that Lou films. In Rick's case, the horror comes from the re-animation of his transition between life and death that occurs as the footage is previewed and furthermore when it is broadcast on morning television news. The death drive, the moment of stasis that is constantly reanimating moments of chaos and demise, becomes necessary, in part, for the viewers' desires to be met as they are made aware by this information that would otherwise be considered felonious. Whereas Detective Frontieri and the news station see Rick's death

as Lou murdering his assistant, Lou saw it as an opportunity and Nina saw it as a beautifully tragic story that audiences need to see in order to capture the human cost in the wake of a suburban crime spree. *Nightcrawler* uses the look back as a means to give audiences a sense of awareness in the camera's function in capturing reality, and how that reality can be manipulated and turned against the viewers by acknowledging the artifice of the reality depicted through the lens that aims to satisfy viewers with the stillness and energy of re-animating death and destruction.

The look back in the film comes from the fact that the characters do acknowledge the cameras within the diegetic space in a manner that addresses to viewers that they are not in safe hands by sharing the camera's perspective with Lou. After one of Lou's earlier accomplishments at sending Nina footage of a shooting that involved him breaking inside a house for the perfect shots, he finds himself sitting at the news desk where he notices the camera pointed his way. He looks around, but then fixes his eyes directly into the camera until the scene changes, giving the viewer the sense that he is only beginning to dominate the news station as his coverage will eventually be featured in every hard-hitting news story on Channel 6. This same look back is used when the camera takes on the perspective of the interrogation room's security camera as Lou stares into the security camera, and back at the audience once Detective Frontieri angrily storms out of the room. In Mulvey's analysis of the freeze frame, she notes that the finality of ending a film on this note "leads in two directions, one that relates primarily to narrative and the other that relates to the materiality of film" (Mulvey, 81). Although she writes primarily about films ending on the freeze frame in this particular example, I would apply this to her ideas on stillness as well with the lingering shot of Lou staring into the camera in these two

instances creates an illusion of stillness in its movement as Lou directly confronts the audience. In both of these scenarios, Lou is addressing the cameras in both the news room and the police department as a way of expressing the control that he carries over the gaze, and, rather than being watched by the camera's gaze, he stares right back at the camera and audience. In Wheeler Winston Dixon's analysis of the look back, he notices that by looking directly back at the audience, "the film acts upon us, addressing us, viewing us as we view it until the film itself becomes a gaze, rather than an object to be gazed upon" (Dixon, 2). *Nightcrawler* plays around with the concept of the active viewer as those who participate in seeking out identification through Lou by watching him will only be cast under Lou's gaze, placing emphasis on the amount of control that he has over cameras in and out of the film's space and the influence that he has on network news.

LOU AS THE VOYEUR

The camera captures what Lou sees, the distance he keeps, and the distance he closes in on, which conflicts heavily with the audience's intentions as Lou's position as a relatable human being becomes less and less possible. As the film goes on, his humanity becomes less visible as he comes into his own as a robotic force of nature who speaks in quotes parroted from online business classes, has very little empathy for the people that he intimidates and uses for his own leverage, and aims to record and capture any information he can find to use as an opportunity to further his success. In the latter case, he gathers this information through voyeuristic means, whether it is entering the front door of private residences to acquire the footage he desires or probing crime scenes to

record the carnage, injuries or deaths that occurred. He seeks out the footage he gets through invasive means that place the opportunity to get the right shot over showing any respect to the victims that his recorded material will propel into the public light. Author Brian McNair describes the lengths that Lou goes to push himself into the lives of the people he films by addressing that Lou “acquires exclusive footage of violent deaths, car crash victims and, in the most disturbing sequence, victims of a home invasion in which several people have recently been killed—indeed, one is still alive when Lou films her dying on the living room couch. Rather than assist her, he flees the scene and starts to negotiate a price for his footage.” (McNair, 2015). As Lou digs deeper into the lives of his stories’ subjects, they are ultimately rendered as objects by Lou as he digs deeper into their private lives.

