

THE NORMALIZATION OF SURVEILLANCE IN SUPERHERO FILMS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how surveillance and surveillance technology has evolved and become normalized in 21st century superhero films. It examines 51 live-action films released between 2000 and 2013. Superhero films have become immensely popular, with films planned for release well into the next decade. Understanding superheroes as filling the role of watchful guardians of civil society, how they are seen to be carrying out their roles takes on greater importance in an age where security concerns are clashing with privacy concerns. The theoretical backbone of the study is Michel Foucault's panopticon and Zygmunt Bauman's liquidity. While the former presents surveillance as an oppressive exercise of power that results in subjects self-regulating their behaviour, the latter focuses on how the flow of information an individual generates, from both ascribed physical data and consumer-driven data, seduces the individual to behave in a manner commiserate with apolitical capitalist ideals. The major contribution coming from this study is a new theoretical concept, the *dissolved panopticon*. The concept contains three categories: Liquid Technology, Solid Technology, and Non Technology. It was developed to synthesize the panopticon and liquidity, placing technological and non technological surveillance techniques under a one umbrella concept that allows future research to examine surveillance as an interaction between a subject and the technique of surveillance, rather than as separate parts. The study was conducted using a manifest content analysis, which allowed for a clear picture of how surveillance has evolved. This research indicates that surveillance in superhero films has increased over the course of the study period, with much of the growth occurring within the categories of Liquid Technology and Solid Technology.

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Chapter 1: Opening credits, opening eyes, an introduction to superheroes, surveillance and the dissolved panopticon.

1.1 Introduction- Out of the darkness....comes the Knight

Night has fallen on Gotham City, and the police stew while the city's ugly underbelly has come to the surface. However, there is unease. The silvery, eerie light is visible high over the sky scrapers of this once dignified urban jungle. The light only bothers the weak and meaningless, the strong ones are less afraid.

A drug deal is underway in a parking garage. Out of a black vehicle steps a Russian gangster with long hair slicked back and a sense of confident seriousness about him. Beside him stand the heavily armed cadre of men there to watch his back and intimidate the other party at the soon-to-commence meeting of criminal elements. Out of a white cargo van emerges a man in a business suit and a mask, which is made from material more commonly associated with a potato sack. He is Jonathon Crane, also known as the Scarecrow, a psychiatrist turned psychotropic drug producing villain. He's still at large following an escape from Arkham Asylum, the city's institute for the criminally insane. In Gotham City, organized corruption is endemic and crime is running rampant. Gangs rule the streets, but they know to lay low when the cryptic light is in the sky- the distinct shadow of a bat at its center signaling Batman's watchful presence. On this night it shines brightly. Weaker criminals fear the signal's presence, as if Batman can see their criminal actions through it. Nevertheless, for the strong, business can not be delayed, no matter who is watching. The Russian is not happy; a mentally crippled customer is quivering at his feet.

The Russian: Look what your drugs are doing to my customers?

Scarecrow: Buyer beware. I said my compound would take you places. I didn't say it would be places you wanted to go.

The Russian: My business! (He looks incredulously) Repeat customers....

Scarecrow: You don't like what I have to offer, you can buy from someone else.

Assuming Batman left anyone to buy from. (Roven, 2008, 0:07:42)

The sense of danger is high in Gotham City; for law abiding citizens and criminal deviants alike. But business is business and consumers need product, no matter the cost. Scarecrow and the Russian conduct their business under the cover of a non descript

location. Despite their menacing reputations and automatic rifles, they know they are not safe. The Batman is a symbol of fear manifested in ferocious action.

The Russians' dogs begin to bark incessantly. A silhouette of the Batman emerges from the shadows. Then another one. Then another one. Each figure takes down a gangster with a flash of physical force. Then another one steps forth, this time with a shotgun. A shootout ensues. But Scarecrow knows better. Batman never uses guns. He knows these bat men are imposters despite their surprising interruption, not *the* Batman.

Then a rumble...the formidable tank that is the Batmobile crashes onto the scene. Silence. Rockets erupt from the front of the tank and two of the gangsters' vehicles explode. But not the Russian's vehicle. He makes an escape.

Meanwhile, the Scarecrow is already attempting to flee. As one of the bat men readies to shoot, a black gloved hand reaches out and grasps the barrel, bending it like a drinking straw. The Dark Knight has arrived, waylaying imposters and henchmen alike, tossing them aside with ruthless vigor. The Russian has escaped, but the Scarecrow has not made it out of the parking garage yet. Batman pursues the psychotic doctor, using the tools at his disposal to rip into the villain's frantically driven van. Scarecrow escapes for the moment by separating Batman from the vehicle via a concrete pillar, but only for a short time. Batman measures his next move. As the van speeds down the levels of the garage, he waits, then plummets, crashing onto the roof above Scarecrow, cape fluttering as the predator has seized his prey; the chase is over and the villain is defeated. On this night, the Scarecrow was not agile enough, nor were his methods sophisticated enough. An imposter, now tied up next to the unmasked Dr. Crane, asks, "What makes you different from us?" Batman, exiting the scene with police on the way, replies, "I'm not wearing hockey pants." A telling brush off. However, there is more to the question of why it is that superheroes, like Batman, are the guardians of justice, the watchmen of the people. The question of how they operate speaks to why they exist in the modern mythology at all.

A question one must ask him/herself is, how did Batman find Scarecrow? Was he watching from the rooftops? Did he plant a wired informant amongst the aforementioned gangsters? Or, did he just intimidate and shake down a low level criminal for information about the meeting? The audience does not know how Batman arrived in his first scene of

the Christopher Nolan film *The Dark Knight* (2008). By the end, they will see that in order for Batman to overcome his next, and greatest enemy, he will have had to transform from a brutish, but just, towering and panoptic monolith of a hero, the one Gotham deserves, to an agile, fluid, technologically creative, ethically questionable hero that, according to police commissioner Jim Gordon, Gotham needs. In order for Batman to defeat the Joker, not only will he adapt his tool kit, exchanging safety and sturdiness for lightness and fluidity, he will change his method, from a watchman *of* the people to a watchman *through* the people.

1.2 The heroes we need, or the heroes we deserve? Surveillance and superhero films

This thesis will focus on the topic of the use of surveillance and surveillance technologies in superhero films. The purpose of the research is to gain insight from superhero films into how surveillance is being normalized, or rather becoming an unconscious, and therefore unquestioned, aspect of modern society. The introductory story suggests Batman just appears to break up a criminal gathering. Delving into the rest of the story from a research basis can demystify his methods, and by extension raise important critiques about those methods. The research will be guided by the following question: how have representations of surveillance and surveillance technologies in early 21st century superhero films contributed to the overall normalization of surveillance?

1.2.1 Research Questions

In addition to the main question that is the basis of this study, four research questions are addressed throughout this study. These questions provide a deeper level of detail beyond the major research question. These four specific research questions are as follows:

- 1) How is surveillance and surveillance technology utilized within superhero films?
- 2) Is there evidence that supports the concept of a dissolved panopticon?
- 3) Has there been a change in the number of instances of surveillance depicted in superhero films between the years 2000 and 2013?

- 4) Between 2000 and 2013, has there been a shift in the dominant type of surveillance used in superhero films?

1.3 Background of the Study: Superhero Films in an Era of Surveillance

There are two key debates that will form the backdrop of this project. The first debate is within surveillance studies between the panopticon metaphor and the concept of liquid surveillance. The second debate surrounds the merits of studying superhero films in the first place.

1.3.1 Surveillance

In the first debate, the work of post-structural theorist, Michel Foucault, has dominated much of the discussion within surveillance studies for over three decades wherein the metaphor of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon is a central concept (1791). The panopticon concept explains how subjects moderate their behavior to, at first, avoid negative consequences from whoever is watching. Additionally, according to Foucault (1995[1975]), after enough repetition, the new behavior then comes to seem natural, the subject made docile. With surveillance comes knowledge, and knowledge is power (1995[1975]). Power is at its most intense when it is concealed in day to day routines (Giddens, 1987). Foucault used the panopticon to understand how the power to attain control of another's body is gained through structures. Philosopher Jeremy Bentham devised the panopticon as a prison structure to keep the prisoner in constant view of the sometimes invisible prison guard, reinforcing the prisoner's conformative actions under the threat of punishment. Foucault transplanted the structural idea to spaces where individuals have greater freedom of movement, but inhibited are by a watchful guard. These restraints could be in the form of closed circuit television high above a retail space, or the passport, which creates its own possible barriers to entry by bureaucracy.

Post modern theorist Zygmunt Bauman has suggested that modernity has evolved, that it has become liquid (Daems & Robert, 2007). Accordingly, the collective public has been replaced by the individualism of the private. Private aspects of the individual,

including their biometric markers like finger prints and facial features, the private sector, the drivers of capitalism and consumerism, and the ability of the former to engage with the latter in a unique way separates the individual of the private from the collective public. For Bauman (2012(2000)), surveillance is no longer about enforcing control and negating deviance. Rather it focuses on the consumer and promoting the consumer culture, spilling into areas of society that surveillance was never associated with (2012(2000)).

Whether through institutional bureaucracy or digital consumerism, as technology has advanced, the ability to surveill the new activity that is generated is established and expanded. In short, surveillance tends to increase as technology widens the range of vision. This raises the question of whether technologically-based surveillance is helpful or harmful? Ethics theorist Kristen Schrader-Frechette (1992) suggests that proponents of technological surveillance will expound upon its benefits, claiming such technologies protect individuals from both physical and proprietary harm. They meet any criticism of these claims with demands for quantitative evidence of actual physical harm (1992). On the other hand, proponents from the non-technological perspective raise ethical issues that affect “civil liberties, personal autonomy, or rights such as due process” (1992, 1231). Notably, superheroes are never concerned with civil rights and the processes that spring from them, such as due process. Whereas state authorities, such as the police, need formal approval from the judiciary, in the form of a warrant, to electronically surveil a suspect (whether through tapping into telecommunications [though not necessarily to search an unlocked phone], credit card usage, or internet usage), superheroes are generally portrayed as having free reign to engage in technological surveillance without judiciary oversight. A prime example is when Batman listens in on phone conversations in *The Dark Knight*. Now, federal policing agencies in the United States are able to use technology such as drones for surveillance purposes without a warrant, though many states are racing to limit this power (Salles, 2015). The superhero is a trail blazer in that they use what they deem necessary to defeat evil. The state makes the same claim, except that what constitutes evil is highly subjective. Warrantless drone surveillance with its potential to enhance state control is a striking example. While superheroes and states can do what they feel is necessary, the trick is determining if they should. California

Governor Jerry Brown's opposition to limiting drone surveillance because of its unjustifiable invasiveness of privacy indicates there is room for critical thought (2015).

1.3.2 Superhero films and academia

The second debate shifts to the area of superhero films and academic research. On one side, superhero films are seen as merely colourfully kinetic concoctions that are psychologically childish, lacking in the lightness of a musical, and without "lived meaning" due to a reliance on computer generated imagery (Bukatman, 2011, 20). On the other hand, superhero films provide an opportunity to reflect on issues such as law (Butler, 2011), surveillance (Wanzo, 2009), dominant ideologies (Treat, 2009), and the body (Taylor, 2007).

In response to this debate, I argue for the importance of studying film from a sociological perspective. Society is very much in the midst of a media driven age where the Internet is transforming how radio, television, and film are consumed. Ownership in media holdings are increasingly concentrated and the importance of creating easily marketable products that generate revenue and profit is essential (Winseck, 2008). Budgets for films in particular are astronomical and come with the great expectation of huge profits; they must entertain while taking limited risks in order to attract the largest audiences (Philips, 2004). Because the media is so ubiquitous, it is extremely important to examine all of its types for embedded overt and covert messages, whether it is social media, advertising, music, or film.

1.4 Why Study Superhero Films from a Sociological Perspective?

Why the superhero films? This study has focused on superhero films for four reasons. First, the films provide an avenue to examine a variety of social issues. Second, surveillance happens to be an important function for superheroes and the state alike. Thanks to the emergence of advanced technologies, advanced surveillance is a pressing social issue in the real world and on film. Third, superhero films have become massively popular and are voluminously produced (particularly in the 21st century). Fourth,

superhero films have become so prolific, they have spawned a new genre unto themselves. This has been spurred by not just mass popularity, but also a rise in the quality of filmmaking and storytelling.

1.4.1 Superheroes and social issues

First, superhero films provide an opening to a number of social issues. At the micro level of society, the films deal with issues such as the use of power at a state, corporate, and individual level; crime and justice, including who or what is deviant (and according to whom); the representation of the masculine and feminine body (Taylor, 2007), and the role of patriarchy in society (Murray, 2011). Superhero films can also shine a light on macro issues, such as ideology, whether they be economic, political, or theological in nature (Hughes, 2006).

1.4.2 The function of surveillance in superhero films

Second, surveillance is an important function of many superhero films. From the perspective of surveillance studies, the technology has evolved to the point where what was once science fiction is now, or will soon be, reality. On film, the line is now blurred to such an extent that the idea of suspending disbelief must itself be suspended. Films like *Enemy of the State* (1998) and *Minority Report* (2002) have directly addressed critical issues of the state's use of surveillance. In the context of current events, Edward Snowden's National Security Agency revelations regarding the United States' spying capabilities seem to add further credibility to these films (McNair, 2013). Meanwhile, for superheroes, surveillance is a key function, but it holds a complicated place (Wanzo, 2009). For them, the ability to fully utilize surveillance and surveillance technology is nearly unquestionable when the goal is to capture (and eliminate?) the villain (Hagley & Harrison, 2014). Therefore, if the lines have blurred between fact and fiction, and governments and corporations have near unfettered, only recently questioned, access to such technology, it becomes very relevant to examine whether surveillance is presented in film as a natural and necessary part of society.

1.4.3 The popularity of superhero films

Third, superhero films have been wildly popular amongst theatre goers of all ages, including younger audiences. This is, in part, because of favourable ratings from ratings boards like the Motion Picture Association of America, that make the films accessible (Smith, 2014). Therefore, because the films are so popular, it is important to examine them for what they say about society. It must be acknowledged that the goal of this study is not to suggest that superhero films are purposely made to directly indoctrinate the audience. Films are first and foremost an entertainment vehicle designed to generate profits for the producers and distributors (Leaver, 2010). While superhero films may carry messages about society, which can and should be studied critically, they are secondary to the goals of the producers and audience.

1.4.4 Superhero films as a legitimate film genre

Fourth, superhero films have gained legitimacy as a genre separate from the science fiction and fantasy genres. Primary evidence can be found at film box office aggregate website Box Office Mojo.com, which now lists superhero films as a separate category (2013). In addition, mainstream media is openly making the distinction (*The Guardian*, 2013), while film critics have also come to see superhero films as a genre onto themselves (Roepert, 2014). More evidence is found in the sheer quantity of superhero based films that now exist. More than 60% of all superhero based films ever made up to 2013 were produced after 2000, with many more at various stages of production (Box Office Mojo, 2013). These films feature ensemble casts made up of respected, popular, and promising film stars. The film industry has also recognized the increased quality of the films, having awarded many superhero films for technical prowess. To date, the top award has been a 2008 Best Supporting Actor Academy Award for Heath Ledger's role as the Joker in *The Dark Knight* (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science, 2013). In terms of revenue generation, two of these films - *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *Marvel's Avengers* (2012) - are in the top 30 of all time grossing films, both unadjusted and

adjusted for inflation, which accounts for differences in theatre ticket costs over time (Box Office Mojo, 2013), indicating that superhero films, as products of popular culture, have achieved a wide audience far exceeding the limitations of a niche status.

1.5 Research Goals

In an attempt to better understand the way that surveillance and surveillance technologies are utilized and normalized in superhero films, a series of goals were established as follows:

- 1) To explore the themes of surveillance within superhero films.
- 2) To operationalize the types of surveillance and the technologies of surveillance.
- 3) To develop the concept of the dissolved panopticon which is a synthesis of Michel Foucault's concept of panopticism and Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquidity.
- 4) To lay groundwork for deeper exploration of surveillance that could be used in other genres of film.

1.6 Chapter Breakdown

The following sections will introduce what each of the chapters will address in this study. These include: a literature review in Chapter Two; a breakdown of the theoretical positions in Chapter Three; the methodological approach in Chapter Four; major findings in Chapter Five; the second wave of results in Chapter Six; a discussion derived from the findings and a conclusion in Chapter Seven.

1.6.1 Literature Review: Or, a history of what came before.

A film that is going to be large in scope or long in runtime is generally introduced by some form of backstory; what has happened before the story begins that sets up the plot of what is to follow. Chapter Two will explore some of the literature, as it pertains to this study, in greater detail, including the theme of surveillance of the subject or

individual. What emerges is a window into three areas of knowledge that are seeking to gain a grounding in legitimacy. Film theory focuses on the struggle between understanding the content of film and film's place in greater society. Surveillance studies looks to the emergence of technology. Finally, studies regarding superheroes try to cut through the spectacle inherent in superhero media to reach a place where real issues can be examined in a new light. Because the literature relating to film theory has a city map's worth of avenues to explore, and surveillance literature is vast and dense, and superhero literature largely focuses on the comic book medium, the literature review found here is presented in a targeted fashion. It gives a snapshot without overwhelming the reader with the mosaic of material that is available.

1.6.2 Surveillance Theory: From Foucault to Bauman to the dissolved panopticon.

Superheroes such as Iron Man, Batman, and Beast, are tremendous innovators. They use the tools they create, such as Iron Man's wide range of suits, Batman's telecommunications based sonar device, and Beast's mechanical creations to enhance their superpowers or to solve some new problem. These tools are at least as important as the physical force they possess. Inspired by these superheroes, Chapter Three features an introduction to a new theoretical innovation to clarify the surveillance content embedded within superhero films. This new theoretical tool, the concept of the *dissolved panopticon*, is a synthesis of two competing concepts from Michel Foucault and Zygmunt Bauman. In short, Foucault's (1995[1975]) concept of the panopticon is the metaphorical mechanism of discipline which subtly turns a subject into a docile body. Bauman's (2012[2000]) concept of liquidity focuses on the idea that society has shifted from a base of solid collectivity to one adrift in a flow of individuality. Instead of the panopticon's singular top-down eyes surveilling society, there is a sea of eyes amongst the populous that are watching society at any time from anywhere. The *dissolved panopticon* is a concept that combines the two positions to create a fluid panopticon, where everyone can watch everyone, but discipline, disguised as seduction, which leads to internalized control of the self is still important. The *dissolved panopticon* is broken down into three

categories: liquid technology, solid technology, and non-technology. A deeper theoretical explanation will be presented in Chapter Three.

1.6.3 Methodology: Content Analysis

In Chapter Four, an explanation of the method that was used to carry out this study will be presented. Briefly, the method utilized a cross sectional content analysis of superhero films. This method is preferred because it will present an illustrated trend of surveillance, and the *dissolved panopticon*, in superhero films over the selected time period. Evidence of the newly developed concept will come from the data that relates to the types of surveillance used in the films, and how often they appear. Further discussion follows on the significant points in the data that elaborate on the answer to the overall research question.

The films that have been included in the data set for study were films released between 2000 and 2013. The timeframe has been selected for a number of reasons. First, 2000 saw the release of *X Men*, the first superhero film to address subject matter that is mature in nature, including an overt Holocaust theme (Baron, 2003). Second, the starting point provides a window on superhero films and surveillance prior to the September 11th, 2001 World Trade Center attack. The event is a pivotal point in recent history because it has led to substantially escalated surveillance and security measures in the United States and beyond (Lyon, 2006). In addition, the timeframe includes a period of on-film reaction and reflection about security and privacy (Kellner, 2010; Barker, 2011). Third, many original films have had sequels, while others still have been rebooted. Films such as *X Men* (2000), *Iron Man* (2008), and *Batman Begins* (2005) have had multiple sequels (and one prequel, *X Men: First Class* [2012]) produced. Reboots, where an origin story is retold in a different manner without any connection to previous incarnations, have been produced for the Superman, Spiderman, and Hulk characters. Finally, 2013 is the latest year the study could include and be up to date but finite regarding the films to be studied.

The films that are to be included are live action, had a wide theatrical release, and are clearly superhero films. Animated films are being excluded because, while characteristics of reality may be evident, animation puts up a barrier of unreality. A wide

theatrical release is important because it means the population at large would have been made aware of the film's release and had an opportunity to see it. For example, the 2010 film *Super* was not included because it reached only 38 screens in the United States at its widest release (Box Office Mojo, 2013) as compared to *Iron Man 2*, released in the same year, which reached 4,390 screens. Finally, a superhero film must feature characters that meet the criteria of what makes a superhero - a secret identity, a mission, and super powers (Coogan, 2006). *Wanted* (2009), in one example, was excluded because the characters did not have alternate identities or a guiding mission.

1.6.4 Findings in two parts

Chapters Five and Six present the quantitative and qualitative data and analysis. The chapters feature a report on the volume of surveillance that exists in superhero films and give a detailed accounting of the types of surveillance visible. This is the evidence that shows the existence of the *dissolved panopticon*. Finally, the report provides analysis that illustrates the shift in the dominant type of surveillance. Further support will be provided by unpacking the film, *The Dark Knight*, to illustrate how the *dissolved panopticon* came into its own in superhero films.

1.6.5 Discussion: Themes and the dissolved panopticon unpacked on film

Chapter Seven features a discussion about the implications of the data results. It focuses on the normalization of surveillance in superhero films and the *dissolved panopticon*. Specifically, the discussion moves in the direction of how surveillance is made to seem natural through discourse and placement. It also discusses how the *dissolved panopticon* is presented on screen and the implications of the emergence of the concept.

1.6.6 Conclusion

Finally, Chapter Eight will look back one final time to what has been presented in this thesis. The chapter will provide an overview of each chapter. It will also look to the future and present some possible avenues for further exploration that may branch off from this research.

1.7. The End of the Beginning

With the overview of the chapters complete, the opening introduction has come to a close. The chapter began with a dramatic recreation of Batman's first scene in the 2008 film, *The Dark Knight*. His seemingly random appearance begged the question of how he knew where to show up? It opens up the larger question of how superheroes generally come across such fear inducing crises? Superhero films are immensely popular with audiences because of their spectacular nature and real world settings. While the storylines are generally not complex, the gloss and energy masks opportunities to promote certain ideologies, whether intended or not, including the increasing need for surveillance. Its role as a central component to gaining and maintaining control of order in a chaotic time begs the question of how the films normalize surveillance and its technology. This thesis will provide insight into the sociological ramifications of surveillance in superhero films. Chapter Two follows, which, will delve into the literature that best informs the central subjects of this thesis-surveillance and film.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the relevant literature that informs this thesis. The review begins with an overview of film theory, a relatively new area of continual growth, with less than 50 years of research. Second, I develop literature that deals with the expansion of the surveillance society. Third, I introduce the area of surveillance on film. This section combines film theory with surveillance theory. Fourth, I present an overview of the academic study of superheroes. This examines how superheroes in film have impacted society on levels as far reaching as the law and as close at hand as the portrayal of body images. Fifth, I introduce research involving superheroes in film. A summary will provide a condensed overview of the literature discussed and its relevance to the research questions.

2.2 A Behind the Scenes Feature on Film Theory

Sociology has many competing perspectives on the spectacle and myth-making properties of popular culture. The critical theory perspective, such as that coming from the Frankfurt School, has called popular culture and film a distraction and a tool for promotion that operates like an opiate for the masses (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002). Contrary to that position, while film has the capability of being a conservative medium, too focused on the spectacle and celebrities, it can also be a force for social change (Benjamin, 1969; Church & Geller, 1989; Bapis, 2008; Hunt & Wang-Fei, 2010). Film is a medium for storytelling, or myth-making, and spectacle has come to play a part nearly as integral to telling stories as the tension of the drama. The section will briefly review the literature that has served as the historical basis for film theory, from the early issues of popular culture through the emergence of film theory through Marxian psychoanalysis to the present

Film theory emerged in the 1970s and was influenced heavily by the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser (Flisfeder, 2009).

Althusser's (2012[1971], 80) concept of the "ideological state apparatus where an ideology is recognized and interpreted by a subject, has been highly influential. Through "interpellation", or the hailing of a subject-person through discourse or some signifier, the act of ideology transforms individuals into subjects (2012, 84). A posted sign stating cameras are present is an example. The sign is recognized by the person who interprets it to mean he/she is under surveillance. Normatively appropriate behavior follows if the sign was correctly interpreted. For this study, film is the ideology which the audience recognizes and interprets. Therefore, the audience is not passive, despite the seeming lack of surface engagement with a given film. Rather the audience, through the recognition of a film's hailing cues, is actively receiving the film's messages on some level.

From the feminist perspective, Laura Mulvey's (2010) concept of the cinematic gaze, born out of Lacanian theory, has been useful to the critique of female representations and the treatment of the body in media and popular culture. For example, she refers to the 'gaze' as a mechanism whereby the female body is fetishized by the male voyeur (2010). She points to the Alfred Hitchcock film, *Rear Window*, for a complex example. Whereas the main character, Jeffries, confined to a wheelchair, is indifferent to his girlfriend while he spies on his neighbor across the way for much of the film, his attitude towards her changes into something Mulvey describes as erotic when the plot takes her to the neighbour's home and into the view of Jeffries telescope (2010). As an aside, one glaring feminist critique of this study is that female superheroes are nearly non-existent, and, therefore, are vastly underrepresented in the research. Theorist bell hooks (1992) added to the discourse on feminism in film and culture as a whole in the 1990s by introducing race and Otherness to the discourse. Specifically, she focuses on how race is appropriated and consumed. She describes her position with the film *Heart Condition*, where a white racist cop receives a heart transplant from a black male antagonist, then proceeds to change his view on race, win the love of the girl (whom the black man had also been pursuing) and ends up befriending the black man's family (1992). For hooks, the film literally depicts the "eating of the Other" (1992, 313).

The cognitivist approach was developed in the 1970s as both an alternative to psycho-analysis and an attempt to quantitatively assess film. It stresses empirically gauging the audience response to film rather than attempting to read the content of a film

to find deeper meaning (Flisfeder, 2009). Film theorist David Bordwell (1996) suggested that theorizing without data served to leave film theory as a weak academic pursuit. He considered theorizing based on not only the psycho-analysis of Lacan and Althusser, but also the Frankfurt School, the post-structuralists, such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, and post-modernists, such as Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. In particular, Bordwell had four major criticisms of non-cognitive approaches to theory (1996). The first criticism is their top-down approach to theory. By attempting to apply an established theory to a singular film, theory can not grow, nor can it be adequately proved. The second criticism is the use of a bricolage approach to applying theory. That is, pieces of various theories are spliced together to suit the ends of the academic. Bordwell points out that doing so may cause an academic to miss the points that make one theory contradict another. The third criticism is that of associational reasoning, where the academic makes leaps from ideas and inferences that make no logical sense. The fourth criticism is that of hermeneutic impulse, where the academic applies theory with no quantifiable proof to back up their position.

Yet despite the objections of Bordwell, non-cognitive film theory still persists. Philosopher and theorist Slavoj Žižek has attempted to understand the content of film from a Marxist perspective using the frame of Lacan's social Real. He combines ideological displacement and class struggle with a thing or an idea *of* its place that is not necessarily based in reality (Flisfeder, 2009). For instance, taking a Žizekian frame of analysis, when Tony Stark proclaims, in *Iron Man 2* (2010), that he has privatized world peace, what he is saying is that the superhero can do what the state can not, that is, to attain world peace. The ideology that is displaced is the one that states that privatized world peace preserves class order that supports the status quo, the form of corporate capitalism that fuels the enrichment of the private elite (this includes Stark) at the expense of the social state. For Žizek, the claim that a film is '...just a movie' misses the context of the content (2009). Therefore, to watch a superhero film as just entertainment is to ignore the messages and ideas that are embedded and reinforced within the film.

Understanding superheroes as a form of media-driven modern mythology means having to understand how such mythology operates. Post structuralist theorist Roland Barthes (1983) introduced a means to critically interpret the myths that media create,

which provides insight into how the mythology of superheroes can be used as a vehicle for ideological promotion/preservation through the medium of film. Barthes (1983) presented a seven point guide to peering through the constructed myth: inoculation, the diffusing of criticism by admission followed by the trumpeting of the benefits of the myth; the privation of history, or the changing of contingent factors into a natural essence (Durham & Kellner, 2012); identification, the elimination by some means of Otherness; tautology, the essentialism of facts that can not be challenged; neither-norism, the use of extreme points to eliminate any middle ground; the quantification of quality, the economization of an argument in order to cheapen it; and finally, the statement of fact, where the myth becomes proverb (Barthes, 1983).

Critical media theorist Doug Kellner (2010) builds on cultural theorist, Stuart Hall's (1980) concept of encoding (the constructing and packaging of message) and decoding (the unpacking and reading of the message) by introducing the concept of transcoding, which describes how "specific political discourses...are translated or encoded in media texts" (Kellner, 2010, 2). In discussing *The Dark Knight* (2008), Kellner suggests that Batman is a metaphor for the Bush-Cheney administration in the United States, specifically the administration's policies on terrorism, including torture, extraordinary renditions, and mass surveillance (2010).

In summary, film has been studied from a number of perspectives, including the critical, psycho-analytic, feminist, and post-structuralist perspectives. Because film is both a vehicle for myth-making and spectacle, it becomes important to interpret, or transcode the meanings of the message. This is important to the thesis because superheroes, being both modern mythology and highly spectacular, are prime vehicles for promoting messages that tie directly to the function of a superhero- an active agent of surveillance. The following section will introduce some of the past literature on surveillance and its use in film.

2.3 Surveillance Theory: On the street and on the screen

Much discussion in the area of surveillance theory has shifted from panopticism (Foucault, 1975) towards liquidity (Bauman, 2001) creating theoretical progeny,

including social sorting (Lyon 2002). Rather than focusing on the subject as a starting point, these latter ideas turn the subject into an atomized data point. The literature has shown that as society modernized and industrialized, surveillance became more complex, in the form of regulation and systemization (Higgs, 2001; Weller & Bawden, 2005). As a result, surveillance has played a significant role in society's move to, through, and from industrialization to a still-burgeoning post-industrial period. Therefore, it is no surprise that people have, and continue to congregate at the site of (post?) industrialism- the city.

As an example of sociology using popular culture and the arts as a social prognosticator, one can look to sociologist, Pitrim Sorokin. Sorokin is notable for his break from the dominate perspective of structural functionalism, popularized by theorist, Talcott Parsons (1937), which stated that in order to understand society, a researcher had to attempt to find static patterns of functionality. Sorokin (1942) countered that claim by suggesting society was in a constant state of flux, first solidifying then dissolving. Sorokin's observation was that in those periods of fluctuation, the cracks such shifting exposed could be fertile ground for fascism to take root. This insight was as important in understanding the first half of the 20th century, with its advancing technology and dysfunctionality, as it is to today with hyper advancements in technology leading to a greater surveillance network and near-subject free social control. Amongst the various social settings Sorokin utilized as examples in *Crisis of our Age*, including law and family, he focused on the arts and popular culture, including film, as signposts of the social changes he saw occurring in the 1930s and 40s (1942).

Theorists William Robinson and Mario Barrera (2012), who focus on globalization and social movements, argue that fascism is not the same as in Sorokin's time, rather the face of fascism has changed, emerging as transnational capital-driven neo-fascism - a fascism born out of consumerism. Called a 'crisis in capitalism', fascism is one response to such a crisis (2012). Zygmunt Bauman (1989) showed how the Holocaust, as a byproduct of nation-state backed fascism, could come about as a culmination of isolated, bureaucratic decision-making, where such an intense focus on instrumental rationality led to catastrophe. The response to the 1970s crisis in capitalism was a top-down implementation of globalized capitalism, now referred to as neoliberalism, that featured a restructuring of the economic order and social policy

(Robinson & Barrera, 2012). The current state of global finance has provided another window for social change, it is merely a question of what that change will look like. Robinson and Barrera (2012, 10) suggest that the foundation exists for neo-fascism to take hold, marked by a variety of social phenomenon, such as transnational capital, masculinist militarization, economic insecurity, fanatical ideology, and racist mythology amongst others:

[a] fusion of transnational capital with reactionary political power; escalating militarization featuring extreme masculinization; a mass base among economically insecure and socially disaffected sectors, animated by fanatical ideology; race/culture supremacy and xenophobia embracing an idealized and mythical past; economic destabilization and concomitant social anxiety among privileged strata of working and middle classes; a racist mobilization of scapegoats that serves to displace and redirect social tensions and contradictions; and...charismatic leadership (Robinson & Barrera, 2012, 10).

Indeed, some of these characteristics are prevalent in popular culture. Masculinity, militarization, fantasy, mysticism, and irrationality are, in some form, a central feature of many Hollywood films (2012). Business is as much the ideology of the culture industry (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2007) as it is for transnational capital.

At the heart of transnational capital lies the combination of risk and fear. Ulrich Beck coined the term 'risk society' to define an age, post-industrialism, where class was no longer the defining characteristic of society, rather it has been replaced by the level of risk a society faces (Joas & Knobl, 2010). A society at risk can be defined as follows. It is global in nature, transcending national borders, with heavy dependence on scientific and empirical knowledge. A society at risk is also overly reactionary legislatively, willing to sacrifice rights and freedoms for coping mechanisms (Zuriek, 2004). The catalyst for such a state of tension and paranoia is fear, the unseen enemy of hope that is capable of crushing all things tangible and intangible, people and economies alike.

The dark side of consumerism is crime, an illegitimate denial of the individual's right to consume. Crime theorist David Garland (2001) reports that increasingly the *fear* of crime is being seen as an entry point to social control, let alone the *act* of crime. This has shaped the politics that goes into streetscape surveillance (Lett, Heir, & Walby, 2012), where the focus is not so much on the collective whole, but on select groups, panoptically sorted (Gandy, 1993) leaving those who are not targeted to benefit from the wider goods that new data based surveillance provides (Lyon, 2010). In Canada, it has

been shown that acceptance or rejection of the more obvious surveillance technologies, like closed-circuit television, has not been directly led by elite partners (Hier, Greenberg, Walby, & Lett, 2011). Yet, opportunities arise when elite partners, such as the state, become very interested in increasing surveillance capabilities beyond the benign institutional control mechanisms, such as a terrorist attack (Haggerty & Grazos, 2005). Anti-terrorist surveillance is justified as a retrospective source of information, a deterrent, and a tool for some pre-emptive action (2005). Surveillance theorist, Gemma Galdon-Clavell (2011, 523), suggests that instead of viewing surveillance as a “technology with social consequences” (2011, 526), it should be seen as “a political and social process with technological consequences.”

Surveillance theorists, Rodrigo Jose Firmino, Fabio Duarte, and Clovis Ultramari (2010), argue that as old as surveillance technologies are, at least theoretically, they still play an enormous role, alongside locative media and global networking, in how cities, in particular, are shaped. Spatially, the city has become a site of increased transfer of the public to the private, a political-economy bias that shifts notions of citizenship to markets and consumerism (Graham & Wood, 2003). This punches holes in neoliberalism’s sales pitch of a flat earth devoid of hierarchies that in reality has never existed (Firminio, Duarte, & Ultramari, 2010). Digital surveillance is the tool driving the transition to “individualization, commodification, and consumerization” (Graham & Wood, 2003).

2.3.1 Surveillance in film

The implications of surveillance, on and off screen, have been explored extensively in the academic literature. While the panopticon metaphor has been applied to surveillance-based films, such as *Rear Window* (Albrechtslund, 2008), recent literature has focused on social sorting and liquid surveillance. For example, Muir (2012) attempts to illustrate how social sorting reaches its zenith in films such as *Minority Report*, where the mise en scène, the setting of the scene of the film, is a character in itself. This is explained in the film through the differences in materials making up the urban settings. The materials illustrated how surveillance and control function differently in the consumer class and under class areas of a future Washington D.C. (2012). While

materials were clean, thin, transparent, brightly lit, and awash in consumer marketing signifiers in the upper class sections of the city, the lower class sections were shadowy, thick with concrete, and devoid of consumer culture indicators (2012). However, this does not mean that panopticism can be discarded. Simon (2005) points out that Foucault's panoptic ideal is adaptable to the digitized age. Film and television serve to enculture, rather than overtly train, an audience to produce behaviours that are "structured (though not determined) by the synoptic management of perceptions of risk, morality, desire, and truth." (2005, 10).

On the other hand, perhaps film itself should not be seen as a mere reflection of a surveillance society. Rather, it should be viewed as a practice of surveillance itself (Zimmer, 2011). Surveillance and media theorist, Dietmar Kammerer (2004), suggests that what matters is that movies and surveillance technology, like closed circuit television, are alike; the representation is not important. What is important is the complications and complexity of the relationship between film/closed circuit television and the audience.

In summary, this section has covered a portion of the literature relating to surveillance. It points to the changing paradigm of surveillance, from subject based to data based, acknowledging that with every evolution in technology, there has been an evolution the nature of surveillance. While evidence points to this being the case prior to the 20th century, this review narrows the focus on the middle of the century as the point in recent history where technological innovation and dangerous political ideology came together in the form of Nazi Germany. The fascism of those days is seen as being a real danger in the present day, but in a different form - not rooted in nationalism, but global finance. At the center of global finance is risk, which leads to uncertainty and insecurity, giving rise to methods of surveillance to attempt to ensure a level of safety. However, fear of crime remains high despite the increased security, and cities are undergoing transformations that serve to secure, and also segment, its citizens along consumeristic lines, via tools such as closed circuit television. On film, surveillance has evolved from merely watching to recording to networking. Yet, one should also consider film as not just a reflection of what is happening in society, but as a participant in it, a vehicle for normalization.

2.4 *The Superhero as Modern Mythology?*

Superheroes have long been associated with comic books and, as such, the literature has largely focused on that particular medium. However, the move to put superheroes in visual media, both film and television, in a real world setting opens them up to examination from the point of mainstream, rather than niche, appeal.

The clearest definition of a superhero in the literature comes from writer, Peter Coogan (2009) who defines a superhero as having four distinct characteristics - the hero has some mission, a *raison d'être*; the hero has some super human power, or access to advanced technology; the hero has a dual identity - one that marks them as a hero and another that places them in the category of an ordinary human being; and generic distinction, an idea backed by Wittgenstein's position that universality is not required to define a genre (Henderson, 1978; Coogan, 2009). Coogan (2009) states that generic distinction is a tool used to include or exclude a character as a superhero. A character may feature the aspects of a superhero, but if the character fits into a different genre, then they can be excluded. He cites the main character in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* who is excluded because she lacks a secret identity, her heroic role was pre-existing, and her association with vampires puts her in the horror genre (2009). Who to include/exclude as a superhero can be a daunting task due to issue with goodness of fit as it relates to the aforementioned definition. For example, the *Blade* franchise features a vampire slayer, but, unlike *Buffy*, the role of the character does not predate him. *The Punisher* (included) is essentially a long origin story where the character only embodies the superhero character to the fullest extent at the climax of the film, while the main character in *Wanted* (excluded) never takes on the identity of a superhero.

Much academic work done on the social impact of mythical superheroes has come from the comic book medium with some work relating to film. However, in the 21st century, superheroes have come to dominate the modern cinema, the number of films released on the silver screen annually has been astounding. As a result, academia has had to adapt its examination of superheroes to include film representations alongside traditional comic book representations. This section will look back to some of the large

body of literature that delves into the cultural world of superheroes. Literature that deals with superheroes in films will be presented in another section.

Superheroes are seen as a modern mythology (Reynolds, 1992). Specifically, superheroes function as an American mono-myth (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). Theorists, Richard Van Heertum, and, Kip Austen Hinton (2010), summarize the mono-myth succinctly, as:

...[e]scapist fantasy where a generally solitary, violent individual, or small group saves a community from some great evil—betraying the ideals of democratic responsibility and participation, of reasoned and intelligent debate and of reins on power. Redeemer characters are the only ones who can save society from danger or evil (often embodied by corrupt or inept politicians, bumbling police and federal agents and the collapse of the other social institutions entrusted to protect us. (Van Heertum & Hinton, 2010, 27)

The mono-myth idea is evident at the level of the individual character. For example, Jeanne Holland (2012), a cultural studies writer, refers to Spider-Man as an example of American exceptionalism, he is “superhuman, courageous, self-sacrificing, protective of the weak” (2012, 291). While Superman is adorned in the same colour scheme, another cultural studies writer, Sarah Kozloff (1981), describes the man of steel in even higher terms, casting him as the Christian saviour. A third cultural studies writer, Andreas Reichstein (1998), suggests that Batman is a character born out of the Gothic style, similar to Victorian era characters like Mr. Hyde or Dorian Gray, being wealthy bachelors who lead double lives and are capable of tremendous evil; the difference between the hero and the villain comes down to the control of evil impulses. A contemporary approach to Batman suggests that the character represents the dark side of American justice; justified as a sometimes good, sometimes bad guy taking down homicidal psychotics that does not operate within the systems and institutions that form the bedrock of law and justice (Kellner, 2010; Butler, 2011). Legal expert Joel Butler (2011) uses Batman as a warning about what society is faced with if institutions become so corrupted that justice is compromised.

2.4.1 Superheroes on film: It's a bird! It's a plane! It's academia's take on superheroes in the cinema!

The pool of literature that addresses superheroes has largely focused on comic book representations. However, academia has begun to notice the proliferation of

superheroes in film which is leading to a different kind of analysis than that of comic books. Coming from a variety of diverse perspectives, superhero films have come to be defined academically by several key common characteristics: they tend to be spectacular in nature, conformist yet tremendously popular, and they focus on characters who are quite flawed in nature. Because of the fantastical nature of superheroes, and the highly recognizable settings they operate in, the films become an ideal site for societal reflection.

Film theorist, Scott Bukatman (2011), suggests that superhero films “celebrate a range of phenomena”, including “kinesis, immersion, weightlessness, bright colors, urban settings, fluidity, kaleidoscopic perception, and masquerade.” However, it is theorized that too much kinetic effect, and not enough humanity has prevented superhero films from reaching the historical heights of popularity attained by the Western or musical film genres (2011, 119). Similar to Bukatman’s disapproval of the emergence of the superhero film, cultural theorist, Rachel Wanzo (2009), suggests that in the comic book world, a medium that provides more nuance than film, surveillance, and by extension state control, is something to be fought against. Yet, these films are popular and are being produced at a rampant rate. Communications and culture theorist, Shaun Treat (2009), takes a more positive tone, suggesting that the post 9/11 superhero zeitgeist should be, and has been, embraced. The contemporary audience prefers their superheroes to be “SuperAntiheroes who are flawed, dystopian cyborgs” (2009, 105). The image of the squeaky clean morally virtuous Superman who provides hope has been replaced by frayed edged image of Batman or Rorschach, characters who are morally ambiguous, possibly psychotic, characters.

While superhero films are usually contemporary in their depiction of time, it is not always the case. Notably, *Captain America: First Avenger* (2011) was set nearly entirely in the 1940s, ending with the hero in the present day. Superhero films may also borrow elements of other time periods, as seen in *Batman* from 1989. They are also set in a tangible representation of reality. That is, the settings are generally recognizable, even when the cities where the stories take place do not actually exist. The reason for this could be attributed to its generative and narrative implications, where the superhero is born and operates (Urrichio, 2010). However, no matter the time period or reality the

superhero film is set in or borrowing from, because of their spectacular nature, they are a reflection of the “historical movement in which we are caught” (Debord, 1977; Durham & Kellner, 2012, 108). As such, the spectacle can be a hiding place for seemingly mundane reflections on society; the separation of real life and fantasy may even be the unstated goal (Debord, 1977; Durham & Kellner, 2012).

In summary, superhero films are acknowledged as being spectacular in nature, yet debate rages about how relatable and nuanced they are as story telling vehicles (Wanzo, 2009; Bukatman, 2011). On the other hand, it is also suggested that these films are a reflection of the times in which they were produced (Treat, 2009). The superhero has been defined as having a mission, powers, and a secret identity. The idea of generic distinction provides a tool for a researcher to include or exclude characters that have similar features to the superhero, but do not neatly fit the definition. This was important to this research, as it provided a framework for the inclusion and exclusion of films in the study.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has presented a cross section of literature from the areas of film, surveillance and superheroes along with an intersection of film with the two latter areas. Film theory is a relatively new area of academic study, only fully emerging in the 1970s. At first it was largely a product of psychoanalytic theory, but has expanded to include areas such as feminist theory and post-structuralist theory, which has given film theory a much denser air of legitimacy. Coincidentally, surveillance theory is also a burgeoning area of study for academia. What is becoming clear is that technology is changing the impact of surveillance. Whereas, Foucault’s panopticon addressed a simpler time, the move to post-industrialization is opening up dangerous possibilities if surveillance technologies are not thoughtfully implemented. Such consequences have been foretold on film, but the medium of film must itself be held up to scrutiny for its role in normalizing surveillance practices. Finally, the literature showed that superheroes do have validity as a subject of study. Though problematic as one-dimensional characters on film, superheroes can also act as a mirror that reflects the state of society and what values it holds most dearly.

The following chapter will address the theoretical positions that provide the backbone of this study. First, the chapter will focus on the philosopher and post structural theorist Michel Foucault and his conceptualization of the panopticon. Next, the focus shifts to post modernist sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and his theory of liquidity. Finally, the chapter will introduce, for the first time, a new concept called the *dissolved panopticon*, a synthesis of Foucault's panopticon and Bauman's liquidity.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Juxtapositions

3.1 Introduction

The overall aim of my theoretical selections is to make sense of, and apply meaning to, the use of surveillance techniques and technologies embedded in the superhero film genre. Theoretically, this avenue of research will allow for a comparison between the Foucauldian and Baumanistic positions, ultimately bringing them together in the singular *dissolved panopticon*. Briefly, Michel Foucault's panopticon attempts to explain how a subject comes to control their behavior in the manner that power desires. Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquidity describes how the individual is controlled through objective means, via data, ascribed biometrics, or consumption patterns. The *dissolved panopticon* is a concept I have designed in order to understand how the subject interacts with surveillance technologies derived from panopticism and liquidity. As such, the *dissolved panopticon* consists of three main elements: Liquid Technology, which focuses on data-based technological surveillance; Solid Technology, which focuses on subject-based technological surveillance; and, Non Technology, which focuses on surveillance unaided by technology.

This chapter will break down the relevant theoretical positions that will be used to answer the overall research question, which asks: how have surveillance and surveillance technologies been normalized in 21st century superhero films?

3.2 The Decision About Theory

The following sections will break down the individual components that make up the theoretical position of this thesis. The section will begin with a discussion of Michel Foucault's panopticon. The second section will address Zygmunt Bauman's theory of liquidity, specifically addressing liquid modernity and how it affects society's sense of security. The third section will introduce a new concept, the *dissolved panopticon*, which is a synthesis of the panoptic and liquid theories. Finally, the fourth section will provide a summation of the theories and how they come together in the *dissolved panopticon*.

3.2.1 Foucault's Panopticon

Since Michel Foucault revitalized philosopher Jeremy Bentham's ideal prison design, the panopticon, with such provocative elegance, much attention has been paid to the implications for social control and surveillance. For Foucault, the issue of control is one of power. With the arrival of the panopticon, the shift from punishing the body to punishing the mind was underway. Just as the watchers of the panopticon prison were faceless, even non-existent, giving the model its power, power itself is faceless and detached. There is no one person at the levers of power (Joas & Knobl, 2010). The panopticon itself is metaphorical; a description of a power technique that positions "the subjected human being to ever closer scrutiny" (2010, 359).

Discipline and Punish (Foucault, 1995[1975]) presented a historically based manual for creating discipline in the 19th century. Foucault was aiming at something far more translucent and less stationary than bricks and mortar; his target was power and how it can be used for the purposes of control. While Bentham's panopticon is a visible symbol of control and power at work, Foucault's panopticon, where power seeks to enclose people wherever they may be, regardless of the obstacles that might be in their way (Simon, 2005). Unlike the days of the monarchy, where power was in the hands of a single individual, the point of punishment is not to "destroy the body...[but]... to exercise power over both the mind and body as effectively as possible..." in order for power to increase (Joas & Knobl, 2010, 358). For Foucault, power comes in the form of knowledge; the watcher gaining power by watching, and the subject made powerless knowing that he or she can be in the watcher's gaze at anytime. It is a power that is all encompassing. However, it is separate from any one individual, though it can be utilized by anyone, unlike hereditary or monarchical power. This power is "decentralized, silent, inconspicuous, but all pervasive" (Joas & Knobl, 2010, 358).

At the most basic level, doing what one desires regardless of resistance is the essence of power. However, such a blunt definition dulls the mind, masking the nuance and intricacy in which power can be exercised. Instead, Foucault suggests a soft approach to power; a power that has control over the subject through the mind rather than the body, turning the subject on one's self (Foucault, 1995[1975]). When power has reached a point

where the subject has internalized their powerlessness, the subject becomes a “docile body” (1995[1975], 136). Foucault describes the docile body as one “that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved (1995[1975], 136). However, docility will not set in without a discipline that is, in terms of the panopticon, “a functional mechanism...” that is “lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion...” (1995[1975], 209). Evidence of effective discipline is found in four indicative bodily characteristics. Docility is achieved when the body is *cellular*, *organic*, *generic*, and *combinatory* (1995[1975]). That is to say the design of any tactic that achieves docility requires a particular spatial arrangement (cellular) with a series of coded activities (organic) that occur over time (generic) that, when combined (combinatory), will, at the point of docility, cause the subject to act in the desired manner (1995[1975]).

The characteristics of the docile body are evident when one considers film as a disciplinary tool. For example, applying Foucault’s definitions, when viewing a film an audience member is made organic by the ritual of preparing for watching via choosing what to watch, to drink, to eat, and then sitting to watch a film. The member is made cellular when they are seated in front of a screen which dominates the viewers vision and hearing. Cinemas emphasize these characteristics more than home viewing because of four factors: the act of going to a social environment (the theatre); the larger screen, which overrides the senses more intensely; a darker environment; and the elimination of distractions such as mobile phones, games played simultaneously with watching, and interference from other people, which interrupts the viewing ritual.

The films themselves, replete with the structures of story telling, serve to bring about the organic characteristics of viewers. Repeated viewing of films of a particular genre, or carrying particular messages, whether they be many films or a single film replayed over and over, serve to bring about a generic, or normalized, quality. This means that constant exposure to films of a similar nature, or even the same films, removes the sense of mystery, or the shock value of fresh spectacle, serving to dull the senses of the viewer, leaving them less aware to the nuances. One might say one superhero film is no different than another. On the surface, that may be true; villains do vile things, heroes stop them, but only after going through some difficult, but really never perilous scenario to catch the villain. The planet is always saved and the hero is victorious. Going into the

superhero film with those ideas already pre-established and normalized, potentially leaves the viewer to ignore the methods by which the superhero saved the day.

Finally, docility reaches full bloom through the “composition of forces” (1995[1975], 162). This is the combination of organic, cellular, and generic characteristics coming together in some form. The ritualized viewing of films or a series of films (organic), via a sensory filling medium (cellular), which is often an isolated exercise of interpretation, from a genre telling similar stories over time (generic) all combine to train the viewer to react in an automatic fashion. The question becomes, what message is the viewer reacting to?