Lou acts as an agent of surveillance as he gathers information indiscriminately for his own use, but he benefits the most as he convinces the Channel 6 news station to take him seriously as the fuel that is keeping the station up and running. What he seeks out is not so much the attention that would eventually have his face up front in the camera as a media personality, but rather to have his presence known through the footage, making him seem less like an actual person and more like a force that is responsible for the ratings increase. Lou tells Nina during a date that he does not want to be in front of the camera as a reporter, but would rather be “the guy that owns the station, that owns the camera”. As such, his operation is within the shadows as he prefers to be able to probe crime scenes under the guise of both a passerby who happened to be checking inside homes for help and as a collective effort from a self-made company he calls Video Production News. His desire for distance is solidified with his relationship with Nina, as

even the one relationship he aims to keep close as someone he can be with professionally and romantically is emotionally distant as he threatens to cut her off from his service during their first date if she does not agree to an intimate relationship with him. Even love is a bargaining chip for Lou as the camera avoids romance much like Lou does by staying far away from any form of intimacy outside of moments where Lou bargains for sex and where Nina is enamored by the Lou's footage. Lou's need to be away from others in favor of closing in on them, unseen, is noted through the idea that the "voyeuristic desire, along with certain forms of sadism, is the only desire whose principle of distance symbolically and spatially evokes this fundamental rent" (Metz, 829). The gulf of space that Lou wishes to keep between himself and the subjects of the film and of his footage fuels the sadistic desire he has to control those around him and keep a possessive eye over both his co-workers and the victims that he films. In the process, the distance allows him the comfort and satisfaction of being able to manipulate and distort reality so that he may produce the perfect product for Channel 6 and mold himself as the city's main source for up-close and personal news footage.

The manipulation that Lou does throughout the film is not only in convincing close ones to agree to support his acquisition of private information, but also the ability to twist this information to create a reality that is eventually broadcast as news. While this is actively encouraged by Nina who tells Lou to imagine "the newscast as a screaming woman running down the street with her throat cut," Lou takes this a step further by having complete control of the aesthetics and events that are included and excluded in the news story. An earlier example has Lou rearranging refrigerator magnets to create drama in a shooting, rearranging a dead body so that it is in plain view after a brutal accident,

and eventually, cutting the brakes on Joe Loder's van and orchestrating a car crash as he films a severely injured Joe as he placed on a stretcher. His manipulation, however, had reached its highest body count when he decided to withhold information of a triple-murder in a Granada Hills mansion so that he can plan their arrest and film it in a scenario that would guarantee a shootout. Using the camera and his sense of derangement, Lou deliberately simulated many of the crimes that he filmed, creating moments where reality was destined to intervene. This is in line with Baudrillard's claim that a simulated robbery would never work as it would always find itself "in the real, one of whose functions is precisely to devour every attempt at simulation, to reduce everything to some reality" (Baudrillard, 373). This reality, however, was heavily sought after by Lou as he disregarded authority and collateral damage as he intended on creating a massive commotion that was all too real when he withheld information on the Granada Hills shooters so he can have the chance to film the ultimate chase for television.

The extent of which he staged the crime is heightened as he lies to the detectives about being unable to see who the assailants are when he kept the information of their identities and license plate to himself. Behind the backs of law enforcement and the news station, he uses the footage specifically showing the assailants' faces and their license plates to follow their van to a crowded restaurant, call 911 to report their presence, and film the police confrontation from the other side of the street. Although the showdown and casualties from the incident were completely real, the crime bust and ensuing chaos from its aftermath were the end results of the meticulous planning Lou made to guarantee that the showdown would intensify into an action-packed news story that would grant him accolades. The crime scenes and showdowns that Lou creates as an alternate reality

to be broadcast on network news plays into the idea that Lou's success comes from his willingness to create a hyperactive simulation of crime to give audiences news they want to pay attention to, rendering real life crime into a Hollywood production that promises both a fearful view of reality and a safe space that separates the viewer's reality from the "reality" on-screen. The concept appears in Baudrillard's analysis of simulations as he writes that "Simulation is infinitely more dangerous since it always suggests, over and above its object, that law and order themselves might be really nothing more than a simulation" (Baudrillard, 372). This resonates the most with Lou's orchestration of how he and his footage are presented within the news as he controls how the police approach the assailants during the final shootout and presents his footage based on his insistence that his involvement with recording at the scene of the crime was coincidental. The simulations that Lou creates as a result of manipulating crime scenes and law enforcement all stem from the desire to be the gatekeeper in charge of what the station broadcasts and how it expresses their message.