However, there is a chorus of voices that suggest the time has come to move past a Foucauldian dominated perspective as this perspective is not able to explain the effects of data-driven surveillance (Mathiesen, 1997; Bauman, 2012 [2000]; Lyons (2002); Lianos, 2003). One reason is that Foucault could not have foreseen the astonishing developments in technology (Lianos, 2003; Graham & Wood, 2003). The dawn of cellular phones and the internet have done much to alter the speed and space of everyday life. Another perspective suggests that the developments in surveillance and control via the use of data constitutes a super-panopticon, where physicality is replaced by something much less subjective (Poster, 1990). Sociologist Thomas Mathiesen (1997) argues that the panopticon itself is redundant, surveillance having moved from the few watching the many to the many watching the few, in other words a synopticon. Theorist Michalis Lianos (2003) points out that Foucault’s theory was developed looking back at a past that was industrial, unlike today’s post-industrial reality. While Foucault argues for the human being as subject in matters of control, constrained as the subject is, Lianos suggests that in the post industrial period, control operates through an institutional framework (2003). He states:

...this angle links the emergence of institutional normativity to overarching social change. Thus, it is not control that becomes dissocialized, but sociality which institutionalizes itself; it is not surveillance which intensifies and spreads, but the demand for systems and networks which propagates itself and favours the fluid – albeit atomised – channeling of individuals; it is not liberty that is in decline but its content that shifts towards access and use of systems;... (Lianos, 2003, 425)

Finally, Zygmunt Bauman, (2001) argues that control is exercised through the seduction of the individual rather than the repression of the subject. These arguments have helped

push the discussion from a position based on fixed surveillance to a position where surveillance is much more liquid.

In summary, Foucault's interpretation of the panopticon is not a literal reading. It is a conceptual understanding of control and power, where control is of the mind rather than of the body. It requires a discipline that is a subtle form of coercion. In order to achieve this, the panopticon can not be static; it must be spread out and mobile in order to achieve the goal of docility in the subject. However, many theorists argue that the panopticon is not a suitable metaphor for the post-industrial period. Their argument is based on the complexity of technology, which is a synoptic rather than panoptic reality that features a seductive, rather than repressive, approach to control.

3.2.2 Bauman's Liquidity

As stated in the previous section, Zygmunt Bauman offers a different perspective on social control and society at large. The focus is not on mobility, the keystone of post-structuralism, but fluidity. It is one thing to have closed circuit television cameras seeing anybody entering a space, it is entirely another when data can track that individual's movements entirely. For Bauman, society has shifted from one that is based on industrialized production - heavy modernity - to a society based on consumption - light modernity. Heavy modernity, also called solid modernity, is a form of modernity that *produces* goods. It is inhabited by citizens that build nation states and that values space because so much time is required to get from one place to the next. Light modernity, also called liquid modernity, is a modernity that consumes goods and lifestyles, promotes individuality, and requires little time and, therefore, values space much less (Bauman, 2012[2000]). Going forward, these modernities will be referred to as solid modernity and liquid modernity.

In order to attain a clearer understanding of solid modernity and liquid modernity, one must examine them as opposite ends of a spectrum. Solid modernity is "heavy/solid/condensed/systematic", light modernity is "light, fluid, diffuse, and network-like" (Bauman, 2012[2000], 25). This has an impact on the relationship between time and space. In solid modernity, much time was required to cover space, which in turn

gave the space more value. In liquid modernity, space can be reached in substantially less time, stripping space of value by making it less desirable to visit, particularly if it can be visited at any time, and less necessary to secure and manage. For Bauman, in order to achieve great power, it is speed, not size, that is the main determinant. As he states, “(p)eople who move and act faster, who come closest to the momentariness of movement, are now the people who rule” (2012[2000], 119). Liquid modernity allows for “disengagement, elusiveness” marked by “facile escape and hopeless chase” (2012[2000], 120). Where once satisfaction was attained through communal gatherings and public interaction, now it is pursued through shopping. However, the chase for consumer goods has not eased the anxiety that prompted the desire for escape in the first place. Excessive purchasing of expensive goods, everything from houses and cars, to tech gadgets to specialty coffees (never mind the myriad cheap or throw-away products overflowing store shelves) has led to enormous levels of debt within average households with the pay off of satisfaction that lasts for a moment, if it is attained at all. The never-ending loop of desire-acquisition-dissatisfaction-desire illustrates how facile and hopeless endless consumerism is.

According to Bauman, while solid modernity was grounded in the industrial based economy of the past, liquid modernity is rooted in the knowledge economy of the present. Solid modernity can be understood as heavy capitalism. Based on the production of goods, heavy capitalism is marked by the co-dependence of capital and labour epitomized in the Henry Ford model of assembly line manufacturing, where the workers were compensated at a rate that gave them purchasing power and a reason to remain in one career or place of employment. Compared to solid modernity, the light capitalism of liquid modernity is capable of flight from one place to another, forcing labour into a state of flexibility and uncertainty -“(h)aving shed the ballast of bulky machinery and massive factory crews, capital travels light with no more than cabin luggage...” (2012[2000], 150). Workers used to be able to have one career, now they must constantly change their skill set for jobs that may only exist for a short period of time. The state is at the mercy of capital and in constant competition with other states, the threat of sunk costs, buildings built by companies for instance, being the cost of doing business. When the state does not, or can not act in accordance with the desire of capital, capital will look to where it

can find maximum profit, leaving the consequences of its departure at the feet of the state.

Liquid modernity is the private's colonization of all things public. Where once the collective was the center of society, now the individual has taken its place. Where communities were once bound by an enduring common cause, now they come together and dissipate around the spectacle (2012[2000]). For Bauman, this has come about because of society's shift in focus; instead of a stable, enduring, and long-term focus, to a shorter term focus that is much less certain, secure, and safe (2012(2000)).

The ramifications of instability have profound effects on the social fabric. Uncertainty and an overall sense of risk is a driver behind the increase in societal mobility. At the level of the individual, risk can be understood as the conflict that arises around the construction and maintenance of a particular position or role within society (Beck, 1992[1986]; Joas & Knobl, 2010). A whole society at risk, one that is global in nature, transcending national borders, compounds conflict. Such a conflicted society relies heavily on so-called professional and expert knowledge, and is overly reactionary legislatively, sacrificing rights and freedoms for coping mechanisms (Zuriek, 2004). The 21st century has seen, thus far, an explosion of coping mechanisms for threats both real and over-hyped.

Surveillance theorists, David Lyon (2001), and Roy Boyne (2000) turn to Bauman and liquid modernity as the path to understanding contemporary surveillance and control. In the surveillance terms, Lyon highlights Boyne's position, suggesting that the panopticon is being replaced:

(T)he physical apparatus has been rendered redundant by its own success, previsualization by simulation is transcending the present panoptic gaze, many now watch the few (synopticon) as much as the few watch the many, panoptical regimes are self-defeating, and seduction is replacing panoptical surveillance (Lyon, 2001, 175).

Instead of Foucault's totalizing vision of power, based on solid, fractured structures, Bauman's vision is much more liquescent. Power does not merely move from one place to another (Giddens, 1987), it flows like an ocean. Surveillance must then be a "liquid surveillance" (Lyon, 2010, 325). This concept views surveillance as the "reduction of the body to data and the creation of data-doubles on which life-chances and choices hang more significantly than on our real lives and the stories we tell about them" (2010, 325).

The panopticon is the starting point of control, but for Bauman, what it really symbolizes is the dualism of freedom and unfreedom, the thin line between the controlled and the controllers (2010). The key is consumer seduction, where the consumer is non-threatening due to the increased perception of material needs, rather than ratcheting down on a society via oppressive norms (Lyon, 2010; Bauman, 1987). As ubiquitous as George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is in discussions about control and surveillance, it is a cultural product born out of solid modernity. Bauman turns the idea of Big Brother on its head to point out the difference in social control when engaged in liquid modernity: "(t)oday's Big Brother is not about keeping people in and making them stick to the line, but about kicking people out and making sure that when they are kicked out that they will duly go and won't come back" (Bauman 2006, 25). Those who do not or can not meet the standard participation in the market are controlled much more rigorously, via ghettoization and prison, which Bauman predicts will only grow in number due to the side effect of negative globalization and mass-unemployment; paradoxically, as these prisons increase, the desire to keep those deemed useless to the economy out of certain spaces will also increase (Daems & Robert, 2007). Institutional control, using data collection, may separate subjectivity from the person being surveilled. However, everyone is under a watchful eye and will either be a beneficent or victim of social sorting (Lyon, 2002). Just who will benefit is not set in stone.

Because fear is so prevalent, even in liquid modernity the panopticon cannot be completely ignored (Lyons, 2001). Even though Bauman sees surveillance as something now largely beyond the subject, if not the individual entirely, he states that "(t)he most technologically equipped generation in human history is the generation most haunted by feelings of insecurity and helplessness" (Daems & Robert, 2007, 96). Like in solid modernity, power in and of itself is still invisible and unasccribed to any one person or group. It can be harnessed and directed. Critical theorist C. Wright Mills' (1956) examination of post war America included an analysis of how the power elite behind the government, military and corporate institutions of the day had come to dominate over the family, educational, and religious institutions. Mills showed how unstable individual institutions can be; they gain and lose prominence in relation to other institutions depending on the dominant hegemony of the day. Change has occurred in the past and is

certainly possible in the future. In liquid modernity, the panopticon is limited to that section of society that can not be seduced; panoptic control is the “sharp end” of social control (Lyons & Bauman, 2013, 54). The enduring question is, whose interests are being served?

In the end, liquid modernity comes to serve those very few powerbrokers that reside behind the fences and walls of exclusive gated communities. The perfect flow of liquidity is to have an individual fully exposed, their digital DNA fully sequenced so that they can be endlessly seduced with consumer goods, with marketing tailored to their very specific individual desires. These flows of information and marketing and goods are constantly in motion, keeping the individual forever off-balance, as the market provides an endless feed of goods and services fit for pleasurable, at least in the short term, consumption.

In a time where the individual is in a constant state of flux, forever searching for ways to improve the self, the superhero is the do-it-yourself ideal. Whether through enhancements to the body or to the financial portfolio, superheroes represent the end game of liquid modernity. They are physically fit, mentally strong, and in the cases of superheroes whose super power is wealth combined with a command of enhanced technology, such as Batman or Iron Man, extremely capable, intelligent, and resourceful. Yet even the superhero is not immune to uncertainty and fear. The question becomes, if the superhero is the personification of the idealistic character, that of strong, righteous crusaders, what role do they play within society? Dramaturgically speaking, these characters are playing at the specific roles of watchers in the front stage, while in the backstage they either live as ordinary individuals, foils to the front stage superhero, or remain isolated in their fortresses of solitude (Goffman, 1959). Yet these characters are not real, they are imagined. They are merely manifestations of society’s desire for security in uncertain times. In reality, governments and police forces are corruptible, but in fantasy, superheroes take the position of being incorruptible, even when the superhero’s driving force is questionable (for example in the films Hancock and Hulk) and methods questionable (in the films Batman and Punisher). They exist in comic books, cartoons, and film. Live action films, specifically, provide a literal frame for the characters to act out their roles in a setting, predominately urban in nature, that is familiar

to the audience. A vehicle for escapism aside, what role could superheroes who live on screen play? In a society in a state of liquidity, where the market is omniscient and seductive, where individuals either move within the flow or are ghettoized and demonized, the superhero is Bauman's gardener of the garden culture, rather than a pre-modern gamekeeper (Lyon, 2010). Through their mythologies, superheroes can set a righteous mood. They can make natural the methods that are required to bring down an existential evil, villains who would destroy civil society if not all of humanity. Just as the gardener sees the weed that threatens to destroy the carefully tended flowerbed as evil, the superhero sees the villain who is bent on the destruction of the western way of life-its conception of liberties as much as its materialism- as the evil that threatens the fragile stability of society. Neither weed nor villain can be allowed to remain and so must be eliminated. Furthermore, future villainy would preferably be prevented, and so, the superhero also seeks to normalize techniques of control. In the context of the imagination, there is little difference between a fictional supervillain storming the streets of Gotham City on the screen and a very real terrorist executing a plan of attack in Paris.

To summarize, Bauman suggests that modernity has moved from a solid state to a liquid state. The foundations of solid modernity, collectivity, production, enforcement, have shifted to individuality, consumerism, temptation and seduction (Bauman & Lyons, 2013). In conjunction, speed has usurped size as the most important characteristic of modernity affecting a wide swath of how society operates. For a traditionally static panopticon, this suggests that it, too, must evolve into something more mobile, yet less obviously repressive; the panopticon must dissolve.

3.2.3 The Dissolved Panopticon

The dissolved panopticon is a synthesis of panoptic and liquid surveillance. The Foucauldian conception of panoptic surveillance is built on solid structural foundations that oppress. Notably, the digitization of surveillance has been referred to as a super panopticon, which has the effect of placing binoculars with enhanced peripheral vision on the panoptic eye (Poster, 1990; Graham & Wood, 2003). Sociologist, David Lyon (2001) applies liquidity to surveillance technology, noting that increased mobility by individuals

has been facilitated by leaps in technology, and surveillance technology has kept up. In keeping with Bauman's theoretical positing, liquid surveillance does not require oppression, but rather grants permission. Liquidity is a consumer-based method of seduction that atomizes the individual into bytes of information. As technology has advanced and proliferated, the use of data has become a massively important component for compiling information for both the state and commerce. In Baumanistic terms, the *dissolved panopticon* suggests the heaviness of the modern Foucauldian panopticon infused with the lightness, or effusiveness of liquidity. It is hardware's presence (along with the discipline of practice) combined with software's instantaneity.

Of course, it must be stated that not all surveillance is bad or ill-intended. Lianos (2003) and Lyon (2010) offer a fresh perspective by asking if surveillance *has* to be seen in a negative light, which Foucauldian analysis tends to suggest it is. Whether positive or negative, the dominance of data collection has seeped into nearly every corner of life. Following theorist Georg Simmel (2004), what is done with the data determines its value and the judgment of the consequences from its use.

A challenge lies in moving beyond the binary positions of solidity and liquidity. Surveillance must not be understood in the extremes. Even though contemporary surveillance is more instrumentally based and market-driven, less panoptical or Big Brother-based, the disconnection of the subject from surveillance and control can not be accepted outright. As sociologist Bart Simon (2005) points out, if one were to be divided up into bits of data, it becomes possible to conjure an individual out of the various data points; a subject does not have to exist to bring an individual to life digitally speaking. Rather than going down the road of digital incarnation, Simon suggests looking to Marxist theorist, Louis Althusser (1971). Althusser's concept of interpellation suggests that in order for communication to work, the subject must be able to recognize that he/she is the intended recipient of the communicated message. Therefore, in order for surveillance of any kind to be effective, the subject must still be signaled and then recognize the signifier's act of signalling, whether for the market or for security. As such, Simon (2005) suggests the subject must be in the foreground of any discussion about surveillance. If one is to include the subject in the discussion, then Foucault's panoptic theory is still relevant.

The *dissolved panopticon* is a concept that returns the subject to liquid surveillance. The concept was designed from the perspective that the panoptic eye is no longer locked into any one given position; rather, the eye can be in many locations at once, while the singular operator has given way to multiple operators who may work concurrently. The *dissolved panopticon* is simultaneously a panoptic and synoptic surveillance where the few watching the many is just as likely as the many watching the few (Mathiesen, 1997). It features three categories of technology: a liquid technology, a solid technology, and a non-technological category. Liquid technology is the type of technology that creates data points, such as telecommunications, new media, and biometrics technologies. Being the newest type of technology, it requires the deepest explanation, which will be done using two examples: the smartphone and biometric face recognition technology.

First, Liquid Technology is best exemplified as the smartphone. In addition to being a telephone, the smartphone incorporates the tools of Solid Technology, including both audio and video recording capabilities and conventional digital cameras. These are tools that might be used by institutional operators, like the police or the news media. Yet phones today are not just mobile, they are fluid. For instance, they provide instant access to the internet, a mainly unstructured new media that promotes user-generated content through various blogs and websites like YouTube. This, in turn, allows the owner to become a panoptic operator. Proponents of the synoptic counter argument might see this as an example of the many watching the few, especially when a singular event draws a crowd of smartphone-wielding onlookers. Yet, because anybody is capable of becoming the ‘few’ at any time, smartphones allow the many to watch the many. At the same time, smartphones, loaded with convenient applications like maps, social media, and shopping options amongst others, are not immune to panoptic surveillance because they send signals and data that leave a trail of an individuals’ activities and movements.

A second example of Liquid Technology is biometric face-recognition technology. Facial recognition software takes the data points that make up the map of a face and applies those points when the face is scanned again in the future. This is how Facebook is able to suggest name tagging for friends in members’ photos automatically (Singer, 2014). It is a technology that acts as a panopticon because it does not have to be

visible, which asserts pressure on the subject to internalize control of the self. It is simultaneously light in presence, fast in information transfer, and digitally based. The inventor of the facial recognition technology, Dr. Joseph Atick, has come to understand and express grave concerns about the potential for abuse by governments and corporations, including Google and Facebook (2014). For the individual, it is a push-pull scenario; the push for greater convenience, which the technology provides, versus the pull of increased data collection, which has the potential to lead to restriction, exclusion, and sorting.

The second component of the *dissolved panopticon* is Solid Technology. This is the type of technology that still requires a subject, unlike Liquid Technology, which makes the subject optional. Solid Technology more closely adheres to the traditional Foucauldian panopticon where power is mobile, and open to anyone to possess. More specifically, examples of the Solid Technology include closed circuit television, recorded video/audio (such as a tape recording, or a recording using a video camera), old media (news media, etc...), and institutional based surveillance in the form of bureaucratic regulations and laws (i.e., the passport as a legal document, and the prison as an exercise of law).

The third component of the *dissolved* panopticon is Non Technology. This is the type of surveillance that requires no technological enhancements. It is an action based type of surveillance where the observer must be in the same space as the observed. This includes instances of unseen watching, where the observed does not know they are being watched, instances where the observer is actively engaging with the observed without making any intentions known, and those theoretical instances of telepathic surveillance where the observer can tap into the thoughts of the observed. For example, the X Men character, Professor X, is capable of locating the position of, and reading the thoughts of any fellow mutant in his presence, including those of his team of X Men.

3.2.4 Theory Summary

To summarize, Foucauldian panoptic theory is based on the long slow creep of control, while Baumanian theory is sudden dissolution, a rupture in history (Bauman,

1989). An evolution of the panopticon that suggests an adaptation that is synoptic in nature (at least, the many watching the many) makes the original panopticon much less static; it loses the stability of structure and becomes more liquid. Following Simon (2005), the sorting, categorizing, and indexing of the subject into points of data can be seen as the panopticon dissolved. The categories of the *dissolved panopticon* are Liquid Technology, Solid Technology, and Non Technology.

3.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the theoretical components that will allow me to address the research goals of this thesis were presented. Foucault's panopticon concept and Bauman's liquidity are key concepts in surveillance studies and they form the exploration of the surveillance themes within superhero films. The *dissolved panopticon* concept will drive the research; it is a synthesis of Foucault's and Bauman's theoretical positions. Furthermore, the *dissolved panopticon* will be used to operationalize the types and technologies of surveillance. What this will do is break down surveillance into three categorical types - Liquid Technology, Solid Technology, and Non Technology - based on the technology at play. Finally, the theoretical backdrop may provide the groundwork for deeper explorations of surveillance in other film genres.

The following chapter will delve into the methodology of the study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Four will explain the methodology employed for this research. The chapter begins with a discussion on the content analysis method, followed by an overview of the methodologies used in past film content analysis studies. It continues with a discussion about the methodology for this study, beginning with an explanation of the criteria that was used to select the films and the timeframe, then delves into how the data was gathered. Finally, the chapter concludes with a section on how the data was organized for analysis.

4.2 Establishing the methodology

When engaging in social research, two considerations must be made: what is the ontology and what is the epistemology? Sociologist, Jennifer Mason (2002), suggests beginning with identifying what social reality is going to be studied. She acknowledges the difficulties in attempting to conceptualize a different understanding of the nature of a given phenomenon beyond the basic understanding of the components of the “social world” (2002, 14). For instance, when identifying what exactly this study was to entail, it became important to conceptualize superhero films as something deeper than superficial blockbuster popcorn spectacles. There was something more that could be said about the reality they created and reflected back to the audience.

Once the ontological direction has been settled upon, the next challenge is to establish an epistemological approach. Mason asks the researcher: “what might represent knowledge or evidence of the entities or social ‘reality’ that I wish to investigate?” (2002, 16). She suggests a variety of ideas exist that deal with the notion of evidence. It can be categorical, at times too much so, implying self-evident proof of a widely known reality. Or, it can be found in the perspective or argument, which is less rigorous, but also less

self-aggrandizing (2002). For instance, visual data is thought amongst many researchers to speak for itself, while others feel it is in fact the viewer that gives the data its sociological meaning (Emmison, 2004). So, while this study is looking at the visual data - the instances of the surveillance that happen as the evidence to be quantified - it could also have examined the reality of the viewer and the meaning they give it. Media theorist Klaus Bruhn Jensen (2012) states that when it comes to media studies, in particular, there have been several conceptions of “evidence, inference, and interpretation” that have been folded into it, by the virtue of its intersectionality at the point where art and science meet (2012, 283). He points to a growing tendency towards viewing evidence in a complimentary fashion, not so much at the stage of minimal measurements, but at the end of “concluding a process of inquiry, in a context, and for a purpose” (2012: 284). As such, it becomes more useful to apply a fluid perception to the evidence on hand. However, drawing on Mason’s (2002) distinction between categorical and perceptive/argumentative evidence, pictures alone do not necessarily provide meaning (Emmison, 2004). That is not to suggest that, for example, film theorist, David Bordwell’s approach of straight categorization is without use. More than one epistemology can emerge, which may not fit so easily with one type of methodology (Mason, 2002). In media studies, there is often conflict between subject and object and what intentions are filtered through what “social structures and cultural practices” (Jensen, 2012, 286). What remains paramount is that the answers generated from an epistemological perspective lead to the answer of the ontological question (Mason, 2002).

In surveillance studies, the epistemological choice is to either categorize or perceive/argue. Categorization can be thought of as strict technocratic methodology. The perception/argumentative approach is found in political discourse. Discourse often frames surveillance as a prescription for the reduction of crime and, on a wider scale, of risk. However, the discourse does not always match the results, as evidenced by a report on the effectiveness of video surveillance in several Ontario cities (Lett, Heir, & Walby, 2012). Surveillance theorist Kevin Haggerty (2009) calls the rhetoric surrounding surveillance research a knife fight without rules. He argues that powerfully influential parties with special interests have swayed methodology to a heavy emphasis towards quantifiable research practices at the expense of ethical considerations. The result is an

argument about the means of surveillance research rather than the ends it achieves. Specifically, studies that generate great public discourse, such as surveys that examine privacy and surveillance, can be challenged by what methodological information is left aside as much as the results themselves (Haggerty & Gazo, 2005). Furthermore, theorist Kevin Walby (2005) argues for more research that employs non-numeric methods, such as the institutional ethnography method, when studying surveillance. He argues that qualitative methods peel back the curtain on the power that managerial and professional institutions possess and how they use it to sway discussions that impact how much surveillance should be installed.

In summary, this section has addressed methodology from an ontological general perspective. The process of engaging in research begins with identifying a particular ontological question, what is it in society that the researcher wants to study? After that, the focus shifts to the epistemological level, how is the evidence to be identified. Mason (2002) suggests that evidence gathering is often either categorical or perspective/argumentative. Theorist Michael Emmison (2004) states that while data is often taken as is, the meaning of it is determined by the interpretation of the ones who engage with it. Jensen (2012) argues that the debate comes down to dichotomy of subject versus object. He also suggests that categorical and perspective approaches to evidence can co-exist, giving the research a richer purpose. Surveillance studies are a prime example of the struggle between empiricism and hermeneutic approaches to evidence gathering and interpretation. All of this is relevant to my study because it reveals how a dual approach to methodology can provide a richer vein of evidence to prove the *dissolved panopticon* is a meaningful concept and to answer the overarching research question of surveillance normalization. The following sections will focus the discussion of methodology from a generalized level to how it applies specifically to this project.

4.3 Content analysis method

The method used to complete this project is a *content analysis*. More specifically, I use a manifest content analysis, a mixed approach that examines both qualitative and quantitative data (Jensen, 2012). Over the course of the last two decades, content analysis

has become much more sophisticated, bringing qualitative and quantitative approaches together, as researchers began to apply it to a variety of areas of study beyond the social sciences, including health research and communications studies (Hseih & Shannon, 2005; Creswell, 2013). Content analysis can now utilize quantitative counts just as much as qualitative contextual analysis, making it a mixed method. A mixed method demands a rigorous level of data collecting from both perspectives, connected together as support for each side results (Creswell, 2013).

The approach used in this study was to initially count the frequencies of surveillance technology phenomena in order to meet the basic standard of manifest content analysis. Also known as the summative content analysis approach (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999; Hseih & Shannon, 2005), it became an important method when it became clear that contextualizing the observations within the films would add further depth to the understanding of what was being observed. Sociologists Hsiu-Fang Hseih and Sarah Shannon (2005) used the specific example of books and other textual materials. While printed text was the focus of Hseih's description, the idea can be applied to film; the words are spoken, not read, and there are images included which are essentially another type of textual material. In cases where the quantity of films is extensive, such as the works of film theorists, David Bordwell (1985[2013]), Jessica Allen (1997), or Sarah Projansky (2001), it becomes quite impractical to attempt to mix methods. At 51 films, a manifest method is the most useful, but it does not have to be used exclusively. Adding summative analysis to films, such as *The Dark Knight*, allows the overall analysis to unfold more fully; one does not have to simply say phenomenon A has happened X amount of times over Z number of films. Rather, analysis can include discussion about how phenomenon A is most provocatively manifested in a singular film.

4.4 Limitations of content analysis

Content analysis is a useful method for breaking down and understanding symbols, texts, and images. However, it is not without its limitations. Sociologist Klaus Krippendorff (1989) identified three significant limitations including: scientific decision-making; replicability; and, contributions to social theory.

The first issue regarding the notion of scientific decision-making is the bias of quantitative analysis over qualitative analysis. Krippendorff (1989, 407) states that the desire to find scientific units of analysis “amounts to a commitment to be quantitative...” which “discourages analysis of...literary, historical, or psychological inquires”. This has also been identified as a problem with the mixed method approach (Denzin & Ryan, 2007). The second limitation concerns the ability to replicate the results. There is difficulty in replication of qualitative content because it is difficult to separate the influence of the researcher or the content from fixed codifications, which eliminates analysis that evolves through communications made by individuals and groups. The third limitation Krippendorff identifies is how the content analysis method contributes to the body of knowledge. He suggests a quandary exists where if the categories are derived from the data, they cannot be generalized in any way beyond the data set. On the other hand, if general theory is applied, “findings tend to ignore the symbolic richness and uniqueness of the data” (1989, 407).

The limitations of the content analysis method that Krippendorff identifies ring true for this study. There has been much consideration as to the direction of this study regarding the qualitative and quantitative approach. Even in a mixed method, there is bound to be a leaning in one direction at the expense of the other. For this study, the quantitative approach has won out, as numerical data has provided most of the paint for the picture. However, that is not to say that symbolic data has been ignored. Next, the issue of replicability is a concern. Due to the issue of subjectivity, what I, as the researcher, perceive as an instance of surveillance may not be classified as such by another researcher. This can potentially throw off the results and lead to different conclusions. Finally, the quandary of applicability only applies mildly. Because the categories derived from the data are taken from real world sources, such as telecommunications or CCTV, the data can be applicable to other veins of study. With that stated, the applicability of every single category is not clear, especially those that deal with extrasensory phenomenon. There is a universality that applies to the remaining categories that can not be easily applied to instances of extrasensory surveillance.

4.5 Study of film

A broad quantitative approach to content analysis of film has been achieved with great success on numerous occasions. The first such study dates back to 1935 when Edgar Dale produced *Content of Motion Pictures*. Early film theorist Dorothy Jones (1942) developed the method further by eliminating morality based judgments about what films should or should not be studied, a major critique of Dale's study. The most in-depth study is David Bordwell's (along with, Janet Staiger's, and, Kristen Thompson's) (1985 [2013]) investigation of classic Hollywood films from 1915 to 1960. A quantitative method was employed, applied to each shot, to lay out the stylistic markers that define the various genres of films. A list of nearly 30,000 films was compiled, from which a sample of 841 films were selected. The films were watched by a pair of researchers in a uniform fashion, with extensive field notes taken, tracking the technical methods of film making along with the visuals, such as setting and costume design. Such an exhaustive approach stands as a benchmark for studying films in the classical era. In another large scale study, researchers, Jessica Allen, Sonja Livingstone, and Robert Reiner (1997), following the lead of one of the first to study film, theorist Edgar Dale (1935), studied crime content in films released in Great Britain from 1945 to 1991. In this study, a random sample of films were taken from different time periods and coded by genre. The sampled films were then examined for instances of criminality; no descriptions of the events of the films were given, only the numerical breakdown of different types of crime. The researchers acknowledged that by doing a broad quantitative study, they were sacrificing the ability to provide details about tones or treatments of the films. In these studies, hundreds of films were sampled from periods of time spanning more than 45 years. More recently, film theorist, Sarah Projansky's (2001) study of rape depictions on film from 1903 to 1972 featured an analysis of over 150 films in varying levels of descriptive detail but with no quantitative data provided. The researcher examined rape depiction through the lens of a numerous frames, including women's bodies, and by extension gender, class, race, and nation maintenance. By approaching the topic in this manner, Projansky was able to show how rape narratives are used as vehicles for delving into other social issues.

What this collection of works provides is a variety of options for proceeding with the execution of the data collecting that also allows for innovation in the analysis. That is, a variety of methods attempted in the past can be utilized in whole or in part for this research. The common thread with all of the studies introduced here is that they dealt with a large number of films spanning many decades. Therefore, samples were the best approach to take in order to reach a list that totaled into the hundreds. In comparison, this study is focusing on a narrow time frame and can include a set of films from one genre, as opposed to a sample of films from many genres. In terms of specific analysis, the Allen study illustrated that intriguing and insightful findings can result from a simple cross tabulation statistical method, which is how that study laid out the shifts in genres and the crime content they contained over an extended period of time. The Projansky study provided insight in discussing a topic from a variety of angles while not delving too deeply into any one film. As such, this study will take a varied approach to how deeply any one film from the data set is discussed. For this study, Allen's method of cross tabulation was utilized to analyze the data; variables were established that focused on a specific area of, in the prior study it was crime while surveillance technology is the focus here. Projansky's method is used in part, not as a central method of analysis, but as way to ground the data in the films that were studied.

4.6 Origins of the data set

This section will discuss how the data set was acquired. It will lay out how a number of factors were decided upon. These include: how the films were obtained, the criteria that was used to select the chosen films, the reasons for selecting the films, and logic behind the timeframe.

The films selected for the study are films that are aimed at a large audience. In fact, the vast majority of superhero films are released by Hollywood's major studios, including: Warner Bros., Disney, which owns Marvel Studios, Sony, and 20th Century Fox. These films are tremendously expensive to produce but are also often tremendously profitable, both as a single film and as vehicle for revenue generation directly through purchases and rentals of the film for home use and indirectly through tie-ins, such as

merchandizing. Because the films come with large budgets, studios backed by large conglomerate corporations are the only ones in a position to create these large scale films because of the tremendous pool of resources corporations can provide. The risk for studios lies in the profitability of the films, something not determined until after both the domestic and international markets have been sufficiently reached. In order to study these films ethically, I have purchased them on DVD or Blu Ray disk, renting them through Apple's iTunes service, or streamed them through Netflix. In total, 51 films were gathered for this study.

Table 4.1: Criteria for a film's inclusion in the study

-	Films must be in the superhero genre
-	Films must be live-action
-	Films must have had a wide theatrical release
-	Films must have been released between 2000 and 2013

The list of films from the chosen timeframe that were included in this study is extensive, but not exhaustive. There were a number of characteristics the films had to have in order to be included. First, *the films had to be from the superhero genre*. Each film was subjected to the test of generic distinction. Generic distinction is defined as a mechanism that is used to separate superhero characters from other characters that merely resemble a superhero (Coogan, 2009). *Wanted* (2009) was excluded because the characters only had a super capability, no secret identities or any clear reason to exist beyond the role of assassins. *The Punisher* (2004) was included because the hero dons a superhero identity, albeit at the end of the film, in addition to a mastery of weapons. These examples illustrate the fine line between a character that can be called a superhero and a character that can not be considered as a superhero. The potential for controversy lies in the subjective application of generic distinction; a character that one person may perceive as a superhero another may not based on the interpretation of the existing characteristics.

Second, *the films had to be live action*. While many superhero films are filled with computer generated imagery (CGI), the actors and the setting had to be as real as is possible on film. Animation can resemble reality but is by definition not real. CGI is certainly blurring the line between animation and live action, but it does not yet go far enough to achieve simulacra. *The Incredibles* (2004) is the best example of an animated

film that was excluded. It was a very popular film that passed the generic distinction test, but the animation left the characters to fill the stereotypical masculine/feminine visuals and roles; the male/hero figures were intelligent and over-sized, the female figures were impossibly thin, and the villain was small and brainy (as opposed to big and dimwitted).

Third, *films had to have been released to a wide audience through a large number of screens*. A wide release provides an opportunity for a large audience to view the film. These films also have a more pronounced promotional campaign luring more people to the theatre. A film that is not seen on a mass scale is less likely to impact the wider society. As an example, *Super* (2011) was excluded because it reached just 39 screens compared to *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), which reached more than 4,400 screens (Box Office Mojo, 2013). Finally, *films had to have been originally released between 2000 and 2013*. *The Iron Monkey* (1993) was excluded because it was released in 1993, only reaching North American cinemas in 2001 (Internet Movie Database, 2013).

There are four reasons for selecting the specific window of 2000 to 2013 to study. These reasons include: creating a finite study period; the start of maturity in superhero films; the volume of films produced that are sequels, prequels or reboots of original films; and, the context of history that these films are a product of.

First, a study of this nature can be as temporally open-ended as the researcher is willing to let it be. Therefore, putting a limit on it is imperative to completion. Studies such as Bordwell's (1985[2013]) and Allen's (1997) examined thousands of films from many decades. To acquire such a large data set requires time to procure, view, and complete the study, finances to cover expenses, open access to films, and human capacity to carry out the project. Limitations on any of these factors places limitations on the scale of a study. As I was the only researcher, the scope of this study had to be limited.

Second, the study period began in 2000 with *X Men*, which pushed the genre in a more mature direction after the cartoonish films of the 1990s. The film attempted to address real world issues of equality and human rights using the Holocaust as a backdrop (Baron, 2003). This film set the tone for many of the superhero films that followed in subsequent years.

Third, there has been a tremendous number of superhero films produced since 2000, more than half of all the film in the genre, but not all of them are original stories.

Superhero films are often set up as franchises featuring any number of sequels depending on the plans of the creators and/or audience reception to what has come before. In addition to direct sequels, there have been spin off movies where a character from a franchise gets a stand alone film (*The Wolverine*) and prequels, where the origin story gets its own origin story (*X Men: First Class*, *X Men Origins: Wolverine*, which is both a stand alone film and a prequel). In yet another form of presentation, some superhero characters have been rebooted, where the original stories and sequels are completely ignored, giving way to a new take on the characters and worlds they inhabit. Superman, the Hulk, the Punisher, and Spider-Man were all subjected to a reboot. It is worth noting that *Spider-Man* spawned two sequels in five years before being replaced by *The Amazing Spider-Man* seven years later. What these sequels, prequels, and reboots contribute is a window in how surveillance messages evolved over the course of the series and how they were then adapted for the rebooted versions.

Finally, films are often products of the times in which they were produced. Within the selected time frame, the events of September 11th, 2001 figure prominently. Lyon (2006) suggests it has been the major cause for escalated surveillance and security measures in the United States and beyond. It follows that the films would take on the issues and challenges, in some form, caused by the impact and consequences of such a large singular event and the wars that followed in Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, *Iron Man* uses the latter war as the set up for the creation of the title character.

In summary, the films that were selected for the study were produced by the major movie studios of Hollywood. The films were obtained by a variety of means, including purchasing of hard copies, renting from Apple's iTunes service, and streaming from Netflix. These lengths were taken to ensure ethical use of copyrighted material. The films selected for the study had to meet the criteria for selection: they had to be from the superhero genre, be live action, had to have been widely released in theatres, and had to be released between 2000 and 2013. The reasons for placing a window of time on the study were logistical; the study had to be finite, and resources were limited in terms of time to study the films, resources to procure films, and as the only researcher, the human capacity to study each film accurately. The specific timeframe of 2000 to 2013 was selected because it is the point where the superhero films matured enough to discuss

social issues within the context of the films, the period where the volume of films produced increased dramatically, and were produced against the backdrop of a specific historical context. It was not until the criteria was set that data gathering could begin in earnest.

4.7 Data gathering and preliminary analysis

The first stage of data gathering was to preliminarily examine a series of films to establish if there was enough data to create a proper study. Field notes were taken from 16 films to determine and clarify the variables of the *dissolved panopticon* concept, which seeks to return the subject to an ever expanding data driven method of surveillance. These notes have also been utilized to enhance the chapter dealing with the results of the study and subsequent discussion. After the initial inquiry, a template of the variables and sub variables was then created-see Table 4.2 for the complete list. Over the course of seven weeks, 51 films were scored based on the created variables. In addition, a second round of field notes were taken from all the films in the study, including the 16 films initially assessed. Once gathered, the quantitative data was inputted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The field notes were set aside for later use.

4.8 Data organization and analysis

Data was organized across a series of spreadsheets, with each sheet containing different groupings. First the entire data set was tabulated for each film. Then, averages were determined for the collective set of films based on the major variables of the *dissolved panopticon* - Liquid Technology, Solid Technology, and Non Technology - along with each of their respective sub variables. On the second sheet, the films were separated into two groups, the first group containing 25 films, the second group containing 26 films. Having an odd number of films did result in one benefit; the films divided at the break between the years 2007 and 2008. Overall totals and averages were calculated at the variable and sub variable level for each group. The data was then tallied

collectively by year, eliminating the individual films. This was carried out at the variable and sub-variable level.

Table 4.2: Variables and Sub-variables of *dissolved panopticon*

Liquid Technology	Solid Technology	Non Technology
Satellite	CCTV	Watchtower
Telecommunications	Recorded (audio/visual)	Participant
Biometric	Old Media	Extrasensory w/o technology
Card/Data based	Institutional setting	
New Media		
Extrasensory w/ technology		

After the overall figures were determined, the data was analyzed at the sub variable level. These sub-variables are found in Table 4.2. Once again, the data was tabulated and averages were determined for each of the sub-variables.

4.9 Limitations of the method in this study

Finally, while the study has attempted to be inclusive and up to date, there have been limitations on the basis of medium, subject. These include the selection of movies over comic books, the exclusion of television and theatrical renditions, subjectivity versus objectivity, the lack of female representation, and the matter of conducting research during a period in time where there was a vast evolution of the subject matter, particularly regarding surveillance.

First, there is the issue of selecting movies over comic books. Films were selected for the project because they provide a densely packed narrow source. Comic books tend to be lengthy in their storytelling techniques, setting up characters and situations over the course of many issues. In addition, many comic books are written in the form of a graphic novel. These are as detailed as written novels, including sequences and characters that would not fit into the time constraint of a movie. Like written novels, there have been film adaptations of graphic novels. This study includes two: *V for Vendetta* and *The Watchmen*. Films condense the character and situational set ups, while also forcing the audience to absorb what is happening much quicker than with a comic book or graphic novel, where the reader can linger or revisit certain portions of the story. Films are more easily consumed repeatedly over time because they demand less time than a book.

Second, movies were selected as the visual medium over television or theatre for similar reasons as comic books. Superheroes have emerged on television in recent years, notably *Heroes*, *Arrow*, and *Marvel's Agents of S.H.E.I.L.D.*. Like comic books, television dramatization allows for longer episodic storytelling. Character development can occur over many hours of a television show's season, while film is confined to 2 or 3 hours. As a result, there is a time constraint for the completion of project, which makes utilizing television shows as a source more difficult. Meanwhile, theatre is an unstable source, with only one superhero play on stage, *Spider Man: Turn Off the Dark*, which closed on Broadway while data was being collected for this study.

A third limitation has to do with the subjectivity of the viewer. I, as a researcher will bring my own biases to the viewing, which will have an affect on the interpretation of the films. As a result, there is a possibility that my subjectivity will have affected the qualitative analysis.

The fourth limitation is the inequality of gender representation. It is very clear that there is a lack of first order female representation within the superhero genre. Characters such as Elektra, Catwoman, and G-Girl are the stars of the films they are in. However, the remainder of female superheroes, including villains, are either part of a larger male-dominated team (for example, Storm, Rogue, and Mystique in the *X Men* franchise, Black Widow in *The Avengers*, Sue Storm in *Fantastic Four*, and Silk Spectre II in *Watchmen*) or are secondary characters (such as Mary in *Hancock*, Elektra, who was in *Daredevil* before getting a stand-alone film, and a different Catwoman in *The Dark Knight Rises*). Therefore, because of the dearth of samples to work from, it is not possible to get a definitive understanding of female interaction with surveillance technology that is unencumbered by a dominate male presence.

Finally, throughout the process of research and writing, there has been an evolution in the nature of surveillance at the state and corporate level. This is an important limitation because it has changed the scope of what the state is actually capable of rather than just theoretically capable of. The whistle has been blown by Edward Snowden and Bradley Manning revealing the nature of the surveillance program conducted by the National Security Agency in the United States, the level of access to data given by Google, and Facebook amongst others through the PRISM program, and

the level of co-operation with the GCHQ in United Kingdom, along with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand through the Five Eyes program. Incorporating information about the breadth and scope of data gathered from an unsuspecting public, then shared with foreign nations, while the revelations spill out in real time has been a challenge.

4.10 Chapter Summary

To summarize, this chapter has been dedicated to laying out the methodology of the study. The chosen method for this study is the manifest content analysis, also referred to in the literature as summative content analysis (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). While manifest content analysis has been determined to be the best method for the project, limitations have been recognized. These include a bias towards scientific findings, the bias towards quantitative units of analysis over qualitative data; the replicability of results, due to the difficulty of researcher/content objectivity; and the contribution to social theory, whereby the results are limited by theory, or can not say more beyond the data of the study. Reviewed literature revealed research into the content of films goes back to the 1930s; the most well known study being David Bordwell's genre-crossing examination, which covered a broad timeframe.

This chapter also delved into how the study was established. Films were purchased, rented, or streamed from licensed distributors. The films that were selected for the study had to meet the following criteria: they had to be superhero films, meeting a specific definition (Coogan, 2009); they had to be live-action; the films had to have a wide theatrical release; and they had to be released between 2000 and 2013. Data was gathered in two stages: first, field notes were taken of a small sample of the films to determine the suitability of the topic; then, each of the films was viewed and quantitative data based on the categories of the *dissolved panopticon* concept, with field notes taken augment the data gathered. The data was then totaled, averaged, and cross-tabulated for analysis based on years of release, a bi-section of years, and by groupings based on characters (either in a group of sequels, prequels, and reboots, or as a collection of singular films). Frequencies were also determined the rate at which surveillance was put on screen.

Finally, the chapter also included a section on the limitations of the study. The first and second limitations were tied together. They spoke to the narrowness of superhero films compared to the longer form media, such as television, theatre, and comic books. The third limitation is one that is common to content analysis based studies, that of objectivity of the viewer. The last limitation involved the problem of writing while events were unfolding simultaneously. This presented issues regarding the ability to reflect on how events could influence the study and the consistency of the writing.

Chapter 5 Findings Part 1

“And here...we...go.” – Joker (*The Dark Knight*)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings that relate directly to the *dissolved panopticon*. The results will be broken down into a number of sections. The first section will lay out how many films were released per year across the study period. The second section will contain the overall results from the superhero films. These show how the films were spaced out throughout the time period of the study, along with the overall results of surveillance instances. The third section will delve into the individual variables of the *dissolved panopticon*. Within this section, the variables are divided into sub sections, one each for Liquid Technology, Solid Technology, and Non Technology. The results will show surveillance in superhero films as more technologically based at the end of the study period than the beginning. They will also reveal what type of technologies are most prominently presented in superhero films.

5.2 Film Distribution

How does Spider-Man always seem to know where crime is taking place? In 2002, he (played by Tobey Maguire) walked down the street as Peter Parker, or scaled the roof tops looking for trouble, or crimes merely came to him. In 2004, Spider Man introduced photography and the oldest form of media to his crime-fighting, the newspaper. It was the villain, Dr. Octopus (played by Alfred Molina), who pushed the boundaries of surveillance, with cameras built in to his four mechanical tentacles and wired to his brain which gave him unparalleled vision and security of his person. In 2007, Spider Man introduced radio scanners to help him surveill New York City. Still, he just mostly stumbled upon criminality. However, the media evolved with the increasing reliance on the internet. The introduction of television as a scene setter heightened the sense of danger for the characters in the film and the audience watching it. It also gave Spider Man a new outlet for information. Meanwhile, the media became the source of an enemy as a rival photographer, who would become monstrous villain Venom (played by

Topher Grace), also began to surveill Spider Man. The hunter was now the game. In 2012, Spider Man (played by Andrew Garfield) had caught up to the realities of 21st century superheroism. He still scaled buildings and happened upon criminality, but he was much more technologically inclined. He used mobile phones, conducted research using the internet, and played to a media that was not so hero-friendly. Though slow to uptake, technological surveillance did emerge and overtake Spider Man in the early part of the 21st century, just as it did to the whole superhero genre.

This report begins with an outline of the number of films that were released in each year. Doing so will provide some context for the information coming forth in this chapter. Table 5.1 displays the prominence of the films that data was extracted from in the years which this study covers. The table provides a backdrop for the graphical data that will appear in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Table 5.1: Number of films released

Number of films	Year of release
7	2008
5	2004-2006, 2011-2013
3	2003, 2007
2	2000, 2002, 2009, 2010
0	2001

As displayed in Table 5.1, a total of 51 films were released between 2000 and 2013. The range of films released in any given year was 0 to 7; the former occurred once in 2001, while the latter also occurred only once, in 2008. The most common total of films released in a given year is five, occurring six times- from 2004 to 2006, and 2011 to 2013.

5.3 Total and mean instances of surveillance

Overall, a total of 2,218 instances of surveillance were recorded with a mean average of 170.6 instances per year. The range of instances per year was 244, with a high of 321 instances recorded in 2012 and a low of 71 instances recorded in 2002. Figure 5.1 provides an illustration of the total instances of surveillance by year. It shows the general upward trend of surveillance in superhero films over the years, which I suggest this

reflects the increase in governmental use of surveillance technology in world caught up in the so-called War on Terror.

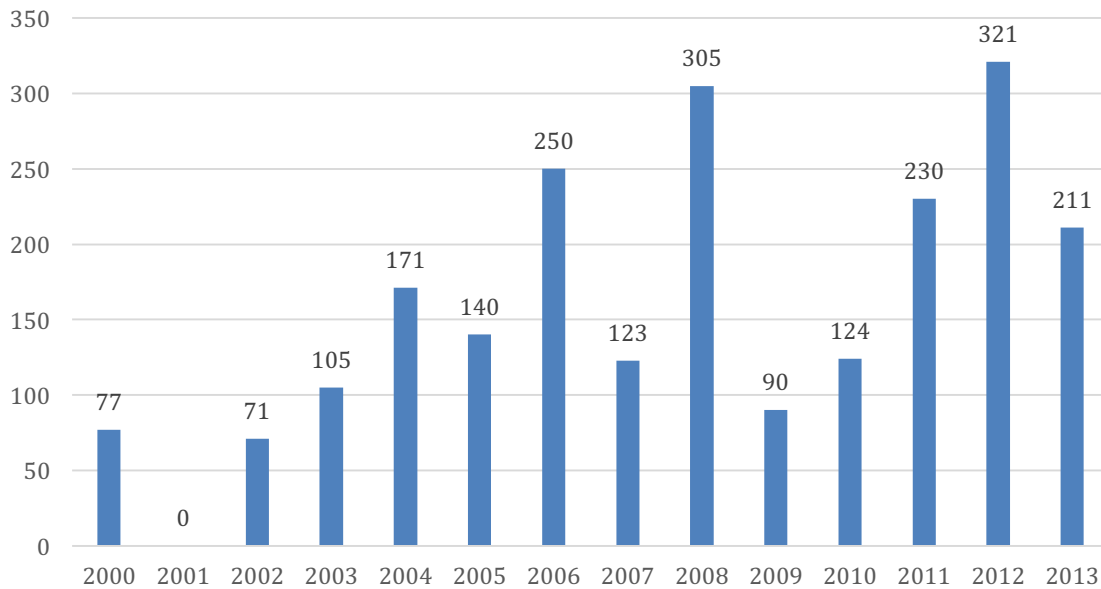


Figure 5.1: Total surveillance instances by year

Overall, the pattern of instances moves in waves. Total instances drop from 2000 to 2002, then begins to trend upward. What follows is a series of drops and increases, each drop falling less and less. The exception is in 2009, where the combination of a smaller number of film releases (two) coupled with the years the films were set in (set in the 1970s and 1980s) combined to lower the level of surveillance technology on display negatively affecting the overall amount of surveillance that year. In addition to 2009, only two films were released in the years 2000, 2002, and 2010, which partly explains the drops in the totals from those years.

Figure 5.2 shows how the mean number of instances tempers the effect the number of films released has on the total instances of surveillance. Its relevance to the study lies in the support it provides to the claim that the *dissolved panopticon* exists and the trend is one of overall expansion in surveillance in superhero films.

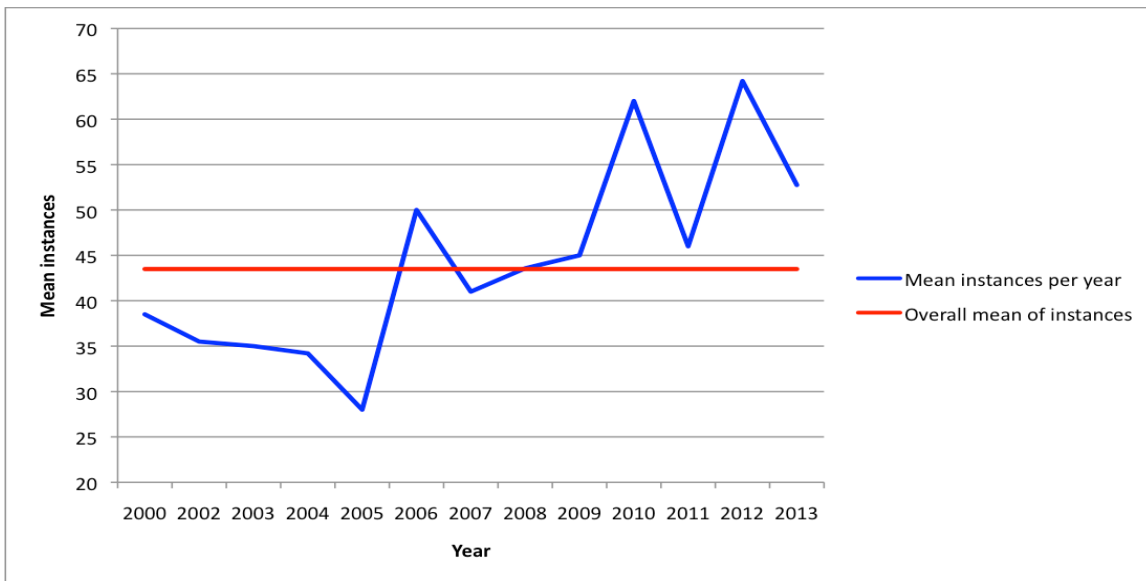


Figure 5.2: Mean instances per year

The mean average for the whole study was 43.57 instances per film. Figure 5.2 shows that a wave does occur in the means for each of the years, but the pattern differs from the overall number of instances. The most significant point is that after 2007, the mean does not fall below the study’s overall mean. In contrast, the overall number of instances in Figure 5.1 is more volatile from 2007 onward. This indicates that even though there may have been fewer instances overall, the average per film increased, contributing to the normalization of surveillance through increasingly frequent exposure within a given film.