Ultimately, the most dangerous aspect of Lou's success is that he is rewarded for his behavior by a system that thrives on underhanded tactics, disregarding common decency, and placing a higher value on getting results over maintaining ethical standards. McNair summarizes the sociopathy his character displays in that it "symbolizes a news culture in which the goal of getting the story, as bloody and violent as possible, is subordinate to the interests of law enforcement and police investigation, as well as the limits imposed by common decency." (McNair, 2015). Although reality should dictate that Lou should not be able to get away with tampering with crime scenes and negligent homicide, the stature and pedigree he achieves from being a stringer gives him enough

protection to place him on par with law enforcement. His profession gives him the mobility to militarize his outfit by giving him a police scanner that allows him to acquire dispatches as they come in, has Rick use his smartphone to act as a GPS to get him from crime scene to crime scene at a faster pace, uploads all of his footage and keeps the footage he wants to use to his own devices, and has the immunity of the station to avoid any ethical charges the police might bring to him. His imperviousness to law enforcement and the protection the station gives him ultimately gives Lou the freedom he needs to gather any information he wants no matter whose privacy he is invading and how far he had gone to acquire his footage.

MASS MEDIA AS THE VOYEUR

Although Lou goes considerable lengths to seek gratification from voyeurism, it is the media industry that fully encourages him to satiate his hunger for dominance through filming invasive news stories. Much of our background on Lou and his personality is molded by his consumption of media and the screen's gaze. He follows the news stories every day as it gives him validation to see his news stories being continuously reported as well as the invalidation of being too late to deliver any proper footage of the news story. Often as he watches television, the commercials reflect his pursuit to satisfy his appetites much like a coyote with commercials such as one for Bird's Eye vegetables where coyotes gather to get excited for potatoes that plays on the morning after he is introduced to the life of stringers as well as after the commercial break for the triple murder he would eventually cover. Early on in the film, Lou attacks a security guard for his watch, but his fate is left unknown until the news report mentions a killed police officer. After

recording all of the police codes he would need to pursue crime scenes, he is watching the 1955 film *The Court Jester*, which focuses on a carnival performer plotting against a corrupt king by disguising himself as a court jester, highlighting the ability Lou has to use the tools at his disposal to overcome Joe Loder's Mayhem company and replicate its success to mold his own company, eventually becoming pivotal to Channel 6's success. Our understanding of Lou comes from his interaction with these screens as he uses them to gather information, learn skills of his trade, and seek gratification. Media's ubiquitousness in Lou's daily surroundings helps fuel his prospects and assists the audience in relating his television consumption with his need for self-gratification.

What makes Lou's breakthrough into television news so successful is the compatibility of his desires with the desires of Nina and the Channel 6 news staff to have juicy material that takes the audience closer and closer to violent crime scenes. Despite the objections that the newsroom editor Frank Kruse (Kevin Rahm) has over the unethical nature of Lou's footage, Nina and the rest of the Channel 6 crew are more than eager to work with any of the disturbing and probing material Lou provides for the station. If they are able to legally show a clip, they will show it, and there will always be a way for them to show material against standards and practice. In Pisters' look at the shift from seeing the camera as a disembodied eye to seeing it as an embodied brain, she turns her attention to the digital revolution in the midst of the media cycle as she notes that "mass media are indeed no longer the most important makers or distributors of the news, but they still have a huge filtering function" (Pisters, 1321). In many cases, the Internet relies on the performance of stories from television news in order to collect and archive the most attention-grabbing headlines to be circulated throughout Internet

databases. With this pressure to remain relevant through old and new media by further spreading across the city, Nina and Lou collaborate to bring back only the most shocking, brutal headlines that would increase the demands of viewers and expand Lou's business further. This is expressed through the steps that it takes for Lou's coverage of the triple murder to be accepted for the news story. While the camera barely shows the murder victims from Lou's perspective as he films across the house, the viewers are able to see the full extent of the brutality from the newsroom's review of the footage he acquired as only the bloodied bodies are shown on full display. And yet, it is not until the news broadcast where we see the entire sequence where the camera combs through the house, albeit this time with the faces and bodies blurred out as to avoid any fines. We see the same sequence happen three times to understand the process that it takes for the story to be fully realized for public consumption. Through this process and Nina's standards, it gives Lou more leeway to capture the grittiest footage he can find so that it can be distilled and consumed for audiences, giving them the opportunity to share the gaze presented to them by Channel 6 and Lou. The presentation of the triple murder place emphasis on the demands placed on television news to have audiences come face-to-face with their stories by invading private spaces and relate their gaze to the camera's gaze as it travel into a reality paved in blood.

MASS MEDIA AND PARANOIA

The similarities between the interests of Channel 6's news coverage and the footage that Lou gather lies in the idea that viewership will increase if the images presented are shocking and terrifying. The form that Lou's documentation of the crime

scenes and how it is applied in daily broadcasts taps into the viewers' own fears of a dangerous world by reminding them that they are not safe, a message that resonates with news media and with Lou's presence in the film as a villainous protagonist who is all too aware of his viewers. John Fiske notes that when television news hails the audience to recognize a message they aim to send, "the addresses recognize the social position our language has constructed, and if their response is cooperative, they adopt this same position" (Fiske, 1271). How the story is ideologically positioned helps gauge their audience's understanding of the city around them, so by creating stories that bring them closer to carnage and chaos, it keeps audiences dependent on the media message to make sense of what is happening in the city and how to cope with the trauma. The film addresses that the graphic nature of the crimes Lou films are seen as a necessity for Nina as the viewers of the morning news are drawn in the most by audacious, violent imagery to breed a culture of fear.

In addition, there is a work culture in the Channel 6 news station and Lou's profession that creates a racial dynamic to which stories the executives and viewers would value the most. Much of the higher sought-out footage is of affluent neighborhoods that are struck with violence, specifically crimes committed by low-income people of color against well-off white people. The value is placed higher on white fatalities as well, given that Lou's argument to be paid higher for the triple murder over a food truck stabbing with more fatalities was that the stabbing's victims were Mexican people and not a white, suburban family. The value and devalue of specific races in network news according to the film lends to the study presented by Parenti that links enjoyment of crime-based reality television to the consent of authoritarian power

structures as she states that “reality TV begins to reveal itself as part of a general field in which fear is created, shaped, and mobilized to build a capillary level, even intuitive, consent for police power, state authority, and the repression of populations deemed undesirable or dangerous – the poor, dark-skinned, foreign, and politically suspect” (Parenti, 190-191). The study focused on the police procedure reality show, *COPS*, but the structure of the Channel 6 news cycle as directed by Nina results in the lines blurring between reality television and local newscasts, and reports which prioritize urban crime committed by those who society often scapegoats to centralize the fear around them as opposed to Lou who are not only able to get away with his criminal activity, but is rewarded for committing crime as it benefits the corporate elite to have illegally obtained footage that supports a hegemonic understanding of both fear and society.

A news story is given its context and meaning within how it is framed in the news program. As the news anchors report on the triple murder, they are instructed to make sense of the footage by building up how fearful and terrifying it is that such violence can be committed in such a wealthy, safe neighborhood against what appears to be a family gunned down in their home by assailants who are still on the move. The two anchors make commentary on Lou’s footage to digest the information for audiences and play on their fears of a crime like this happening in their own homes. As Lou presses Nina to pay him a higher price for his footage, he says that because the case is still developing, it can grow into many more updates relating to the story that would be just as profitable due to the fears of suburban, white audiences that they will be the next ones shot. Monetizing from a culture of fear is also brought up by Parenti as she states that “Voyeurism has a close cousin: the security cult of the home in which many middle-class and well-to-do

Americans, operating as if they lived in crime-plagued ghettos, equip their homes with state-of-the-art surveillance and security gear ranging from driveway gates and electric fences to automatic doors, CCTV, and superwired motion sensors” (Parenti, 191). The profitability from fear paves the way for an active consent on behalf of the audience to be watched and patrolled by news gathering sources like Lou so that they will be protected from the crime that they see on the news and reality television. This is in line with Michel Foucault’s concepts on governmentality when he discusses the idea that the power of politics is through the weaver’s preparatory actions as “making war, giving good judgments in tribunals, as well as persuading assemblies with the art of rhetoric, are not exactly politics but the conditions of its practice” (Foucault, 197). Much of the power behind Lou’s footage, while not on the scale of a world power, is brought out mainly from his effective effort of weaving together convincing news stories that touch a nerve with the news station’s target demographic, breeding fear through the soaring ratings that his footage brings in. These ratings carry the significance of showing how many people are meticulously searching for follow-up information on Lou’s stories and how sought after his more horrific stories end up being. As a result, Lou’s ability to probe the private spheres of victims of crime and accidents to show audiences the result of his voyeuristic pursuits is sanctioned and pardoned as a result of the consenting power of the audience to provide footage that would cater to their fears, confirm their prejudices, and offer their privacy in exchange for security. Essentially, the fears and desires of the audience to give the media the consent to film their private spheres in a bid to catch criminals that they perceive as the most likely to harm their livelihood becomes the drive behind Nina’s

desire to have footage that they will not be able to look away from and Lou's desire to control the gaze in any way he sees fit.