Regarding the individual films, much of what can said about them will be presented in the following sections. On a per-film basis, there was a range of 90 between the highest and lowest totals of surveillance instances in the collection of films. The highest total of instances was found in the Batman film *The Dark Knight* (2008), at 100 instances over the course of the film’s 153 minute run time (including credits). On the low side of the range, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009), the origin story of the titular *X-Men* character had just 10 recorded instances. Table 1 of the Appendix shows the distribution of the remaining films.

In summary, this section has shown that there has been an escalation in the total number of surveillance instances in superhero films. Figure 5.1 indicates a general upward trend in the total number of instances per year. Figure 5.2 reinforces the result, by showing the average number of instances per year is also on the rise.

5.3.1 The dissolved panopticon in superhero films

The dissolved panopticon contains three categories: Liquid Technology, Solid Technology, and Non Technology. It provides a synthesis of the panopticon and liquidity, placing technological and non technological surveillance techniques under a one umbrella concept.

Table 5.2 breaks down the *dissolved panopticon* by its major variables and indicates their respective sub-variables. The results for each variable will be reported as a group with its attendant sub-variables. Therefore, Liquid Technology, Solid Technology and Non Technology will each receive a section for reportage.

Table 5.2: The variables and sub-variables of the dissolved panopticon

Liquid Technology	Solid Technology	Non Technology
Satellite	CCTV	Watchtower
Telecommunications	Recorded (audio/visual)	Participant
Biometric	Old Media	Extrasensory w/o technology
Card/Data based	Institutional setting	
New Media		
Extrasensory w/ technology		

Figure 5.3 (see page 61) indicates the position of the *dissolved panopticon* variables during each year where a superhero film was released. The crux of the claim supporting the concept lies in this graph, which will be referred to during the following three sub-sections.

The results in Figure 5.3 show that Liquid Technology is a fast growing, if still unstable, area of surveillance. While Liquid Technology was little used in superhero films at the start of century, it became more prominent as time moved forward, due in part to the increase in cellphones. Though Liquid Technology's positive upward trend stuttered, it ended the study period as with the sharpest growth. The variable totaled 675 instances, a per film average of 13.2, representing 31% of all instances. In early moments of 2012's *Avengers*, Black Widow quips to Bruce Banner (aka, Hulk) at their first meeting that the team never lost track of Banner, without telling him how, despite his best attempts to live off the grid. This example shows how far liquid technology has seeped into everyday life. Whereas Batman or Iron Man showed what could be done

technologically in the 2000s, by 2012, a mere mention is enough recognize what constant tracking actually means.

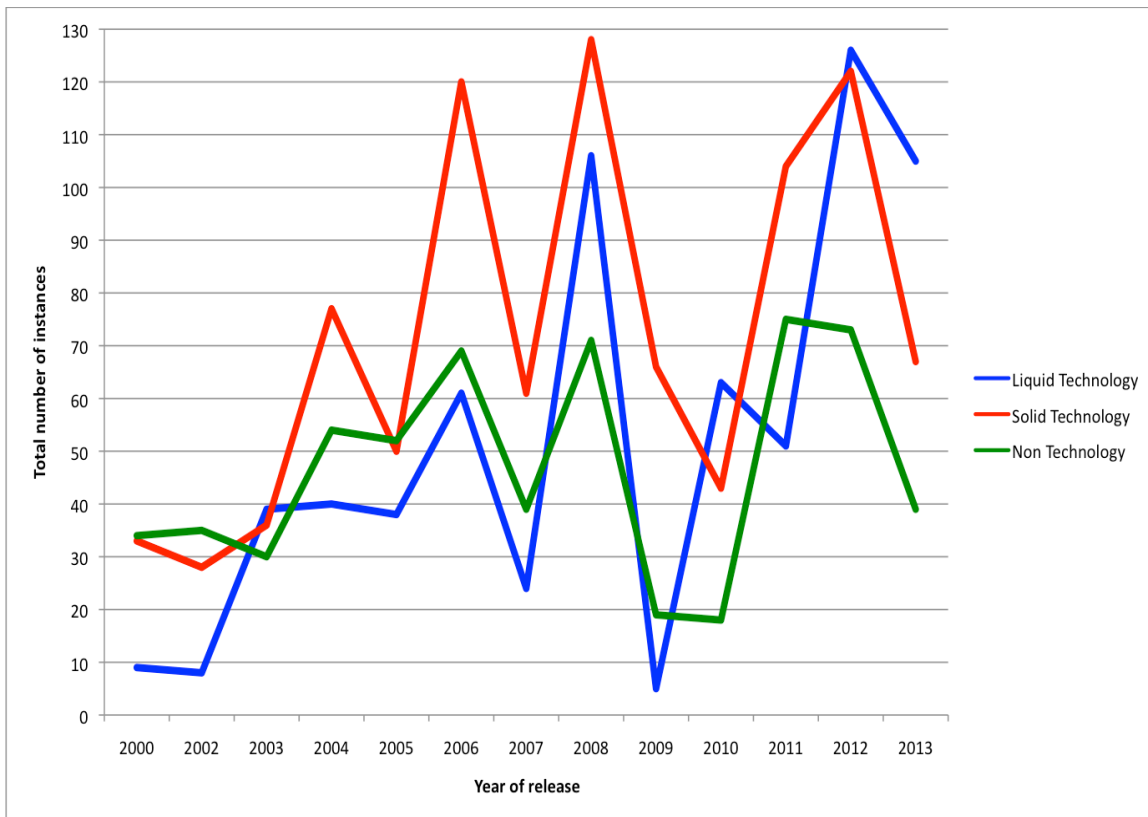


Figure 5.3: The dissolved panopticon from 2000 to 2013

The Solid Technology variable proved to be the most dominate of the three *dissolved panopticon* variables. There were 934 instances for a per film average of 18.3. This accounted for 42% of all recorded instances. Within individual years, 2008 featured the single most recorded instances for any of the *dissolved panopticon* variables, at 128. An increase in the number of films released that year which affected all of the variables positively. While Solid Technology tended to swing from one year to the next, the overall results show a trend that suggests an increase in the use of such technology from 2000 to 2013. However, the last year it was the leading variable was 2010. Solid Technology was the dominant surveillance variable throughout the majority of the study’s timeframe, even though it neither started or finished that way. Though closed circuit television could appear in *Watchmen*, or the montage of media reporting whirl through *Ghost Rider*, Solid Technology is the middle age of surveillance technology, mobile in surveilling a subject, but anchored to its physical position.

Non Technology variable is strong at the start of the study period, but despite an upward trend in the middle period, is in decline by the end. After 2005 it was never the leading variable in a given year. In fact, its decline nearly entirely fed Liquid Technology's ascendancy. Overall, the variable increased along with the other *dissolved panopticon* variables, Liquid Technology and Solid Technology, registered 609 tallies, a mean average of 11.9 instances per film. While Spider Man came to rely on technology more often in *The Amazing Spider Man*, he still scaled the heights to watch over New York, still finding a use for direct surveillance.

The single largest total in a given year was 75 in 2011, the peak of its brief resurgence. The Non Technology total was aided greatly that year by the films that were released. Of the five films, two were set in the past when surveillance technology was in its infancy (*Captain America: First Avenger* was set in 1945, *X-Men: First Class* was set in 1962). Two other films were set largely on alien planets (*Green Lantern & Thor*). Meanwhile, *Spider Man* (2002) had the highest total of recorded Non Technology instances, at 30. This is significant for two reasons: first, it came in the second year of the study period, the next to last time Non Technology would be the highest scoring variable; and, second, the only film that would come close to that total was the aforementioned *X-Men: First Class*, set 40 years earlier than *Spider Man* and released nearly a decade later.

5.3.2 Liquid Technology

Liquid Technology, exemplified by telecommunications, is the variable in the *dissolved panopticon* concept that focuses on technological surveillance that digitizes the subject. It focuses on the quantifiable markers a person leaves, whether through internet traffic, information gathered on a database, a telecommunications footprint, or through the electronically stored data points garnered from, and unique to the individual, such as fingerprints or retina patterns. In all of these cases the subject is removed from the individual. Liquid Technology essentially treats the subjects it surveils as objects. The underlying premise is that anyone could be a threat, or is at least at *risk* of becoming a threat. Therefore, the power that is produced by operating such technology is fickle; it can be turned on its handler just as quickly as it can turn on an unassuming subject.

Society's adoption of Liquid Technology has been rapid, the ubiquitousness of smartphones is but one example. The reflection of that process and its implications is quite clear in superhero films.

Liquid Technology is clearly exemplified by Iron Man. The series of films stars Robert Downey Junior as Iron Man/Tony Stark, an inventor whose massive fortune is built on the only thing he knows – manipulating technology. Iron Man normalizes surveillance technology through his place as a technological superhero. There is no hint of non-technological methods for anything, surveillance or otherwise. Stark is the melded man-machine, his suit is equipped with a link to the central computer, named Jarvis, through which the suit itself is monitored.

Throughout the series of films, it is clear that Tony Stark is a master innovator and manipulator of technology, including surveillance technology. For example, in *Iron Man*, he built a new electrical device to replace his damaged heart and power his Iron Man suit of armour while in a cave under the eye of guards and closed circuit television. He then proceeded to build an array of Iron Man suits in full view of the media in *Iron Man 2*. In *Iron Man 3*, that technology reaches a new level, both in terms of Stark's inventiveness and his utilization of it; he creates a suit he can summon from anywhere along with suits that are drones.

Iron Man's enemies also evolve technologically. There is an attempt to co-opt Stark's technology to make a super suit (*Iron Man*) and robots with artificial intelligence (*Iron Man 2*). In *Iron Man 3*, the villains make a leap, using advanced biological warfare, media propaganda, and a stolen Iron Man suit to attempt to symbolically destroy the hero.

Iron Man 3 centers on the repercussions of Stark's hedonistic and reckless past. It comes to the fore in the form of scientist Aldridge Killian (played by Guy Pearce), a one-time socially awkward outcast whose overtures to collaborate with Stark were cruelly rejected at the dawn of the 21st century. He has returned, having reinvented himself, and is seeking revenge.

Being a master builder, Stark is shown in the film to be expertly adept at handling telecommunications technology, the most accessible of surveillance technologies to the general public. An early exchange between Stark and Stark Industries' head of security (the technologically inept) Happy Hogan (played by Jon Favreau) is an example. Hogan

is telling Stark about a meeting between Killian and Stark Industries CEO, Pepper Potts. Stark attempts to instruct Hogan on how to use the video function on his tablet while they talk so that Stark can see what Hogan sees. After Hogan fails to “flip the screen”, Stark changes course and remotely accesses a database to learn more about what Killian is involved in while Hogan is left to watch Potts and Killian from outside Potts’ office.

In a second example, the story sees Stark call out a terrorist named the Mandarin (played Ben Kingsley), and gives out his home address. Stark’s home is inevitably attacked, and Stark escapes, while unconscious, via a remote controlled suit that flies him from the devastation. It eventually runs out of power and strands him in a small town in Tennessee, far from his Los Angeles home. Stark, now cut off from his computer-based assistant, Jarvis, must manage his predicament on his own. In the search for information, Stark happens upon a television production van. He proceeds to teach a star-struck television producer how to boost the satellite signal of the television van, re-routing it to get internet access in order to access a database containing videos from a various angles (including CCTV) that show Killian conducting the biological experiments that are central to the plot of the film. In these short instances, Stark has exhibited command of Liquid Technology through the *new media*, *database*, and *telecommunications* sub-variables. Also, Stark shows tremendous skills with Solid Technology, via the equipment of *old media*-the television van- which gives him access to military files (*institutional*) which contain video (*recorded video* and *CCTV*). What becomes clear in *Iron Man 3* is that in moments that are big and small, access to information, which lies at the heart of Liquid Technology, must be available from anywhere at anytime. As the risk escalates, access to information becomes more pertinent. Information is the most important source of Stark’s power, next to his life preserving (and suit powering) electrical heart.

Figure 5.4 is a graphic visual of Liquid Technology. It reveals fluctuations of the six sub variables: *satellite*, *telecommunications*, *biometrics*, *data/card based*, *new media*, and *extrasensory with technology*. The graph shows the slow build up in the sub variables in the early part of the study, then the rapid spike in the latter half. The visual adoption of Liquid Technology mirrors what is occurring in society, as much of the business of the life now leaves a digital trail which is being collected and collated in the name of security or returned in the form of some convenient consumer promotion.

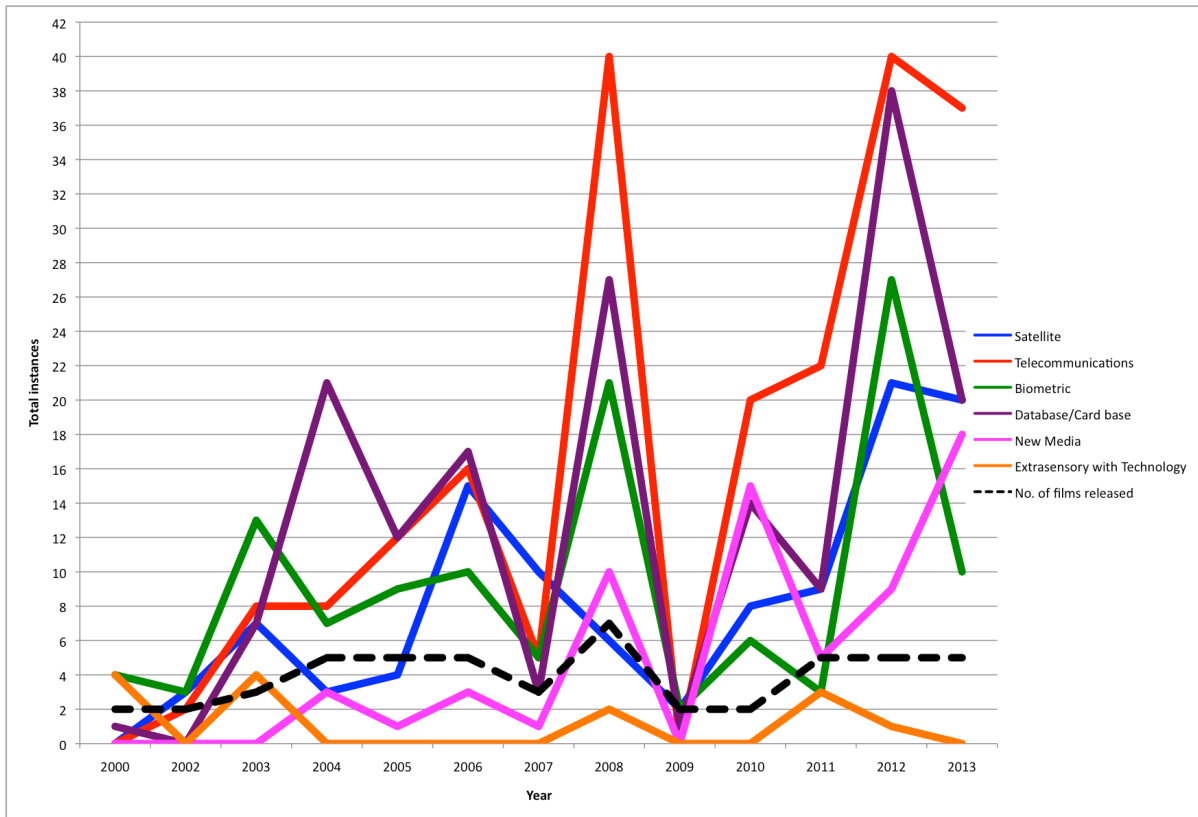


Figure 5.4; Liquid Technology

While the sub variables in Figure 5.4 are scrambled, *Data/card base* proved to be a steady leader, even though it did not actually lead in many of the years. This reflects the central role that databases have played over time as a site of information and as a major source of power. Technology-heavy superheroes such as Iron Man (and the Avengers team) and Batman feature it prominently.

Figure 5.4 also indicates that *telecommunications*, exemplified by the smart phone, has proven to be the most dominant. While there are many films to choose an example from, one intriguing depiction is in a film that featured very little surveillance, *The Wolverine* (2013). In an early scene, the villainous mutant, Viper is seen recording a video of Wolverine during an action sequence using the phone's camera function. Viper and the phone are seen in close up shots with cuts that show her using the phone, then allowing the audience to see what she sees: an unsuspecting Wolverine in the midst of a fight. While it is not clear at this point of the film what Viper's purpose for recording is, the important point is that anybody could record someone else without their knowledge for whatever purposes the surveiller wishes. While the expectation of privacy is non-

existent in a public setting, this is different from being unwatched. However, Liquid Technology blurs this distinction.

The surge in *new media* in the latter stages of the study indicates that the internet has become a powerful tool. From the use of social media in the *Kick Ass* franchise to the portrayal of the internet as a major research resource in *The Amazing Spider-Man*, a dramatic shift from the previous *Spider-Man* trilogy, evidence is suggesting that new media is finally being realized as an important surveillance tool.

Finally, the *extrasensory with technology* variable totaled the least number of instances because it was largely consigned to one film franchise. The *X Men* franchise accounts for 79% of all instances in the final sub-variable across three films (*X Men*, *X2*, *X Men: First Class*). The basis of the sub variable lies in the machine called Cerebro, a device that amplifies the psychic abilities of its user, mainly Professor X. Therefore, the sub variable is best seen not so much as a practical representation of existing surveillance technology, but as a metaphorical technology that promotes and normalizes the idea of mass surveillance- that anyone can be surveilled anywhere at any time.

What Iron Man represents is the flow of spaces in superhero films that are similar to that seen in recent science fiction films (Muir, 2010). Tony Stark/Iron Man is at the helm of a vast flow of information which can be dipped into and compiled in an instant. His information centers (mobile phones, upright work boards, even the Iron Man suits) are all translucent in nature, information can be seen from in front of and behind the screens, and feature long and deep computing capability, where reams of information can be recalled and accessed with the wave of a hand. *Iron Man 3* makes it clear that Stark is capable of tremendous reach, remotely accessing the camera in the phone of his friend, Iron Man's previous appearance on-screen was *Avengers*. At the point in the film when Stark is enlisted in his first scene of the film, he receives a USB filled with information relating to the film's plot. The information is in the form of videos, new clips, digitized documents, photos, and entire life histories collated and stored, ready for access at any time with the movement of a balletic hand. In a liquid modern state, time, or the ability to cover space quickly equates to power. Stark is equipped with the capability and the resources to access a vast amount of information in a moment, whether through his own devices and databases or through someone else's. His ability to literally hook into the

devices of colleagues or the data base of the United States government allows him to achieve what Bauman (2012) referred to as the momentariness of movement. This is what gives Stark, as a representative of corporate capitalism, the inside track to elite power.

In summary, *Iron Man 3* was selected as the film to represent Liquid Technology because the film focuses on a character that is very technological, and who pushes the boundaries of surveillance technology. As such, the various methods that make up this first *dissolved panopticon* variable are at the edge of where surveillance technology is heading. Within superhero films, the trend is toward greater use of surveillance technology, but especially Liquid Technology, as the greatest growth in utilization occurred within this variable. This combined with the next variable, Solid Technology, marked the rapid increase of technological surveillance in totality.

5.3.3 Solid Technology

The second part of the dissolved panopticon to examine is Solid Technology. The variable is made up of technological sub variables that can be stated as typically panoptic; the presence of a subject body is required with this type of surveillance. The sub variables include: *CCTV/video*, *recorded audio/video*, *old media*, *institutional setting*, and *electronic watchtower*. An example is closed circuit television. It records all of the activities that occur within the space it can see, so a person is likely to conform to normatively acceptable behavior within that space because they know their actions will be recorded.

The Josh Trank film *Chronicle* (2012) exemplifies Solid Technology because it is seen entirely through a variety of cameras, a clear example of Foucault's panoptic mobility. This style of filming also gives the audience the perspective of what characters are recording. The film tells the story of three teenage boys, Andrew Detmer (played by Dane DeHaan), his cousin Matt Garetty (played by Alex Russell), and their friend, Steve Montgomery (played by Michael B. Jordan) who become empowered with telekinetic abilities. It is a study in the extraordinary potential and the devastating pitfalls if such powers actually existed. The audience is the viewer of footage largely shot by Andrew on a video recorder to capture the events (an example of the *recorded audio/video* sub

variable). A second camera operated by a fellow classmate, Casey Letter (played by Ashley Hinshaw), provides a second perspective throughout the film. As the story unfolds, Andrew shows extraordinary capability, outpacing his compatriots in developing their powers considerably. While Matt is the solid core of the group, Steve provides the spectacle, setting up many of the tests that show off their skills. Andrew, the shy introvert son of an abusive controlling father and a terminally ill mother, initially uses his abilities to gain a better social footing amongst his peers, only to be rejected. His pent up rage and stressed home life direct Andrew towards a dark corner whereby he becomes the villain, cemented after killing Steve, the most popular of the trio. Then, with his mother near death and in need of expensive medication, he takes on the moniker of Apex Predator, dons a costume and commits a string of ever more violent robberies to raise money, culminating in a fiery gas station explosion which hospitalizes him. This sets up the key Solid Technology scene.

The key sequence begins with a CCTV (the *Video/CCTV* sub variable) angle shot of a hospital hallway (the surveillance that occurs in this kind of setting is an example of the *institutional setting* sub variable). It shows a nurse guiding Andrew's father (played by Michael Kelly) to Andrew's room. The scene then shifts to a shot looking directly at a heavily bandaged Andrew, hooked up to monitors on the left of the screen; Andrew's father sitting next to him on the right side of the screen. This angle is presumably Andrew's camera. A series of dialogue follows whereby the father tells Andrew his mother is dead and that Andrew and his criminal activities are to blame. At this point the camera pulls in closer to Andrew, the soundtrack music building. As the father reaches the peak of anger, now standing, the camera angle shifts, the scene is shown through another CCTV camera pointing down from a high corner in the room. An angry exchange, then an explosion, which destroys the room.

Meanwhile, Matt is at Casey's house, celebrating a birthday captured on her camera. His nose begins to bleed; he knows Andrew has done something. The TV is turned on and the audience hears, then sees, the news channel coverage (the sub variable *old media* in action). Matt and Casey immediately leave, the trip captured on her still rolling camera. Through this angle, the audience sees Matt rescue Andrew's father as he is dropped from outside of the smoldering window by Andrew. They then pursue Andrew

in their car, which is sent high into the sky, and driven into Seattle's Space Needle. Matt is able to pull Casey from the car just as a levitating Andrew drops it from the Needle's height. Matt leaves Casey on the ground and flies back up to square off with Andrew. At this point, new angles are introduced. First, a police helicopter viewfinder shows the pair in the crosshairs of the camera, then a cut to a direct-to-audience news channel view, then another cut to a view from outside a building where a crowd of people can see the pair right outside their window high above the crowd. A tablet is raised to capture the moment, presumably the angle the audience is seeing is from another phone or a tablet. Other phones and cameras can be seen on-camera. Then, Andrew blows out the window and pulls a series of devices into the space around him all of them filming his rage, suspended high above the street. The scene is cut with images from the police helicopter view. The fight ensues. The confrontation, spilling over many city blocks involving flying buses and cars, heavily damaged building, and panicked people caught in the chaos, is caught on civilian cameras, CCTV footage, recorded police car footage, and unknown sources where shots capture the footage, but nobody can be seen taking the footage. The finality of the fight is seen from two angles, using a rapid cut that briefly replays the finishing blow, Andrew impaled, Matt in anguish on the street. This final sequence captured four of the five Solid Technology variables: list. Only the electric watchtower sub variable, such as a metal detector, did not appear in the scene.

Figure 5.5 (see page 70) reveals the sub variables behind Solid Technology. It contains five sub variables, including: *video/CCTV*, *recorded audio/video*, *old media*, *institutional setting*, and *electric watchtower*. Solid Technology depends on the presence of the subject being surveilled, and so, its tools for surveilling are the most recognizable of surveillance technologies. CCTV cameras are often highly visible, and old media, particularly television news, is ubiquitous. Solid Technology's relevancy rests in how recognizable its image is in the mirror reflecting contemporary society.

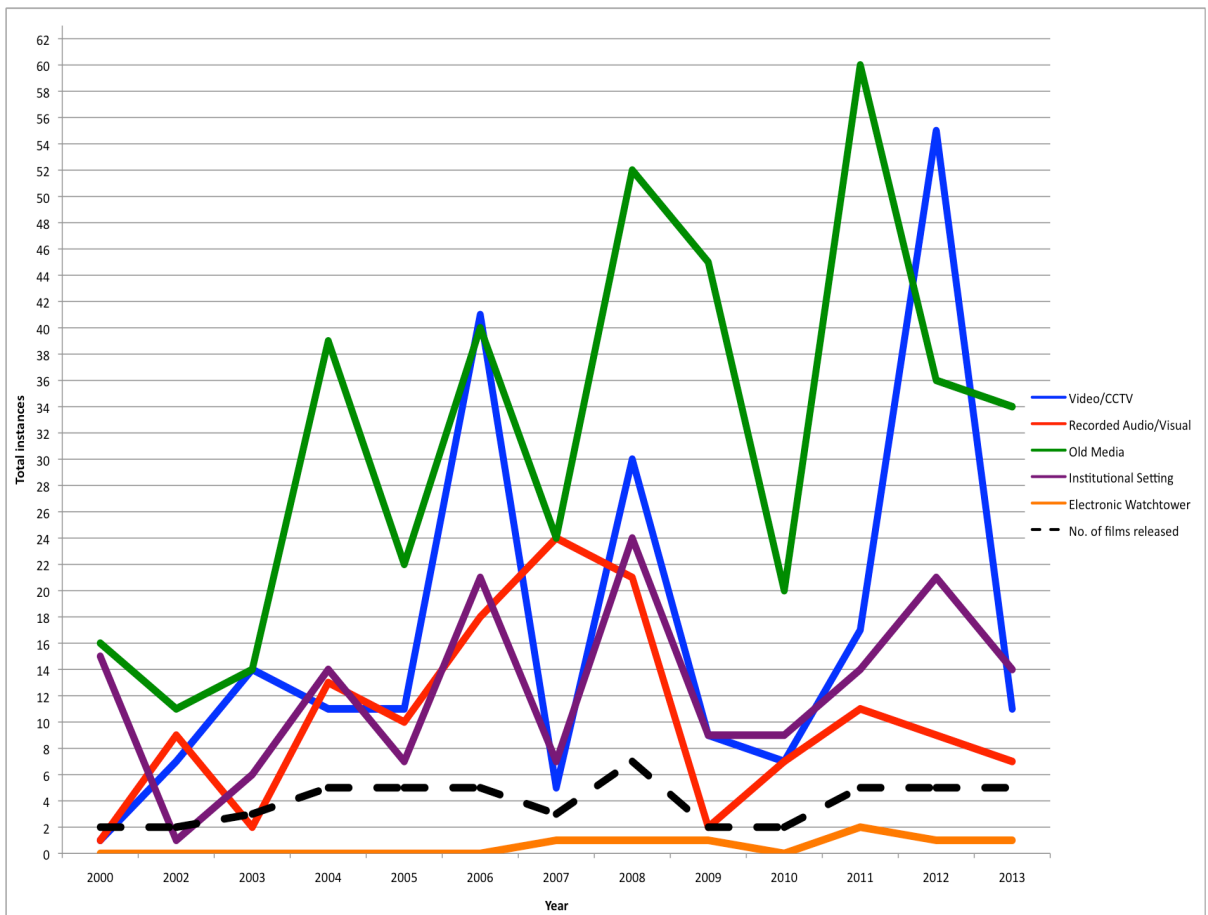


Figure 5.5: Solid Technology instances by year

Like Liquid Technology, Solid Technology also saw overall growth. However, the level of growth was much more sustained. Figure 5.5 indicates that traditional media, as an agent of surveillance, is still an important tool. *Old media* was consistently growing, despite the valleys that nearly every sub variable was subject to. It was the leading sub variable nearly every year. *CCTV/video* saw large peaks and valleys in its results, but its near constant presence reflects the ubiquity of such cameras. *Recorded audio/video* proved more prevalent in the first half of the study, but did not have a strong presence beyond *The Green Hornet*. *Electric watchtower* proved to be a near-irrelevant sub variable. Such a low number of instance concentrated in a single franchise was surprising given its presence harkens back to Foucault's panopticon. Security gates can be seen as a method of securing a space and forcing an individual to control their willingness to be deviant in places such as airports, department stores, and many schools in high crime areas of many major North American cities. Yet, they are nearly invisible in superhero films.

The heavy prevalence of old media such as television and newspapers, serve to repeat messages and ideas not only to the other characters of the film, but also to the audience. Kammerer (2004) was most concerned with not how surveillance is reflected in media, but on how the media as a method of surveillance affected society. The films depicted tabloid style headlines splashed across the scene, such as in *Ghost Rider*, that serve to move along the story but also to set up the backdrop of how the hero should be received. Television news has taken a prominent position reporting on, and capturing images of, superheroes in action. What emerges is the function of modern television news media: showcasing spectacle as news, and the sound-bite debate. An example of spectacle as news can be found in *The Incredible Hulk*. Television news is the medium for the film's first daylight images of the Hulk, caught in action against the United States military on a university campus. The sound-bite debate can be found in the montage of news channel coverage of the climatic battle at the end of *Avengers*, where the merits and consequences of the Avengers team's existence were debated in short clips. However, the relationship between media and superheroes is not arm's length. Superheroes also have an intense internal relationship with the media. Peter Parker/Spider-Man and Clark Kent/Superman work in media. Green Hornet owns his own newspaper. Ghost Rider is

involved romantically with a reporter. Others, such as Tony Stark/Iron Man, and Bruce Wayne/Batman are high profile figures whose relationship is that of any entertainment star, the media is welcomed when it suits the purpose, and rejected harshly when the attention is unwanted. Villainy also knows how to use the media. The Joker used television news to prod Batman into action. Aldridge Killian/The Mandarin orchestrated Al-Qaeda style television production to terrorize the populace, while General Zod's introduction was through the takeover of the entire telecommunications and media infrastructure. With media, terror is a two-way street. The news can be frightening on its own, or it can be used to incite fear, feeding into the sense of uncertainty in Beck's risk society. However, because Brock morphs into the supervillain Venom, it suggests that surveillance has a dark side; not every surveiller is a benevolent hero.

Why such a heavy media presence in these films? *Old media* is prevalent in superhero films for two reasons. First, it serves as a very useful device for conveying storyline information in a short period of time. There is no need for long elaborate scenes that may also not make much sense when a newspaper headline or a report airing on a television news channel suffices. This means that information communications are still very viable ways to inform society. The one exception is the internet, which has not as yet been utilized as a source of news for the audience in a serious way. The cinematographic challenge of putting a computer screen on-screen is still difficult to present seamlessly, though films like *Kick Ass* and *The Amazing Spider Man* made serious attempts by having the main characters engage with computers as a central function of their research.

In summary, the film selected to lead this section, *Chronicle*, was chosen because it represents what has happened with Solid Technology over the course of the research period. It is a film that appears near the end of the period, and it focuses directly on technological surveillance that is still very much subject based. As technological surveillance became the dominant surveillance method, Solid Technology grew in usage. It appeared to have stable growth, so it did not explode onto the screen like Liquid Technology. It also did not swing wildly from one extreme to another, where it was very prevalent for a period of time, then not at all prevalent, then very prevalent once again.

This concludes the technological surveillance methods of the *dissolved panopticon*. The final section deals with the third component of the concept, Non Technology.

5.3.4 Non Technology

Non Technology is the variable that covers the panopticon in its closest approximation of Foucauldian panopticism to Bentham's original concept. This variable deals with the type of surveillance where the surveiller must be in the same space as the subject being surveilled. These include instances of observation, referred to as *watchtower* surveillance, where the surveiller watches the subject with or without the subject's knowledge, *participant observation*, where the surveiller is engaging with the subject under a false pretense to gather information, and *extrasensory without* technology, which refers to those instances where some form of extra human capability is utilized to watch the subject.

M. Night Shyamalan's *Unbreakable* (2000) is an excellent example of how surveillance is handled in a non technological way. It includes each Non Technology sub variable in a fashion that is central to the story. The film stars Bruce Willis as the protagonist, David Dunn, and Samuel L. Jackson, as his foil, Elijah Price, aka Mr. Glass. Its sub-variables are *watchtower*, the act of watching without being seen, evident when Dunn is in the train station discovering the misdeeds of others without their knowledge; *participant observer*, the act of surveilling via direct contact, as evidenced in the film when Dunn's acquaintance-cum-adversary, Elijah Price, debilitated by a chronic condition that leaves his bones brittle, and is explained in the film as the basis for the nickname 'Glass', gleans information from Dunn's wife (played by Robin Wright), a physiotherapist, during a session to rehabilitate Glass's latest broken bone; and *extrasensory without technology*, the sub variable that accounts for instances of surveillance involving telepathy, or some super human capability, such as Superman's x-ray vision, or, in *Unbreakable*, Dunn's ability to see the misdeeds of total strangers via skin to skin contact.

Dunn, a security guard by occupation, bedecked in a hooded rain poncho, his face shaded from view, is standing still in the midst of a crowded train station. He raises his

head, revealing closed eyes, his arms are extended at his side with the palms of his hands open. People brush past him. In the next instances, images flash that vividly depict the misdeeds of the individuals he comes into contact with; a woman who shop lifts, a college student who commits sexual assault on an unconscious female, a man who destroys a family in their own home through invasion, confinement and murder. Dunn follows the man to the house he has taken over. Upon entrance, the hero finds the murdered victims; he searches the house and finds the surviving children. Then a life and death struggle of brute strength ensues, with Dunn, the hero, finally, after nearly dying, besting the man who is confirmed as monster. In this moment, a superhero is born.

Figure 5.6 breaks down the sub variables that make up Non Technology. The sub variables include: *watchtower*, *participant observation*, and *extrasensory without technology*, which accounts for metaphysical surveillance. Non Technology requires the subject and the surveiller to be in the same space, a form of surveillance that in reality is diminishing in importance next to technological surveillance, which leaves a traceable trail. The relevance of Non Technology in contemporary society is evident when law enforcement goes undercover to gain evidence against a criminal suspect. Despite law enforcement's increasing reliance on technology, non technological methods have their place, just as they do within the *dissolved panopticon*.

Figure 5.6 (on pg. 75) charts the movements of the sub variables. What becomes clear is that the original function of the superhero, that of watchful protector, is still very prominent in superhero films. While *participant observation* and *extrasensory without technology* scored low, *watchtower* carried the whole variable. Its sharp fall-rise-fall sequence accounts for the overall decline in Non Technology.

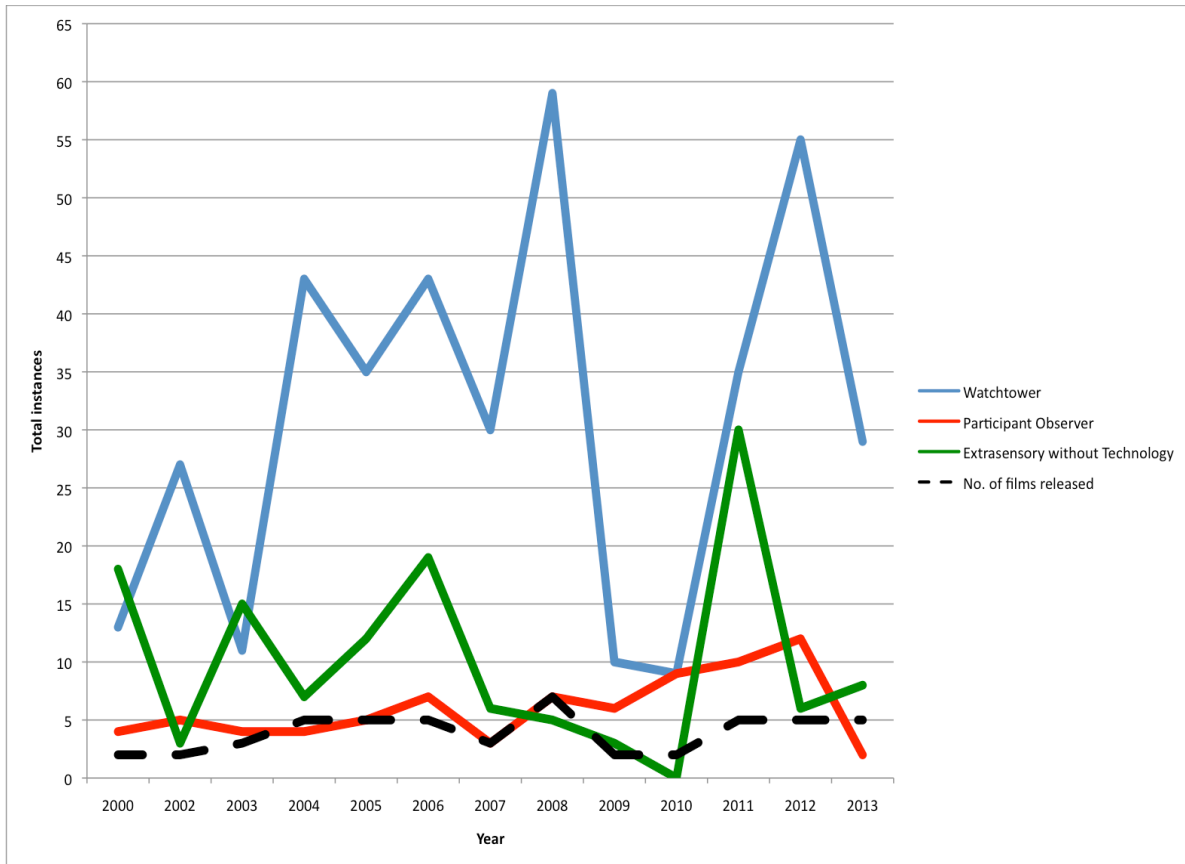


Figure 5.6: Non Technology

The Non Technology variable represents the technique of surveillance that puts an individual into the most contact with the subject of the surveillance. It is the most Benthamesque of panoptic surveillance. In 2000, Non Technology methods stood as the most prevalent forms within superhero films, establishing the heroes as society's watchmen in a quite literal sense. However, with 9/11 and the introduction of the Patriot Act in the United States, along with the focus on tighter controls at airports and powers that deepened the surveillance capabilities for law enforcement agencies throughout the western world in the areas of telecommunications and the internet, it became clear that merely watching was not going to be perceived as adequate. The results of this study would seem to point to the same thing happening in superhero films. Once Hollywood writers caught up to reality, the use of one-to-one surveillance lost ground compared to more technologically inclined methods. 2005 was the last year that non technological methods held the key position, the same year that saw the release of *Batman Begins*, which introduced a very direct connection between militarization and superheroism. This

Batman is the version that Kellner (2010) referred to as the metaphor for the Bush-Cheney administration, replete with its enactment of the Patriot Act, extraordinary renditions, and torture in order to combat terrorism. While the Non-Technology variable did increase along with surveillance usage in total post-2005, it was overshadowed by Liquid and Solid Technology to the point of stagnation by 2011.

Further evidence of stagnation and a move to mass surveillance in superhero films can also be seen in the films that did feature Non-Technology prominently. In the first years, films such as *Unbreakable* (2000), *Spider-Man* (2002), *Spider-Man 2* (2004), and *Elektra* (2005) featured heroes that were ordinary people in a contemporary time who came to be superheroes and whose surveillant abilities were largely based on non-technological methods. As the study period moved on, non technological surveillance was only prominent in two scenarios: either at the beginning of a superhero's existence (*Kick Ass*) when the hero or villain was taking their first steps in their new role; or, it was relegated to films that were set in past (*Captain America: First Avenger*, *Watchmen*, *X-Men: First Class*), or involved some alien component, whether it was where the film was set (*Green Lantern*) or if the characters were supernatural (*Blade II*, *Ghost Rider*) or alien (*Superman Returns*, *Thor*). Films such as *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Avengers* feature many instances of non-technological surveillance but those moments are dwarfed by the flashier blitz of technological surveillance. The implication is that if society is to be properly protected from the risk of evil or terror, a massive technologically driven surveillance network in which all are linked in must be open and available to the guardians of society. In a society where power rests with those who gain move the quickest, instant access must be essential (Bauman, 2012[2001]). Coupled with an understanding that power is based in knowledge, non technological surveillance was inevitably going to become less relied upon (Foucault, 1975[2001]). It provides the least quantifiable data while requiring ample space and time to actualize. This is counter-intuitive to a fluid, instantaneous society. In modern mythology, that means open access for superheroes, as their inherent abilities alone are not enough. In the real world, the importance of an accessible network is even more pronounced, as the guardians are just as faultily human as the individuals they mean to protect; they have no superpowers to compensate for their faultiness.

In summary, the film that was selected (*Unbreakable*) to introduce the Non Technology variable was chosen because it represents a style of superhero surveillance that would soon give way to the future. As the findings suggest, surveillance as a whole increased over the course of the study period. However, Non Technology dropped as time went on. It did receive a spike in 2011, reaching its recorded apex, but that was buoyed by the inclusion of films set in the past when technological methods were not yet available.

5.3.5 Resistance

Surveillance and docility are not connected. While Foucault (1995[1975]) suggested that a subject under the panoptic eye would come to engrain a sense of strict self control, it is not necessarily automatic or inevitable. On the contrary, the subject is an agent capable of making choices; one may choose to obey the watcher in order to avoid punishment, or follow a path of least resistance, accepting both means and ends. On the other hand, the subject may choose to resist. The refusal to accept the naturalization of control or the outright rejection of it as a means to the desired end are options, especially when the controllers are not benevolent. Such is the case in *V for Vendetta*.

The film tells the story of a vengeful hero in a Guy Fawkes mask named V (played by Hugo Weaving). His mission is to bring down the fascist government of England, and its chancellor (played by John Hurt), who are responsible for the disfigurement which drove him to the mask. Along the way VV rescues a young woman named Eve (played by Natalie Portman) and sets in motion his plan to free the country from its terrible malaise. Set 50 years into the future, technology is an important part of the state's control apparatus, including old media, which V uses against them to set the wheels in motion in a key early scene at London's central television station.

The scene begins with the large delivery of Guy Fawkes masks to the station, delivered to the props department. Meanwhile, the police have discovered Eve's true identity and are coming to arrest her at the television station where she happens to work (under false pretenses, as the police's search of her home resulted in the discovery of her true identity, based on the remnants of a false identification card). Suddenly, CCTV

cameras go out and the elevator to the main lobby opens, revealing V's arrival. The scene shifts between Eve looking to escape the building and V setting up the broadcast studio. Eve arrives at the lobby to find it empty, when the fire alarms go off, shutting down the elevators and cutting off the police. When the police do arrive at the proper floor, the chaos of panicked workers attempting to flee disrupts their ability to catch a glimpse of their target. As the police scramble, the television signal is over turned, interrupting programming as V plays his stirring recorded message, using old media against the powers that be to unmask the awful truth of the state of their society, the surveillance systems that insist on conformity and obedience to a ruler who promised an end to fear, war, terror, and rampant disease. As the speech plays, images of people watching televisions pass by, the picture of the evil Chancellor looming above the screen in one instance. The speech concludes and police enter the broadcast studio where the video originated from, cameras and guns at the ready. V throws up another wall, having used those delivered masks to cloak the room in his visage, allowing him to escape in one of the film's kinetic set pieces. The scene concludes with a news story, a piece of resistance from the state, attempting to regain the control by spinning the story to show the death of V. The next image is the lead detective and his partner viewing CCTV footage of V taking an unconscious Eve from the scene.

After collecting data for resistance, the findings show that 10.5% of the surveillance instances recorded include open resistance to surveillance, a total of 233 instances with a per film average of 4.6. It is noteworthy that the total is skewed by one film, *V for Vendetta* (2006). It had 28 instances, or 12% of all instances and outdistancing the next closest film, *The Dark Knight*, by 47%. These two films featured characters (with different intentions) bent on breaking governmental authority- the hero V in the former film, and the villain Joker in the latter film. Only five films had 10 or more total instances of resistance, four of which were released after 2007. This suggests that as surveillance instances increased the level of resistance also increased. However, the data were more spread out across the films released in the latter half of the study. This means a more diverse audience who have varying preferences about which films they chose to see.

Tallying instances of resistance addressed a major criticism of Foucault's panopticon; that the subject will not necessarily accept docility. In the case of villains resisting surveillance, it usually signals a new bar-raising danger, whether it be the Joker co-opting every attempt by to surveill him and turning it against the surveillers in the *Dark Knight*, or the opening scene of *Blade II* where a visitor to a blood donation clinic turns to the CCTV in a private room and reveals himself to be a new breed of villain before slaughtering the nurse and her guard in full view of the camera. It can also mean that power is being exerted too severely. *V for Vendetta* is the classic example, as V attempts to work around a wide watchful surveillance apparatus. Both Hulk movies are predicated on the green monster avoiding detection and capture by the military. The outlawed heroes of *Watchmen* deem it necessary to return to active duty, disobeying the law in the process, but doing so in order to uncover a massive world-altering plot. Finally, in *Avengers*, Captain America comes to question the total surveillance capabilities of his government agency employer SHIELD. In all of these cases, docility was rejected and dominant power structures were challenged. Just as laws exist to define the line of behaviour deemed acceptable or criminal, resistance is essential to test the limits of power and establish when power has gone too far.

In summary, *V for Vendetta* features a hero who is more anti-hero. The film was selected because it places the hero in opposition to the government of the day, which is different from most superhero films. While 10% of all surveillance instances included a form of resistance, the films that carried the most weight were those with strong antagonists, hero or villain, fighting against the hegemonic order. The following section will examine how the *dissolved panopticon* from the angle of how much change occurred between each half of the study period.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has featured the results of the manifest content analysis. In addition to presenting the data, there has been an attempt to discuss the results through a selection of superhero films that represented different elements of the *dissolved panopticon* concept. The data presented included: the distribution of films across the study period;

the overall surveillance totals; the variables of the *dissolved panopticon*- Liquid Technology, Solid Technology, and Non Technology and their sub-variables; and, finally, results for a *resistance* variable. Chapter Six will feature data of a qualitative nature, which will serve to add support to the claim of the existence of the dissolved panopticon.

Chapter 6: Findings part 2

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on how the *dissolved* panopticon and surveillance is normalized in superhero films by drawing from qualitative data. The chapter will focus on four emerging themes. First, it will touch on the shift from metaphysical to the technological surveillance. Second, there will be an examination of how surveillance is used by government and villains. Third, the chapter will share insights into how surveillance technology has been inappropriately presented in certain superhero films, given the times in which they are set, appearing where history says it should not. Fourth, the chapter concludes with an examination of *The Dark Knight*, the touchstone film that best reveals the whole of the *dissolved panopticon*. What all this is shows is twofold. First, it shows how pervasive Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquidity has become, establishing an air of necessity while supplanting traditional Foucauldian forms of surveillance. Second, at the same time, it attempts to show the establishment of a deification of Foucault's panopticon. The chapter shows how surveillance in superhero films never really let the subject be subsumed entirely in a flow of data. In fact, there are efforts within the superhero genre to revise the history of surveillance technology in order to secure the panopticon's rarefied sacrosanct status.

6.2 Superheroes normalizing surveillance

This section will seek to connect the technological evolution of surveillance to superhero films. It achieves this via the shift within the *dissolved panopticon* from metaphysical/non-technological surveillance - a surveiller watching a subject, observing up close, or through telepathy - to technological surveillance. Then, there will be an examination of the shift in who (from villains to heroes) uses surveillance technology and the military's omnipotent presence. The final section focuses on the normalization of surveillance through the revisionist reimagining of its technology in superhero films,

specifically *Captain America: First Avenger*, *Superman Returns*, and *X Men Origins: Wolverine*.

6.2.1 *From metaphysical to technological, shifting surveillance within the dissolved panopticon*

The change in surveillance technology in superhero films is profound. While one would think Superman's invincibility, the Fantastic Four's cohesion of abilities, or Green Lantern's masterful shape-building creativity should be enough power to handle the kind of destabilizing force villains such as the Joker, Magneto, or Loki can muster, increasingly such superhuman abilities need some technological assistance. A new bullish approach to surveillance infused with the trappings of militarism and technological savvy became the norm for superheroes on film after 2001. They were resistant at first, especially in films such as *Unbreakable* and *Spider Man*, but despite their apparent talents and skills, they quickly became reliant on technology to assist them in watching over the urban space they dominate. The upward trend in surveillance instances noted in Figure 5.1 combined with the stagnation of incidents from the *dissolved panopticon's* Non-Technology category (see Figure 5.6) provides support for the claim that technological surveillance has become more pervasive. Though Non Technology increased slightly in the latter half of the study period, it was far outstripped by Liquid Technology and Solid Technology. Even though a metaphysical character such as Thor, who first appeared on film in 2011, can rely on non-tech methods to track a subject, the people he interacts with on Earth have satellite feeds and smartphone cameras at the ready.

6.2.2 *The early adopters of the dissolved panopticon: governments and villains*

Surveillance technology has undergone a shift in acceptance, as reflected in superhero films, from the start of the study period to the end. From one perspective, the increase in the amount of surveillance is apparent in the results. The total number of instances was higher in the latter half of the study period, the average of instances per

film was higher, and the frequency of instances within films increased (See Figure 5.1). Qualitative data helps to show how the characters use surveillance to pursue their ends.

In films from early in the study period, much of the surveillance technology was left to either underpowered police officers or government officials, security guards, or to villains. Surveillance by a hero was largely non technological, or at least was centrally non technological. Consider the emergent hero in *Unbreakable* (2000), David Dunn, whose surveillant skill is purely metaphysical; a sort of sixth sense for discovering someone's evil acts and intentions. He never uses telecommunications technology, nor does he tap into a database full of information. Dunn goes by intuition and the visions he sees when he comes into contact with other people. Dunn's foil, the villainous Elijah Price, aka Mr. Glass, relies on observation and the media (what is media if not an assisted, potentially skewed, observation) to search for Dunn and to ensure that his crimes are having an impact. Meanwhile, the audience sees Dunn's visions as though they coming from a closed circuit television feed, giving the audience a panoptic view a security guard would see. There is a slight escalation of reliance on technological surveillance present amongst the participants involved in the film, from the hero's nil reliance to the villain's slight reliance to the audience's utter reliance via a pseudo CCTV perspective that represents Dunn's visionary perspective. The implication is that the hero has some inherent capacity, a heroic quality, where they know intuitively when deviance is present. The villain manipulates surveillance for their own ambitions, a self centered peek over the shoulder, or tech-assisted periscope searching for useful information. The audience is left with a sense that the hero's skill is good, necessary and unmatched by a mere mortal; the hero is a righteous protector of society. The CCTV perspective doubling as the hero's perspective naturalizes the technology as essentially good; the hero is good, their perspective is very useful in detecting deviance. CCTV conflated as the hero's perspective makes the CCTV perspective inherently good, as it is there to protect society and is very useful in detecting deviance.