CONCLUSION

The camera and narrative of *Nightcrawler* expresses the idea of Lou Bloom having the power and influence to manipulate the camera's gaze how he sees fit in an era where mass media is ubiquitous enough for his presence to be constantly circulated throughout the city. By having the camera embody Lou's perimeter of vision as well as reflect his inner thoughts, it gives Lou the power to personify the camera's gaze as he combs through crime scenes and captures footage for news stories. Lou's psycho-social alterity propel Lou even closer to his goals as his success is attributed to how far he would go to dive into people's homes and control how the criminal justice system acts so that he can get the perfect shot. Lou's emergence in television news had come in a timely manner as concerns over the privacy of Americans in the wake of the NSA leaks reflect in the cynicism the film displays over the wide availability of private information at Lou's hands as he tracks down dispatches using a police scanner and never ends up getting implicated for his invasive filming. Lou's exploits, while illegal and morally questionable, are made all the more horrifying when Nina, as the Channel 6 editor, encourages his behavior and rewards him handsomely for getting precisely the right footage the channel would need for mass exposure and an increase in viewership. When Nina tells Frank that "Lou is inspiring all of us to reach higher," it brings awareness to the idea that the issue is not just with Lou being able to inspire the news station to follow his lead, but rather that Lou's desires are compatible with the news station's, and all it took was for him to go further into depravity

than his competitors to act as the catalyst to push the news station towards Lou's line of thinking. Mulvey's examination of stillness provides context to the power that images hold as Lou's stare and footage play around with the idea that the screen and camera are malleable to match his perspective and appetites. Meanwhile, Pisters' theology ties the nature of the expanding mass media systems with the audience's point of view as they adopt the role of both Lou and his footage as it is processed through the media cycle, giving audiences a direct look at how the footage is shot and produced for television news. As the priorities are giving the audiences a look at crimes so shocking that they wouldn't be able to look away, Lou is seen as doing his job correctly and the fact that he is indulging the camera in his voyeuristic dive into crime scenes is seen as perfectly acceptable. However, *Nightcrawler* is not a film about how depraved journalism has gotten per se, but rather how the American Dream has transformed during the post-Patriot Act era of surveillance into a system that rewards using any means necessary to gather information that would satisfy the desires of the corporate elite. Much like in *Southland Tales*, a major concern for *Nightcrawler* is how new technology is utilized to tap into the curiosity that viewers have to look into a person's privacy at its most gratuitous. The lengths gone to satisfy the target demographic of local news requires catering to the desire for excess that is captured through Krysta Now's talk show and the USIDent camera footage, the SQUID tapes from *Strange Days* that feed into the viewer's desires to taste the forbidden fruit, and, with *Nightcrawler*, Lou's footage for Channel 6 News that provides the audience with excessive news stories they can't look away from. Through Lou's line of vision, the audience, is brought into the fold as an accomplice to his mission, taking in the point of view that the camera guides the audience through and showing them exactly how close he is willing to

get for the sake of television ratings. As a result, *Nightcrawler* conceptualizes the media landscape of today as a surveillance society that hungers for the invasion of privacy at the price of their own in the same way that Lou and Nina do as they hunt for exclusive footage of graphic violence from the shadows.

V. CONCLUSION

The three films encapsulate how surveillance technology has been depicted throughout the years and how the change in interactions that the audience has with surveillance systems in the 2000's and 2010's is reflected in what the camera sees and how the audience makes sense of what they see. Each of the film's narratives have their own concepts and ideas of how far this technology would go, and whether this technology will serve a significant use to the general populace or to government agencies. The films tackle the curiosity, embrace, and recoil from the presence of this technology throughout society as interconnectivity expands enough so to strengthen the bond that merges the public and private spheres together. The theoretical background that provides the framework for this study are from publications relating to the gaze, the neuro-image, governmentality, and simulation. Laura Mulvey's texts provided my study with insight from both her earlier work which delves into the psychological underpinnings of the gaze and her recent work which amends this by integrating it with an analysis on stillness and movement in film. This, in turn gives the viewer an understanding of how surveillance cinema taps into the desires and fears of the viewer through the camera's gaze as well as the stasis and repetition that conditions viewers to feel a sense of fascination from this paradox. Patricia Pisters' concept of the neuro-image gave my study the framework it needed to pursue the idea of the camera as an extension of the viewer's sight in mind. As a result, this solidifies the shift that surveillance cinema had with the three films from personal experience with the film from the human mind to an organizational experience