Next, consider 2000's other superhero film, *X-Men*, a film centered on a collection of heroes with mutant abilities, along with its sequel from 2002, *X2: X-Men United*. In *X-Men* (2000) the titular mutant team's patriarch, Professor Charles Xavier, aka Professor X, has telepathic abilities (*extrasensory without technology* – a Non

Technology category), which are the key to his panoptic ability, and serves as the X-Men team's single most important ability. Cerebro, the machine he uses to enhance his ability, is a powerful add-on that amplifies his panoptic reach to a global level. It is a powerful tool, so powerful, in fact, that only the masterful Professor X can utilize it. Subordinate Jean Gray, a fellow telepath, is seen in the film as having her mind nearly destroyed after attempting to use it. However, reinforcing the idea that technological surveillance is not tasteful to the hero class, it is revealed that Cerebro is not a tool born out of the mind of the hero alone. The central villain, Magneto, makes a partial claim to the machine's creation, thus re-enforcing the dark undertones of technological surveillance. Professor X's noble presence at Cerebro's birth gives the audience permission to accept the aid as a useful tool, but only when a noble individual is at the helm.

X2's (2002) central villain, Colonel Stryker, introduces a truly technological twist to his tactical military capabilities. The plot sees Stryker construct his own Cerebro, to be used by his son, a former student of Professor X, to kill all mutants. Stryker deploys technology in two ways. First, he uses satellite imagery (Liquid Technology) pinpointing Professor X's school for mutants from which he kidnaps a number of children (attained through his role as an active high level member of the United States military). Second, he has added CCTV (Solid Technology) to his lair, giving him eyes on the mutant children prisoners, as well as establishing an area of visibility around his complex that allows him to know when the X Men arrive. Countering the technology, then using it against Stryker would prove to be vital to a successful rescue mission, a combined effort by Professor X's good X-Men and the evil Magneto and his associates. The technology would indeed be turned back on Stryker, but the usurper is not a good X-person, rather it is by Magneto and his associate, the chameleon mutant Mystique. As the plot reveals, the actions of Magneto and Mystique are not altruistic, rather their aim is to use Stryker's plan on humans rather than on Stryker's intended targets, mutants. Much like in the first X-Men film, Cerebro is an add on to the capabilities of Professor X. It is intended to amplify rather than provide the source of surveillant capabilities. The technology is stolen by the evil Colonel Stryker and turned against mutants for malicious purposes. Technological surveillance is presented as a dangerous tool in the first X-Men film, via Jean Gray's near disastrous attempt to use Cerebro, suggesting that such technology should only be

handled by master practitioners, and only when absolutely necessary. Otherwise, technological surveillance is a tool for villains, noting Magneto's claim to Cerebro's creation and the subsequent theft of its schematics leading to the murderous plot of Colonel Stryker.

Superhero films can send conflicting messages about the benefits and criticisms of total government surveillance. The conflict is stark when comparing *Hellboy* and *V for Vendetta*. In the case of *Hellboy* (2004), a film about a demon hero who was born in hell, but socialized in New York under the government's watchful eye, such surveillance is for the better. Hellboy is kept safe from society and vice versa while allowing him to eliminate supernatural dangers. In *V for Vendetta* (2006), featuring a hero who takes on a totalitarian government that employs mass surveillance to maintain its power, the message about government surveillance is for the worse. The former film introduces Satan's son, Hellboy, to the modern world. Instead of bringing fire and brimstone, the hero brings his gruff and rough qualities to serve as a tool of the United States government's paranormal division, a sort of *X-Files-Ghostbusters* hybrid. Hellboy's government handler sends the red hero and his team out and they restore supernatural chaos to order. The government is seen as a necessary evil, as Hellboy enjoys an antagonistic relationship with each agent sent his way. However, it is clear that he gets his orders from the government. The latter film is decidedly anti-authoritarian and sees the evil of an always-watching Big Brother dictator. Set 50 years into the future, *V for Vendetta* plays on the idea of removing the individual subject in order to strive for a collective civil uprising. While ideas of liquidity are present in the form of database information, what is not present are the dangers of liquid surveillance. Liquid surveillance ignores the subject as the central target of control in favor of control via the data the individual generates (Lyons & Bauman, 2013). Throughout, V remains a confounding character, in the same way that the Joker frustrates authorities in *The Dark Knight*, they both maintain a beguiling ambiguity that resists any attempt for surveillant control. *V for Vendetta* alludes to the power of liquidity in a scene where Eve, hiding in plain sight, uses cash to make a purchase rather than any form of electronic method of payment. She eludes spying eyes by becoming invisible electronically and unrecognizable in person, which is made clear when Eve encounters a former colleague

at the shop and is not recognized. The implication of these competing views on government suggests an overall acceptance of protective action, including surveillance, but only up to a point. *V for Vendetta* paints a picture of the possible ramifications of government going beyond protection to acting to maintain power. The relevance of this comparison lies in two questions. First, how much of the government's surveillance capabilities as depicted on film actually already exists? Second, what fantastical enhancements that are seen on screen actually exist? One example that fits with these questions is the overlay of facial recognition software onto CCTV footage, which seemed somehow futuristic a decade ago but is now a reality. If *V for Vendetta* were to be made today, its depiction of the future would have to include this technology along with its implications for society when a fascist government controls its power. Films predictive power can serve to pave the way for the acceptance of technology when it actually arrives.

In comparison, consider the latter two of the trilogy of Batman films where the hero is one who maximizes surveillance technology. The hero uses CCTV, amongst other technologies, to look around Gotham. Early in *The Dark Knight*, he uses it prominently to spy on his love interest, Rachel Dawes. When the Joker arrives, Batman uses a form of facial recognition to map out Joker's features. While it does not seem to help Batman catch Joker, future applications of the technology would likely restrict the movements of known criminals. In *The Dark Knight Rises*, CCTV is a scouting tool. He watches the villain, Bane, physically dismantle the security personnel of the Gotham City Stock Exchange; the black and white image, positioned from above, overlaid with various biometric data measures the movements of the monster. In both instances Batman's butler-cum-assistant Alfred stands over Batman, abetting the hero in his engagement. In fact, Alfred is seemingly always on hand to assist Batman in his various underground compounds, assisting in the gathering and distilling of information.

In summary, surveillance technology was the providence of everybody but superheroes early on. Villains used it against the heroes and governments used it against everybody. Sometimes the government and the villain were one and the same, which put great pressure on the superhero. Then, as time wore on and the villains got more sophisticated, superheroes joined the fray, using technology to enhance their powers. The

implication is that it is acceptable for villains and governments to use surveillance as a matter of course, they are both held in suspicion anyway. Once superheroes use the technology, the level of acceptability is more positive. If a superhero has to use mass surveillance, then what choice do governments have? As the next section will show, such an evolution in tactics drew the government closer to the super-powered action, in the form of the military.

6.2.3 The looming presence of the military

The military has a strong presence in superhero films, either directly or indirectly. The previous section discussed Colonel Stryker from the X Men series, for example. Such a presence reminds the viewer that the state is never far from the fight and the risk of that fight hangs like a Damocles sword, waiting to drop at any moment. As stated earlier in Chapter Three, Robinson and Barrera (2012) pointed out the increase of militarization as a part of apparatus of risk containment, the justification for the increase in surveillance technology and the reduction of privacy. Superheroes confront villains purported to be too powerful for conventional combat, but they do so under the shadow of the armed forces, and presumably the military industrial complex. The military is introduced in a number of ways: as purchaser of a product, as a useful assistant, as the source of the hero, and as the enemy.

One can find the military as a purchaser of a product from private corporations via military contracts. The public-private partnerships can be found in the form of creating a super-soldier, such as in *Spider Man* (2002), where the creation of the villain Green Goblin stems from a chemical enhancement program that goes wrong. The purchase of enhanced weaponry, such as in *Iron Man* (2008), where Tony Stark is very much a weapons supplier to the military, leads to the plot turn that forces Stark to create the device that acts a substitute for his heart, and is the power source for his Iron Man suits. In *Iron Man 2* (2010), the military connection is through a rival tech company that creates robotic soldiers, which are corrupted by the villain Ivan Drago. *Iron Man 3* (2013) features the use of military veterans as guinea pigs for the villain Aldridge Killian, whose regeneration experiments are designed to create another breed of super soldier. The

indirect connection can be found in *Batman Begins* (2005), where the board of Wayne Enterprises takes cautious steps towards military weapons development. Many of the tools at Batman's disposal are all presented as prototypes for the military, rejected because of cost of production or unfulfilled promise.

The military takes an active role in superhero films on occasion. They are a useful assistant in the *Man of Steel* (2013). Superman finds himself in a fight with fellow Krypton native, General Zod, but does not face his enemy alone. The military is directly involved in the combat with Zod's two underlings, all of whom possess the same abilities as Superman. In *Watchmen* (2009), a flashback sequence shows an alternate end to the conflict in Vietnam, where army is in a support capacity to the Comedian and Dr. Manhattan. The climactic battle in *Avengers* (2012) between the team of heroes and Loki and his alien army (who arrived via a worm hole in the sky above New York City) includes a shot of the army arriving, but never really contributing to the combat in any significant way. That is until a fighter jet sends a nuclear missile towards the city. The missile is then co-opted by Iron Man, who manages to escort it through the wormhole, then sending it off to destroy the mother-ship controlling the alien incursion.

Superheroes also come from the ranks of the armed services. In *Green Lantern* (2011), the hero is an air force test pilot who comes across an alien, crashed on Earth, who gives him the lantern and ring that turns the hero into Green Lantern. The military is even more directly involved in *Captain America: First Avenger*. Like in *Spider Man*, the military searches for a chemical enhancement to create a super-soldier. This time, the experiment is done in-house. The result is not a psychotic villain, like in *Spider Man*, but a virtuous moralistic soldier who must earn the leadership rank Captain America comes to take on by the end of the film.

Like in *V in for Vendetta*, there are instances where the government/military are the villains, if indirectly. In *Hulk*, the hero is pursued mercilessly by General Ross, at least until the emergence of Hulk's true enemy. The *Incredible Hulk* features the hero in a constant state of anxiety, as he attempts to remain underground, only to be found out by General Ross (once again), and pursued from Brazil back to the United States. Once again, the military creates a super soldier, but this time the ambitions of the soldier turn him into the uncontrollable Abomination, a villain equally as powerful as Hulk. The

military turns from villain to supportive assistant to the hero as they lose control of Abomination.

In summary, the presence of the military in superhero films is significant because it represents the perception of a heightened level of risk that society is facing. Superheroes and villains are either procuring equipment, building equipment, or borrowing equipment from the military. The reverse is also true, as superheroes are, at times, the suppliers of military hardware. The military can also take an active role, either engaging in combat or supplying the soldier that becomes the superhero/villain.

6.2.4 Out of time, out of place

Many superhero films are set in some form of the present. As such, the technology in the films is that which does, or theoretically could exist in the present. The future is about projection because it can not be said what technology will or will not exist; one can only speculate. The past is a different matter. It is made concrete by what it leaves behind. Re-creations on film can only bring the past back to the present in some artificial fashion. Film and television are littered with examples, such as *Pride & Prejudice* and *Mad Men*. In these examples there are instances where the present is projected onto the past, a sort of revisionism. This occurs when elements of the present appear as natural in recreations of the past where it simply could not possibly exist. If film is a mirror, then the image the audience sees is warped and distorted. Such revisionism, a sort of reverse engineering, is a technique of normalization.

This idea of normalization applies to how technology has been depicted in recent superhero films, CCTV cameras and biometrics technology exists today, therefore it must have existed in some, perhaps lesser, form in the past. Thus, CCTV capabilities can appear in scenes set in the 1940s and high resolution MRI quality images of a surgically altered body can be available in 1979. This a small point to make, but it is impactful. It is in these small details that ideology can be baked into the media product, swallowed by the audience, its flavour lost in the sweetness of the film being consumed.

Some films attempt to portray how technology is used in a fashion that matches the time they are set. Others blur the line, bringing to the screen cutting edge technology

that seems to suggest the future has arrived; tech-driven heroes like Batman and Iron Man lead the way in this category. While a period film such as *The Legend of Zorro* zeroes in on non-technological methods, there is no attempt to implant a modern technology into a 19th century setting. It would be ridiculous to try. As a result, the *dissolved panopticon* only appears in a very limited form. Likewise, *Watchman* portrays 1985 as it generally existed, with a rapidly expanding *old media* via satellite television and the budding 24 hour-7 days a week news channel, and closed circuit television visible in police interrogation rooms. Meanwhile, the three former films attempt to change the past by superimposing technology into time periods where the technology did not exist. If the mise en scène was designed to be fantastical this would not be problematic, but because superhero films nearly always emphasize the realism of their settings, shoehorning technology into where it does not belong is a jarring juxtaposition of time and technology. Within this study there are three films in particular where surveillance technology is temporally out of place: *Captain America: First Avenger*, *Superman Returns*, and *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*.

6.2.4(1) *Captain America: First Avenger*

Captain America: First Avenger is a prime example of how surveillance is becoming normalized in film through historical revisionism. The film is set largely in the 1940s during World War II. It is an origin story for Steve Rogers, aka Captain America (played by Chris Evans). Rogers starts as an undersized but ambitious army hopeful who is recruited to be the test subject of a secret United States military project to create super-soldiers. The result is a bigger, stronger, faster all-American hero, complete with blonde hair and blue eyes, who is sent to Europe to support the troops and help defeat the Nazis. Meanwhile, the film's antagonist, Red Skull (played by Hugo Weaving), a high ranking Nazi officer, has broken away from Hitler's army to create the secretive group called Hydra. Using highly advanced technology and an alien power source, Red Skull has world domination, at the expense of both the Allies and Axis powers. Captain America is sent to thwart Red Skull and crush Hydra where it begins.

The 1940s featured many Solid Technology tools of surveillance. Old media (such as newspapers, magazines and radio) and institutional surveillance (which are the eyes of any bureaucracy) were all prevalent at that time. Therefore, the presence of these tools in the film is unsurprising. However, the same can not be said for small video cameras and closed circuit television. Given that the television medium was a rudimentary technology in the 1930s (broadcast television began after WWII), it is peculiar that closed circuit television should be used in a such a prominent fashion. The particular scene which best exemplifies the out-of-place normality of CCTVs is at the point where the titular hero and a small group of soldiers are storming the base of Red Skull and his Hydra group, seeking to take Red Skull down. In the set piece, unambiguous lingering shots of small overhead cameras are intercut with images of Red Skull viewing a small bank of sepia toned television monitors as Captain America advances through the base. Throughout the film, the villain is portrayed as technologically advanced, employing brilliant minds in the fashion the Nazis did to experiment and innovate. However, the use of CCTV cameras in a time that is out of place suggests a revisionist history. Such images suggest that if CCTV cameras have been around for 70 years, then video surveillance should be perceived as normal, even interpreted as a sort of legacy technology grandfathered through the 20th century into today.

Calling attention to seemingly inconsequential images is important because of the how such images affects how society's sense of history. By revising history in such a way it the impression is that CCTV was prevalent well before it actually was. If it had existed, CCTV would have featured large bulky cameras, rather than the shoebox-sized cameras littering Hydra's base. The revision of history to promote a particular idea harkens back to Barthes' (1983) point about naturalizing myths into facts. Changing history makes whatever it is that is being promoted seem natural. Invoking Nazi imagery and connecting it to modern surveillance technology suggests that it could be distasteful to use. A villain resorting to such technology presents it in a negative light, but also hints at its quality of necessity to ensure security, which Captain America's future friends, the Avengers, are all too willing to accept as true.

6.2.4(2) *Superman Returns*

Superman Returns, from 2006, is a sequel to 1980's *Superman II*. Two other sequel films released in the 1980s are ignored in this postmodern take on the Man of Steel. Instead, the audience is informed, via the film's dialogue, that the Superman/Clark Kent (played by Brandon Routh) has been away for a few years, presumably beginning in the 1980s, yet the technological jump is out of sync, placing modern technology in a setting that should be twenty years earlier. When Superman returns, he finds that Lois Lane (Kate Bosworth) still works for the *Daily Planet* newspaper, except now she has a child under the age of 10. Meanwhile, long time arch enemy Lex Luther (Kevin Spacey) is out of prison and devising a new scheme to rule the world. Given that *Superman II* was released in 1980, and Lois Lane appears to be in her twenties, and her son not yet 10 years old, the longest that Superman could have been gone is a decade, putting his return to Metropolis in the 1990s. What Kent comes back to is much different on screen technologically than what he left behind, and what the early 1990s looked like. For instance, the offices of the *Daily Planet* are bedecked in television monitors broadcasting the 24-hour news cycle. This in itself is not so unusual as CNN did already exist in the early 90s. However, the flat panel television screens the channel is shown on did not exist until the 2000s. In addition, the use of up-to-date mobile phones attempts to make the *mise en scène* feel contemporary, but the timeline suggests that phones should have just moved beyond the brick shaped models of the 1980s.

There is technology that should not be there, but then there is also the surveillance technology that is missing. Taking it as is that the setting is supposed to be in the 2000s, there is a return of the alien Superman after some years of absence, the attempt at continent creation by Lex Luther, it would be expected that governments and their militaries would have eyes turned towards the eccentric villain, yet there was neither a military or intelligence presence to speak of. In a period of time marked by fear and risk, such monumental events would surely send the surveillance apparatus into overdrive. In comparison, the rebooted Superman film, *Man of Steel* (2013), is very militarized, and does not avoid the Liquid Technology of the *dissolved panopticon*. Most importantly, the

latter film does not misrepresent the available technology for the time period through over-embellishment or omission.

6.2.4(3) *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*

A third example can be found in the first solo Wolverine film, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009). The film follows the early years of the hero Wolverine (played by Hugh Jackman), and his brother Victor (played by Liev Schreiber), from childhood in the 1800s all the way to the Vietnam War. They both possess animalistic mutations to compliment a further mutation that gives them an ability to heal, which also allows them to age very slowly. As the film unfolds, the two brothers encounter Colonel William Stryker (played by Danny Huston), the special operations military man who was also the nemesis of the X-Men team in *X2*. This time, Wolverine and Creed work with Stryker and his team of mutants (a precursor to the X-Men) to complete missions until Stryker takes the team to edge of ethical reason. Wolverine leaves the group and disappears. The film fast forwards to the 1970s, where Stryker, his team disbanded, tracks Wolverine down in the mountains of Canada. Meanwhile, Creed is seeking revenge to eliminate former members and exact revenge on Wolverine for walking away from the group. Stryker proposes Wolverine undergo an experiment that would allow Wolverine to defeat Creed.

The resulting experiment is the addition of adamantium metal (which is fictional), a near indestructible metal alloy, which is grafted to Wolverine's skeleton, resulting in the metallic claws that the character is famous for brandishing. At this point in the film, the level of technological surveillance has been minimal. However, the surgical procedure introduces an advanced medical biometrics that is not in keeping with the times. Keeping in mind the time is supposed to be the late 1970s, the audience sees an MRI quality image of the liquefied metal being injected into Wolverine's body, in addition to digital readouts that monitor the character's vital signs displayed using white lettering with smooth lines, rather than the red LED block numbering one would expect of the time period. The act of surveillance in this instance is not substantial to the story, in that hero is not about to catch a villain or prevent some catastrophic event, but it does

normalize a level of sophistication within recognizable technology that just did not exist at the time. Audience members who are old enough may recognize the misleading representation and dismiss it as lazy film-making or a liberty taken to make visual effect more impactful. Younger viewers may see this as well, or they might see the misrepresentation as an actual representation of history, making the advanced technology of today feel more natural.

6.2.5 Summary

One must be mindful to call attention to problems that arise in fictional tales that wish to invoke non-fictional times and places. This section has attempted to bring to light a few examples of historical revisionism regarding surveillance technology. *Captain America: First Avenger*, *Superman Returns*, and *X Men Origins: Wolverine* all take historical liberties with surveillance technology that leave the impression they existed in the past, thereby suggesting that it is only natural to find it everywhere in the present. Without knowing their intent, filmmakers have engaged in the normalization of surveillance technology through non linear means. Superhero films have sought to represent the present reality realistically and have plausibly projected what technology could be like in the future. Continuing these practices is likely to further enhance the technological aspects of the *dissolved panopticon* in the future. However, in some cases, the noble desire to stay realistic to the present on film has been misplaced when looking back at the past.

In the next section, the focus shifts to the *dissolved panopticon* on film. It was not presented better, or more frequently, than in Christopher Nolan's 2008 epic *The Dark Knight*.

6.3 *The Panopticon Dissolves on Film: The Dark Knight*

This section focuses the findings of the *dissolved panopticon* on a single film, *The Dark Knight*. The discussion of the film will begin with a brief explanation of why this

film was singled out. Next, the discussion shifts to an application of the findings to the film to illustrate how the *dissolved panopticon* can appear on film.

6.3.1 Introduction- The Opening Credits

The Dark Knight is the touchstone film that brings the *dissolved panopticon* to life on-screen. The 2008 film is the second of a trilogy of films from director Christopher Nolan, starring Christian Bale as Batman and the late Heath Ledger in his Academy Award winning role as the Joker. The film focuses on themes of terror and power and the state's inability to wrestle power in Gotham City from the criminal underworld and the authorities, led by Lieutenant Jim Gordon (played by Gary Oldman) and District Attorney, Harvey Dent (played by Arron Eckhart). It is an escalation film, where the threat level is heightened at every turn. As a result, the reliance on a masked vigilante who can, and does, operate outside the law becomes ever greater. In order to achieve order, surveillance becomes an essential method, utilizing many of the technological tools on hand. Organized crime is seen to be constantly a step ahead of the authorities thanks to rife corruption within the legal system. More importantly, the film stands as a mirror reflecting the United States, and to a lesser extent the rest of the Western world. It is an image of compromised ethics, violated civil rights, and the push-pull of a near-psychotic pursuit of security and chaos.

The viewer is receiving a barrage of surveillance messaging in *The Dark Knight*. The film contains 100 instances (the most in the study) where the panopticon is being dissolved over the course of its 152 minute run time - one instance every 91 seconds. The frequency of instances is a radical increase over the trilogy's first film, *Batman Begins*. That film had more than half as many instances (44) occurring with more than double the time between each instance (once every 3mins -12sec)). Within the *dissolved panopticon*, the film had the most instances of *telecommunications* based surveillance, and the second most total instances that fall under the Liquid Technology variable (42). While Non Technology waned across the study period, *The Dark Knight* had the fourth most instances (20). Finally, the *resistance* variable was dominated by two films, *V for Vendetta* (28) and *The Dark Knight* (19), while only three other films reached double

digits, with total higher than 11. What follows is a breakdown of how *The Dark Knight* dissolved the panopticon.

6.3.2 Foreshadowing the dissolution of the panopticon.

The dissolution of Foucault's panopticon into a fluid form occurs throughout the entire length of the film. As presented in the introduction of this thesis, the first scene that Batman appears in establishes him as the watchman of Gotham City. However, the Joker's first scene foreshadows an aptitude for resistance. Batman's attempts to exercise power over Joker are continuously rebuffed. As Batman seeks to gain the upper hand by utilizing each type of surveillance at his disposal, Joker counters with a move that undercuts the hero's advantage. He blurs his biometrics indicators, obscures his consumer patterns, and twists old media to his purposes. This results in both Batman and the police employing ever more sophisticated types of surveillance tactics and technologies. Finally, with chaos still persisting, Batman reaches for the fully dissolved panopticon, using advanced biometrics for fingerprint analysis and a telecommunications-based sonar system, closed circuit televisions, and an energized watchful eye. The potential consequences of harnessing such a technological collective raises questions about how much liberty society is willing to cede in order to prevent the spread of terrorism. While power is often in the hands of controlling authorities and elites, the Joker shows that Foucault's panopticon can indeed be controlled by anyone. This is particularly evident in the scenes where Joker aggressively rejects docility while furthering his own agenda by using the powers of telecommunications and the media against authoritative power.

6.3.3 The dulling of the panopticon's sharp edge.

The Joker begins the panoptic melt down immediately after the opening credits. He is picked up by his cohorts on a non descript city street to rob a bank wearing a clown mask, the same as the others in the vehicle, and the rest of the team already infiltrating the bank. The mask Joker wears covers his already painted face, resisting the *watchtower* sub-variable; not even his accomplices are aware of who he is. Bullets fly, and cohorts

begin systematically killing each other, fulfilling Joker's plan. The bank manager, informing the remaining robbers that the bank houses mob money, laments the changing of the times. The Joker un.masks saying, "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stranger". He represents an open rebellion against panopticism. While he is under the eye of surveillance, controlling his behavior, Joker shows a blatant disregard for the powers that be, whether they be the state or organized crime. He is openly challenging the order to become a docile body. This is emphasized by photography taken from CCTV cameras featuring his grinning visage.