with the film from the circuits of surveillance systems and mass media. The impression that the human mind has on the way these films are shot compare the mechanical process of filming with the organic process of thought and perception, tying surveillance machinery with the human mind. In addition, the screen and camera function to shed light on this relationship as it is not unlike the interaction that viewers have with the screen as the camera is used as an apparatus that connects the viewer's vision to the film image's projection. The viewer is often on the side of the voyeur as the camera peers into the private sphere for narrative information and titillation, but the three films selected utilize the camera to turn this gaze back on the viewer, expressing the benefits and discomfort that surveillance technology brings to society. In the process, it expresses the seductive power that both watching and being watched hold as the camera depicts those who are empowered through both means, and emphasizes the coping mechanisms people have faced as they subsist in the new media environment. The viewer's understanding on how the camera functions as a vessel for them to provide a vantage point into the plot, in turn, builds a communication linkage between the viewer and the camera as the camera provides a new means of looking at the plot by focusing from the perspective of surveillance systems. Because of this, the viewer is able to comprehend that while they watch these three films, they have to pay attention to how the film is constructed and which perspectives the camera's line of vision adopts so that they can understand how ubiquitous surveillance has become throughout the internet age.

Strange Days marks a beginning period in the growth of new media, as the narrative is both optimistic and weary of the further evolving technology that is slowly seeping into our cultural norms. The SQUID is cohesive to the role of the both video and

camera as it collects recordings of human behavior and phrenological functions and projects them for the viewer to witness and feel. The sensations from watching the SQUID, while much more advanced than watching a film, are one in the same as the screen projects what is recorded into the frame through its line of sight, and gives audiences the opportunity to watch and experience what was recorded within the camera's line of sight. Experience is key to this as the SQUID's replication of the human eye and the digital camera give viewers an embodied view of the camera, using both the camera throughout the narrative and the SQUID to share the feelings that the characters experience as they look through the device with their own eyes. The film form takes on the concept of the neuro-image that Patricia Pisters explores as the human brain and the camera are interconnected through both the SQUID headset within the narrative as well as the camera's movement in the film that gives audiences a phrenological embodiment of the camera's look. On a more basic level, Christian Metz is used to explain the function behind the gaze as a tool to mirror the psychological desires of the audience, with Laura Mulvey's earlier studies on the gaze and her newer concepts on spectatorship implemented to focus on the key demographic behind Lenny's black market footage of sexually explicit tapes. As the camera and the viewer share the same points of view, the film plays around with the concept of the voyeur as the SQUID is used to probe private spaces, and while it was initially used for surveillance purposes to replace the wiretap, it is used in the film as both a medium of entertainment to give viewers the full enjoyment out of the cinematic gaze and to antagonize the viewer by sharing the feeling that the one recording gets from stalking and harming those around them. Jean Baudrillard's concepts on simulation explain the inevitability of the SQUID's uses outside of simulation as the

recording device bound by reality can simulate the audience's presence in real situations, but this reality ends up surfacing to provide the audience with the shock and implication of experiencing horrifying realities closer than they would ideally appear in simulation. Its use as a surveillance camera holds prominence in modern society as the SQUID's use, while rooted in espionage, entertainment, and snuff films, is also used to record evidence of police brutality, giving viewers the chance to see the truth with their very eyes and provide them with the need to call to action. Ultimately, reality is given its significance through experience, so using cameras as an avenue for experience becomes necessary to explain why surveillance technology acts as an ideal avenue to address the psychological aspects of the enjoyment and paranoia of voyeuristic spying.

Southland Tales is an unusual case as the film aims to envelope politics, mass media, and popular culture during the Iraq War through the point-of-view of a mass surveillance agency. As this was the era where the Patriot Act came into prominence, the film's government agencies such as USIDent serve to gather information on a massive scale by filming the daily activities of Americans throughout Los Angeles. The camera and the power to wield how it is used are consequential to the narrative's theme as fame and exposure give surveillance a double bind where characters seek to have the power to watch over their followers and opponents as well as the power to have the camera constantly pointed at them, granting them the privilege of having their point of view contribute to a dominant ideology. Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality provides the core concept of the contemporary era that this film especially aims to encapsulate, covering the sociopolitical influence that gives the public incentive to consent to authoritarian powers. Governmentality is specifically addressed through its centralization

in Los Angeles where celebrities, moguls, and activists become as dependent on being watched as the government does to keeping their dependence on doing the watching. It is also expressed through Patricia Pisters' study on the neuro-image as she looks at this film and relates the camera's function to that of the human mind, creating a personal connection between the audience and the camera as a reflexive look at the omnipresence of surveillance. The camera mimics the surveillance society that Los Angeles lives under as much of the footage that the audience sees is the same footage that employees at USIDent are watching as they see the narrative unfold and look at the methods that public figures take to glamourize their perspectives through pop culture iconicity. Mulvey's analysis of star power and the media cycle's repetition explains the draw that both audiences of mass media and the media industry itself has of submerging itself with the most dramatic, scandalous aspects of a celebrity's life, and offering a heightened sense of importance to these images of fame and wealth. The simulation of reality explained by Baudrillard is explored in the film through mass media spectacle and viral video as avenues for wide exposure in the geopolitics and popular culture. The film uses governmentality, the neuro-image, and simulation to evoke the idea that America has been so accustomed to surveillance in their daily routines that it has not only become normative, but has become essential in the success of those who seek out the camera's gaze. The look back is called attention to as a result of this awareness, giving off the feeling of inevitability that surveillance, while terrifying, is an aspect of modern technology that civilians must acquaint themselves with to survive in today's society. The viewer is able to comprehend the marriage of mass surveillance and mass media as depicted in *Southland Tales* through sharing their perspective with USIDent, and

understanding that because of the power dynamics between the two, they blend seamlessly into each other as the camera travels towards multiple scenes of the character's private lives, news coverage, and TV commercials at any given point.

Nightcrawler acts as recent, more realistic example of how mass media became an efficient tool for gathering private information and broadcasting it for public use, and implicates the viewer by placing them in the perspective of the news agency as they gather the footage that both they and TV audiences crave. In the film's case, it is the depravity of the film's lead, Lou Bloom, who uses his camcorder and the film's camera to evoke the message that modern society places a high priority on going the furthest lengths to provide results that benefit corporate entities and can gain mass appeal. The camera, undertaking Lou's perspective, digs into the most violent crime scenes, probes private households for the right footage, and implicates the viewer for harboring any desire to follow Lou as his gaze captures footage too shocking and provocative to ignore. Having the audience adopt Lou's point of view aims to have viewers evaluate their own positions as spectators when a voyeuristic stringer who is compared to a starved coyote controls the gaze that they are seeing and takes multiple opportunities to stare back at the camera. Mulvey's insight on the death image delves into this as the characters staring back at the camera and the footage constantly being aired and replayed on television reflects on the materiality of film as it is used, manipulated, and exploited for Lou and the station's gain. Meanwhile, Pisters details the mechanical filtering of mass media systems as the viewer is placed in the position of both Lou and the news station as this filtering into new media creates a desperate urgency to gather information that is guaranteed to be circulated through new media systems and gather ratings. It also calls into question why

audiences of news media would enjoy seeing gratuitous images and theatrics in network news as many of the images that Lou films are doctored and constructed specifically to enhance the dramatic elements of news stories. This cuts into the fear that is presented through Jean Baudrillard's concepts on simulations as much of Lou's intentions are not to act out fake scenarios, but to use fake scenarios as build up for more destructive stories that become too real to be fiction. It brings these fears of their target demographic to the forefront, encouraging them to relinquish their own private spaces to the patrolling eye of the news in return for a sense of security from constant updates on coverage of local crimes in a similar vein to Foucault's concepts on governmentality. However, because the patrolling eye in this case is a sociopathic, determined cameraman who is self-stylized as a business guru, the compromise made by the morning news' audience results in the network broadcasting catastrophic images of death and destruction in intimate settings, empowering the gaze that consumes these images and fueling the fear of being the next one to be watched by Lou's camera lens. The film addresses both the prevailing issue of mass surveillance as a means of providing information and entertainment through news sources as well as the power that the camera has in expressing these themes to the spectator by bringing them face-to-face with a steady feed of footage that news gathering agencies broadcast on television. As a result, *Nightcrawler* aims to express the omnipresence of surveillance as a result of mass media's hunger for up close and personal footage of local tragedies, catastrophies, and spectacles through the perspective of Lou Bloom.

WHAT TO APPLY FROM THIS

This study can help to enhance any further analysis of surveillance culture in the United States and the cinematic gaze as the analysis covers a substantial amount of material that would be applicable to the two fields. The three films that are addressed highlight a specific aspect of America's relationship with surveillance from the 1990's to 2010's as it covers films that explore the public's curiosity for the World Wide Web, the public's reaction to police brutality caught on tape, the advent of the Patriot Act, its lingering consequences as a result of the information Edward Snowden leaked of the full extent of the National Security Agency's spying, and the invasiveness that allows network news to make the private sphere public. Tying in theorists which highlight the importance of spectatorship and identification is also crucial to my study as it helps us understand how to read contemporary films in an age of mass surveillance. Laura Mulvey's older theology, while necessary for pinpointing a key role that the camera plays in honing in on the desires of the viewer, gives way to much newer concepts of stasis, motion, life, and death within the image, creating a new way of comprehending spectatorship in a way that reflects on the mechanical nature of surveillance cameras and the human eye's functionality. Patricia Pisters' neuro-image studies are essential to this study as my idea that the viewer is gladly granted the perspective of surveillance systems in many recent films is supported through Pisters' concept of the human embodiment of the camera as the functionality of camera technology mirrors the human brain's processing. Thus, the neuro-image gives context to how audiences of recent films are forced to relate to both characters within the narrative and the camera's line of sight within the diegetic space. An important aspect of the study is its analysis of the gaze as it

addresses how it is used to express the voyeuristic desires of the audience by placing them within the position of the camera, giving them the opportunity to watch over them as a surveillance camera would watch over those in its line of sight. The most important aspect of relating the gaze to surveillance is the concept of the camera looking back as the screen presents a mirror image, giving audiences the opportunity to identify themselves within the screen as the camera and those who take on the camera's line of vision. However, the potential to use the camera as a way to acknowledge the audience gives viewers the feeling of being watched, giving the three films in the study the chance to manipulate the audience into feeling as if they are no longer in control of the gaze. When the gaze is turned against the audience, it creates a sense of anxiety that replicates the feeling of being the victim of the same voyeuristic indulgences exemplified in the cinematic gaze.

WHAT TO ENHANCE

A major limitation to the study is that its length can only give a small sample of films that cover this topic. Within the scope of the 21st century, many films such as *Minority Report*, *The Bourne Identity*, *The Dark Knight*, and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* explore the concept of surveillance and the interconnectivity of surveillance networks that our access to modern technology has made all the more easier. Its focus on fictitious films also makes for a study that can only highlight the surveillance culture in narrative cinema, requiring further study to address documentary films that cover current trends in surveillance like *Citizenfour*. Analyzing direct footage that witnesses of police brutality recorded in relation to reactions to the film format would

have also aided in understanding what goes through the viewer's mind as they watch filmed evidence of injustice committed by law enforcement and what that reaction would say about the power of video as a medium for documenting reality. This is significantly important for studying how people consume new media and perceive such footage now that there are mediums such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and other visual means of audiovisual communication as these new modes of networking provide people with a way to stay updated on continuing stories by the minute. In future studies, I would like to focus on how video as a whole works to involve and implicate viewers in order to focus on how the video format is evolving with new media as people watch live footage, streaming, and clips uploaded through social media at a much faster pace. Overall, because the study provides a wide array of details within the smaller scale of the thesis, these limitations would be mediated with supplementary mediations on mass media and popular culture in the midst of a surveillance society.

FINAL NOTE

The increasing concern and interest in surveillance in the age of the Internet and smart devices is reflected through the film medium through the films *Strange Days*, *Southland Tales*, and *Nightcrawler*. Each of these films aims to use the camera as a means to interact with the audience in a conversation about how the camera can be used and abused for more purposes than just gathering information. These films together exemplify an evolution in how society thinks of surveillance as *Strange Day's* backdrop highlights the optimism and fear for technology so far off into the distance that it had to be invented, while *Southland Tales* represents the fatigue from Iraq War-period promises

of counter-terrorism amid mass surveillance from the U.S. government, and *Nightcrawler* expresses how surveillance is ubiquitous enough to be a service provided by network news as an information hub and a form of entertainment at the expense of those on the camera's receiving end. The active interest that the public has in the transparency of surveillance agencies feeds into the message expressed in the films that the viewer's desire to hold the gaze is the same desire that uses the gaze against them.

Consequentially, this continues to fuel the relationship between the camera and the spectator in that the feeling the viewer has of needing to assimilate under a much larger field of vision in contemporary American society before a film is called into question during their viewing experience of surveillance cinema. Because these films give viewers the perspective of surveillance technology and the people who use them, it places the viewer at odds as the gaze allows the spectator to feel equal to an all-seeing eye akin to surveillance systems. However, because they also identify with those being watched by the camera, they must also cope with the same feeling they have outside of the film, where they are under the scrutiny of mass surveillance technology that has become integral to their daily lives.

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