The whole of Gotham becomes a panopticon, where the criminals have no idea if Batman is watching, and they must commit to self-control, or face violent consequences. As described in the opening of Chapter One, Batman reinforces his role as watcher and guardian. The presence of Scarecrow, a central criminal figure from *Batman Begins*, early on notifies the viewer that the Joker will be something worse. Scarecrow stoked fear, Joker justifies it.

Batman, now unmasked as Bruce Wayne, is in his bunker, in front of a bank of monitors showing the news (old media), and video surveillance (CCTV) of District Attorney, Harvey Dent (played by Aaron Eckhart), with Wayne's childhood friend, the prosecutor, Rachel Dawes (played by Maggie Gyllenhaal). Wayne is engaged in two forms of surveillance, gathering information, while he himself rejects it, avoiding the eyes of the medical establishment (a form of institutional surveillance) by self medicating his wounds. Throughout the early stages of the film, it is established that Wayne remains outside of the panoptic eye while using advanced Solid Technology as a tool to fulfill his role of watcher. What is clear is that the police can not control crime on their own, despite their militarization. The hint of Batman's presence is enough to do what the police can not, thus leaving crime control to private interests, and civil rights open for abuse. Privatized prisons and bankrupt police forces in the United States are a real-world reminder of law enforcement's struggle to cope.

Soon after, the police move to raid a second mob-controlled bank, but find the vault empty. What currency is left is the irradiated bills the police used to track the mob's money trail. While the raid occurred, the mob accountant, known as Lau (played by Chin Han), explains to his clients, via video conference, that he took their money for safe

keeping, escaping to his native Hong Kong, outside the jurisdiction of the Gotham police by flying to Hong Kong. It just so happened that Lau was in Gotham to do business with Wayne Enterprises, Bruce Wayne's company. Enter the Joker. He sees through the panoptic capabilities and shortcomings of the authorities along with Batman's ability to move through them. "The Batman has no jurisdiction." says Joker, pointing to the limitations of Solid Technology's *institutional surveillance*. His cynicism concerning a system paralyzed by its own adherence to rules (such as those governing extradition) sits beside the freedom of private interest. Lau's escape speaks to the fluidity that capital enjoys. It is a freedom to move through borders at will which the state cannot match. In economics, the threat of flight is how capital keeps states providing the environment for capital to grow ever larger profits without the weight of contributing to the tax base. Developing nations are particularly vulnerable to the threat of lost investment and the employment it brings. However, in this instance, Gotham has its answer to the problem of capital flight and state paralysis - the billionaire Bruce Wayne/Batman.

Up to this point, it has become clear that conventional methods of crime control are weak. The criminals are known to police, but even sophisticated methods of surveillance are undone by corruption, or the legislation that ties the hands of the authorities to procedures such as due process. What is implied is that the city is on the edge of being swamped, the crisis of lawful authority on the brink to giving way to mob rule.

6.3.4 Extraordinary rendition and the introduction of Liquid Technology

It is in Hong Kong where the initial use of telecommunications-as-sonar is introduced as a new surveillance tool. Here is a non-state actor (Batman) engaging in a level of surveillance that obliterates borders on a level with the Central Intelligence Agency or MI5. Presumably, such an act of surveillance against the citizenry by a foreign entity would be heavily frowned upon in the United States (or Canada). In the process of extracting Lau, Batman tracks him with the sonar, disrupts the CCTV cameras (an act of *resistance*, this time by the hero) of Lau's security team, creating confusion and chaos. The result is a spectacular act of extraordinary rendition, with Batman taking Lau from

Hong Kong via a cargo plane that doesn't touch the ground ending with Lau on the steps of GCPD in Gotham. As mentioned by film theorist, Douglas Kellner (2010), this is an instance in the film where the film-makers are critiquing the policies of the Bush Administration. For Kellner, the film represents "a critical allegory about the corruption, violence, and nihilism of the Bush-Cheney era" (2010, 9). He points to the film's depiction of a corrupt body politic and paralyzed legal system as the drivers that send Batman over to the "dark side" (2010, 11), just as Bush Administration did with its practice of extraordinary renditions and the escalation of the mass surveillance in the name of counter-terrorism (2010).

Just as the *Wall Street Journal* newspaper, and specifically media mogul, Rupert Murdoch, openly justified Bush's actions (2010), so too does Harvey Dent, only in the fictional instance, *old media* (a solid technology) is a television news report. The presence of *old media* indicates how the tool is manipulated to inform or omit information. Dent's response to reporters' questions, denying knowledge of how Lau came to land on the GCPD doorstep, perpetuates the authoritative attitude that it does not matter *how* a criminal is brought to justice, just that they *were* brought at all.

In response, Joker, his analysis of Batman's jurisdictional reach proven correct, also takes to the media, bending it to his will, though not to reassure the public of their safety. He achieves his end via a video he supplies to Gotham's prominent television newscast featuring a terrifying exchange with a do-gooder-hostage and even more ominous threat. Soon, Joker moves from stupidly brave citizens to state actors: Gotham's police commissioner, a judge presiding over the mass prosecution of the mob Dent is prosecuting, and Dent himself. Joker succeeds in killing the commissioner and the judge, sending law enforcement into chaos. The subversion of the *biometrics* sub-variable of Liquid Technology, biometrics, via fingerprinting, being the oldest form of liquid surveillance, further pushes Batman towards a total surveillance solution.

6.3.5 *Wire tapping and resistance*

The following scene shows Batman on a rooftop, tapping into the telephone communications of the entire city in real time, the city itself just as murky as Batman's

prospects of capturing Joker without a technological aide. As was shown in Figure 5.3, the shift was under way to an intensified technological reliance for surveillance. Monitoring an urban area, particularly a very large urban area has not been as efficient using solely non technological means for state authorities, police officers walking a neighborhood beat for example, for some time now. Technology has reduced time and space, and surveillance has come to rely on cutting those both down. The murkiness of the skyline, and Batman's use of technology signified that he knows the old manner of guarding the city, as just a watchtower figure is no longer sufficient. The most frightening of villains have become too sophisticated at resistance and evasion. Joker shows his skill level by manipulating the telecommunications network to direct Batman to where more of his victims are located. It is there that the cat and mouse game of surveillance and resistance plays out. It is through telecommunications that an individual can most readily be spied on, his/her conversations intercepted by a third party, or tracked via phone records and cellular phone towers. Joker uses Batman's eavesdropping ability to enhance his own plans. Joker's resistance comes in the form of making a hindering technique an asset. He makes the watcher (Batman) see exactly what he wants the watcher to see. As the scene continues, Joker uses *old media* to lay the ground work for his next action, while Batman increases his level of sophistication with Liquid Technology.

6.3.6 The introduction of complex biometrics, and old fashioned violence

Having removed bullet fragments from a wall where Joker had led him to, Batman engages in complex biometrics detection to extract fingerprints from the shattered bullet. Fingerprints are the oldest form of biometrics and are still an important method of detection. This time, identifying the owner would allow Batman to stop a potential assassination. Having taken the fragments back to his hideaway (rather than entering them as police evidence), he reverse-engineers images of a fragmented bullet, cross checks data bases containing information on known criminals, and determines where Joker will make his next move. However, Joker uses this as misdirection. During the public service for the fallen police commissioner, Joker uses his ambiguity, dressing as a member of the rifle-toting police honour guard, to attempt to assassinate the mayor,

which instead fells Gordon. Joker takes his shot after luring Batman (who travels in the day as Bruce Wayne) to a nearby building and setting him up to be killed by police sharpshooters. In this instance, both characters have removed their costumes, Joker without his makeup, Batman without his mask, yet it is Joker who is more dangerous because he is able to move freely, like a ghost, while Batman, as the high profile quasi celebrity, Bruce Wayne, can not risk having his identity revealed. It is the ghost-like nature of Joker, and other real life terrorists, that makes lone wolf terrorism such a destabilizing force. They can move amongst a populace, undetected, and cause enormous damage. This is true of Timothy McVeigh in Oklahoma City in 1995 and Anders Breivik in Oslo in 2011. What binds Joker, McVeigh, and Breivik is that they are white males. Their position in society is dominant – the long-running standard that feminist and racial equality advocates have sought to change – and are the least likely to be subject to any scrutiny. On the other hand, non-white males are considered a much larger threat, whether they have ties to the inner-city or a country where Islam is the major religion. The lone-wolf nature of McVeigh’s and Breivik’s attacks is a key parallel to Joker’s assassination attempt. Nobody saw it coming. Fear was struck and the sense of stability was shattered.

At this point in the film, Batman, unhinged by Gordon’s possible demise, still has not totally abandoned a Non Technological approach. Batman finds the mafia boss, Maroni (played by Eric Roberts), and uses aggressive tactics to gain information, including dropping Maroni from a balcony in an act of brutality that the police could not legally carry out. However, Batman places himself outside of the boundaries of the law, with tacit state approval granted by the virtue of shining the Bat signal off of police headquarters. It is a small example of the dangers that are posed if vigilantes are allowed free-reign, or worse, if police services were ever privatized. The physical violence Batman carries out is done with impunity in the name of maintaining or restoring order. If physical violence is the immediate response to a crisis situation, it follows that violating civil rights, specifically a right to privacy, does not warrant a second thought, justified as a sacrifice for ensuring safety and security. What inevitably follows is an escalation of measures.

6.3.7 Catching the Joker, but not identifying him

In order to flush out the Joker, Dent uses the old media to set a trap by claiming he is Batman. Joker responds in spectacular fashion; a gun battle on the streets of the city using automatic pistols and a bazooka to get to the armored truck carrying the now arrested Dent. Batman, still a watchtower figure, arrives on the scene. The conclusion of the scene finds Gordon, thought to be killed preventing an assassination, very much alive, having been kept out of the Joker's watchful eye, arresting the Joker. It is in jail, with the mayor at Gordon's side, that the full extent of Joker's resistance to surveillance is fully exposed.

Mayor: Whadda we got?

Gordon: Nothing. No matches on prints, DNA, dental. Clothing is custom. No labels. Nothing in his pockets but knives and lint. No name. No other alias.... (The Dark Knight,2010)

The implication is that Joker is a terrorist in full nightmare form: no data regarding is person, neither government records or biometrics and no records regarding his consumer tendencies. He is an unidentifiable threat with nothing to lose. Surveillance is about gathering information and maintaining control in two ways. First, overtly through the panoptic definition of governmentality, whereby the surveilled comes to control their own behavior as a matter of natural course (Foucault, 1995[1975]). This is done under eyes that may or may not be watching. Second, through covert means, by disguising that watchfulness in the warm blanket of consumerism. Control of the self comes from an individual conforming to a never-ending do-it-yourself self improvement project built on maintaining a certain lifestyle and meeting certain material expectations (Bauman, 2012[2000]). The pressure to renovate a home, or purchase the latest mobile phone, or changing one's behavior to meet the latest fashion, such as a diet or self-improvement method all constitute a form of control through consumption (2012[2000]). So, when hard records, such as government forms or official documents, or soft records, such as consumer details and personal tendencies tracked by brand name loyalties and 'like' button presses, are not available, or non existent, there is a sense of powerlessness.

The foreboding sense is that even the sharp end of panoptic stick will not be enough to ease the sense of dread (Bauman & Lyons, 2013).

The very next scene confirms how powerless the authorities are. Dent has disappeared and Gordon, then Batman, take their turns at interrogating Joker. Batman becomes physical when Joker attempts to subvert him. Then, Joker informs Batman that not only does he have Dent, he also has Dawes and he plans to kill one of them. The physicality increases, much like corporal punishment, or a captive being beaten by captors. Yet, Joker relishes it. The scene ends with a choice about who to save. In this instance, control of the mind and body has not been successful, leaving the power with the deviant. The Joker's reaction provides some fodder for Foucault's insight about the violence of the body versus of the violence of the mind. Foucault suggests that a person can absorb or mentally block out a certain level of physical punishment, but violence of the mind is much more difficult to defend against, and therefore a far more effective model for asserting control (1995[1975]). In the scene, Batman is rendered powerless because his physical force is neutralized by Joker's response to it.

6.3.8 Subverting Liquid and Solid Technology

The Joker then makes his escape by subverting Liquid Technology. He does so by using a mobile phone connected to an explosive device hidden in the stomach of one of his captured henchmen. Joker literally phones in his own escape after overpowering a police officer and demanding his phone call. The wired telephone is obliterated, along with anybody unlucky enough to be near it, and there is no useful data to trace as to where the call came from, as it comes from a police phone. In this instance, Joker not possessing his own mobile phone works in his favour. Not owning a mobile phone is increasingly difficult considering how much activity, consumer or otherwise, is directed through it. One benefit of not owning a mobile phone is that the individual becomes much less traceable due to the lack of information that mobiles phones emit ranging from cellular signal activity to global positioning system tracking and self – reported details put out to social media.

Old media is turned from information conduit to a source of spectacle and panic in a subversion of Solid Technology. A Wayne Enterprises accountant is turned from Batman-truth-teller to target on live television. Joker threatens to blow up a hospital if the accountant is not killed. Batman responds by accessing police and hospital databases to find out which police officer guarding the accountant is a risk. Solid Technology is thus subverted a second time, this time by a form of Liquid Technology. But the accountant's ordeal is not over yet. Batman, as Bruce Wayne and driving around in search of the vehicle containing the accountant and his escorts, finds them in time to get in between the police truck and a citizen bent on colliding with it in order to kill the accountant and prevent the hospital explosion.

What emerges is the whole being greater than the sum of its part. Solid Technology is prominent and important, but corruptible. Liquid Technology is more difficult to tamper with, but the potential consequences of manipulation can be even more explosive. However, when one form of technology supports the other, the totalizing effect can restore order. With that said, Non Technology can not be discounted. The situation involving the accountant is brought to a close in part because Batman was still performing as a watchtower figure. While accessing the databases, Batman drove around, looking for trouble, found it, and then diffused it. In this moment, as small as it is, the story of the *dissolved panopticon* comes together. Just as the quantitative data suggests that surveillance has increased as a whole, the moment Solid Technology, Liquid Technology, and Non Technology act in cohesion is brought to bear. Television news (specifically Joker's manipulating of it) puts the accountant in the spotlight. Batman shows how Liquid Technology can be utilized to narrow the focus onto the accountant's most likely would-be assassin by accessing database records and telecommunications signals. The accountant is ultimately saved from a second assassin seeking to commit murder by purposely crashing his truck into the police vehicle the accountant is riding in by the watchful Batman, as Bruce Wayne. In this moment, Non Technology's relevance is reinforced. Wayne is both a watchtower figure spying the would-be assassin and the participant observer who intercepts the assassin with his own civilian vehicle, feigning ignorance to the police about his knowledge of the situation and keeping his double identity as Batman in tact.

6.3.9 *The dissolved panopticon- the only card left to play*

At this point, the full *dissolved panopticon* is presented as the only solution to stopping Joker. The hospital is blown up, and hostages have been taken. Batman's secret project, alluded to on two occasions in the film, is revealed to be a massively up-scaled version of the sonar system Fox had created for the Hong Kong extraction. This time, however, the technology uses the cellular phones signals from the entire city not to map out or conjure a subject from data, but to present a window on the city to find an actual subject in the flesh. While the ramifications of such invasive and all-seeing technology is not lost on Fox:

Batman: Beautiful, isn't it?

Fox: Beautiful, unethical, dangerous.... This is wrong.

Batman: I've got to find this man Lucius....

Fox: ...Spying on 30 million people isn't a part of my job description. (Roven, 2008, 1:55:46)

Yet, he goes along with it, just the one time only. As evening falls, Batman is on the way to the scene. When the Joker says to the ferry passengers, "Tonight you're all going to be a part of a social experiment" it is not only the people trapped on the ferries who are part of it but society as a whole. The *dissolved panopticon* is positioned to be the central tool to prevent catastrophe. While Fox feels discomfort over what he has been asked to do, there is the question of how the public feels when the egregious violation of privacy is weighed against the threat of terrorism. Unfortunately, the film does not address the general public's reaction, having left Fox to speak for the whole city.

The scene cuts from the ferries to Fox in front of the sonar screens triangulating the Joker's position, Batman on the streets, listening in. As a final verification that human eyes or data alone are not enough, Batman tells Gordon, ready to storm the Joker's location, that with the Joker "it's not that simple". Gordon has snipers with visuals on the Joker's henchmen, but Batman convinces Gordon to allow him, using the sonar, to act first. The understanding is that simple observation is open to deception and misinformation. The Joker's skill at misdirection is confirmed as Batman discovers that the perceived henchmen are the hostages, and vice versa. The Liquid Technology element of the *dissolved panopticon* proves to be the important tool in stopping the Joker. Fox

feeds Batman real time sonar created visuals that literally lead Batman through a multi-level maze of enemies and swat team members right to Joker's location where the final battle plays out. As Joker's plan fizzles, Batman gains the upper hand, leaving him dangling upside down, but alive. Joker then prods the hero, informing him of Harvey Dent's descent into madness, the trauma of his injuries combined with Rachel Dawes' death having turned his mind.

Joker: You didn't think I'd risk losing the battle for Gotham's soul in a fist fight with you? No, you need an ace in the hole.... I took Gotham's White Knight and brought him down to our level. It wasn't hard. See, madness, as you know, is like gravity. All it takes is a little push. (Roven, 2008, 2:14:34)

The Joker laughs manically, for Batman's victory was pyrrhic. Even though Joker was captured, his reign of terror at an end, he had managed to shatter Gotham City's most noble virtues. From the sociological perspective, the Joker's capture was dependent upon the activation of a mass surveillance system that violated the civil rights of the entire city. In doing so, there is some insight into what power will do when pushed hard enough to act. Robinson and Barrera (2012) warned of a neo-fascist rise just over the horizon if proper consideration was not given to the consequences of the state having easy access to our every move. The allegory of *The Dark Knight* is that the state will freely deploy the surveillance net and will not shy away from enlisting private interests to assist in it. Through persistent resistance to conventional means, Joker broke down the traditional methods of surveillance to such an extent that the only method left was a dangerous surveillance system. All it took was one terrorist creating chaos, realizing risk and making good on his threat to the security of the populace, to push an authority figure into the madness of a total surveillance state. The joke is that such a state is not foolproof either.

6.3.10 The dissolved panopticon - the surveillance we need?

Harvey Dent, now transformed into the villain Two Face (half normal, half disfigured, uses a coin flip to determine his courses of action), is the final piece to sort out in *The Dark Knight*. Pushed over the edge of sanity by Joker, Dent focuses on Non-Technological methods to carry out his revenge on Batman and Commissioner Gordon for their part in the death of Rachel Dawes. Along the way, he confronts police officers

and mob bosses alike, determining their fate by the toss of a coin. Gordon tells the audience that Dent has killed five people, including two police officers.

The final set piece features Dent, Gordon, and Gordon's family (kidnapped by the same police officer who delivered Rachel to Joker). Dent threatens to kill Gordon's family to exact his revenge. Before Dent can act, Batman arrives on the scene, presumably immediately after capturing Joker. Just as in the first scene Batman appears in (which also opened Chapter One of this thesis), there is no indication how Batman knows where to find Gordon. In the past, such an unexplained appearance from the superhero could have been chalked up to some innate capability, behind the scenes sleuthing, or just plain luck. In this instance, however, the sonar system lurks in the background. There is a creeping sense of the panoptic at work, as Batman now has the tools to find anyone anywhere.

After failing to convince Dent to lay down his arms, a series of life threatening coin flips results in a brief confrontation and a long fall for both Dent and Batman; Dent dies while Batman picks himself up, cognizant of the symbolism at work. The White Knight, the symbol of justice in its most noble form had been utterly destroyed. The Dark Knight, the symbol of justice at all cost, was left battered but alive. Despite all of Batman's capabilities, the Joker won the day by breaking down Dent, as Gotham's chief prosecutor, the symbol of institutional power in the city, is left to explain what happened. What it means for society at large, and for the *dissolved panopticon* in particular, is that Non-Technological surveillance is diminished, while Liquid and Solid Technology are the types of surveillance that are now relied on. Just as Gordon and Batman pledge to keep up the illusion that Dent died in a noble fashion, the lingering eyes of the *dissolved panopticon* can not be thought of as anything other than guarding against insecurity. Even though the sonar system is revealed to feature a self destruct function, which ultimately destroys the machine and affirms Lucius Fox's faith in Batman, the psychological line has been crossed.

In the larger society off screen, in the wake of the World Trade Center attacks, the Patriot Act in the United States, and the Anti Terrorism Act in Canada were brought about, expanding the security and surveillance powers of each government. Edward Snowden exposed shocking revelations regarding the United States National Security

Agency's digital surveillance practices, the PRISM program, and the intelligence partnerships in the Five Eyes program between the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. These are all indicators of terrorism bringing down a society to a level of unfreedom, where true privacy is scant. In fact, such suspicion is now aimed towards allies as much as at foes, with nothing that western society holds dear- freedom of expression, liberty and responsibility, amongst other values- left in the hands of certainty (Bauman, et, 2014).

At the same time, the intensification of surveillance speaks to the connection of security and consumerism. As western society has come to be more individualized, perhaps less secular, we have become more insecure. Bauman notes that we have never been more fearful even though we have never been more secure (Daems & Robert, 2007). Individuals want to be free to be entertained instantaneously, becoming that ultimate docile body of late modernity, the consumer. However, any romanticism about consumer culture addressing the needs and aspirations of individuals is misguided (Pupavac, 2010). The price of consumerism is the sacrifice of the freedom to be unseen, uncluttered, and unfettered by the feeling that material satisfaction in everyday life is merely an oasis in the desert, which serves to drive the individual deeper into the vast emptiness, the security of quenched thirst frustratingly unmet. All it needed was a little push.

In the final line of the film, Gordon explains to his son why Batman must flee from the law bearing the blame for Dent's actions. In doing so, he confirms Batman's status as a "guardian, a watchful protector...", juxtaposing Dent's moral status, fragile and corruptible, to Batman's superhero superiority. Gordon reinforces Batman's actions as justified within the context of the circumstances presented within the film. In reality, superheroes do not exist in a tangible way, but the manner by which they operate is coming into line with how the powerful maintain their power. Superheroes are meant to save the day, which really means they are meant to maintain the status quo and restore order when the status quo is challenged. The ability of the superhero to operate outside of the law bares a striking resemblance to how those in the upper class level are able avoid the full force of the law compared to those in lesser class positions. There were no prosecutions stemming from the 2008 financial collapse despite the widespread knowledge of reckless behavior by Wall Street financiers and their counterparts

throughout Europe. The extraordinary case of the “Affluenza” teen, Ethan Couch, revealed the level of contempt for the law wealth can generate (Kasperkevic, 2016). The superhero, often a person of considerable means, has an interest in maintaining order as it stands. Tony Stark and Bruce Wayne would find the resources that pay for the tools of their superheroism greatly reduced if the status quo were not restored.

Chapter Seven will focus on a discussion of the results. The discussion will center on the themes that emerged from the study, along with a film-based discussion of how the *dissolved panopticon* fully emerged on screen.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Bruce Wayne: That bandit in the forest in Burma, did you catch him?

Alfred: Yes.

Bruce: How?

Alfred: We burned the forest down. (Roven, 2008, 1:39:08)

7.1 Introduction

At the beginning of the thesis, the first scene that introduces Batman in *The Dark Knight* was described. The scene began with unease in the Gotham City Police Department and on the streets. Soon-to-be-Commissioner Gordon had a light in the sky, the signal of the bat. During a meeting of criminal elements, vigilante bat men interrupted the conversation, looking to take down the hoodlums. Then the actual Batman arrived on the scene, escalated the violence, then shut down the chaos, subduing criminals and vigilantes alike. He exited the scene, claiming a legitimacy the vigilantes could not, born out of a sense of professionalism. The question that arose from the scene was how did Batman know the location of the meeting? If it was through his role as a watchtower figure, that role did not prove sufficient enough when the film's central villain, the Joker, emerged as a major threat. A metaphorical villain for post 9/11 America, this version of Joker represented a worst-case terrorist incarnate, an entirely untraceable (by means of biometrics, digital trails, or otherwise), homegrown villain bent on creating chaos. Batman/Bruce Wayne had to adapt, and in the process, the concept of the *dissolved panopticon* was given a filmic representation.

This discussion chapter serves to answer the research question: how have surveillance and surveillance technologies been represented in early 21st century superhero films? The discussion will also focus on how the *dissolved panopticon* is evident, in pieces in many films and in totality in *The Dark Knight*.

7.2 Surveillance techniques have a new name: the dissolved panopticon

In addition to the overall question that drove this thesis, a series of secondary questions were asked. How is surveillance and surveillance technology utilized within superhero films? Is there evidence that supports the concept of a dissolved panopticon?

Has there been a change in the number of instances of surveillance depicted in films between the years 2000 and 2013? And, between 2000 and 2013, has there been a shift in the dominant type of surveillance used in Superhero films? These questions were answered in main body of the thesis, but will be more directly summarized here.

First, the manner in which superhero films utilized surveillance and surveillance technology changed as the study period moved chronologically. Initially, superheroes did much of their watching using their own eyes or ascribed abilities; Wolverine's animalistic instincts, Spider-Man's arachnid tendencies (or, spider-sense), and David Dunn's (from *Unbreakable*) sixth sense for 'seeing' another person's crimes are all examples. Technology was largely left to authoritative figures attempting to control spaces, such as agents of the state (police, military, bureaucracy), private security, or to those who would disrupt the status quo, the villains, who could be rogue authority figures or super villains who are of equal measure to the superhero. Old media, such as newspapers or television news, was one form of surveillance technology that superheroes made use of (though villains also utilized it) that remained an important form of surveillance all the way through the study period. However, as superheroes became more humanistic, more grounded by their own mortality - Batman, Iron Man, and Kick Ass are examples - they became more likely to be depicted as being very proficient with surveillance technology. This trend pushed previously established heroes (Spider-Man, the X-Men team) to be more technologically inclined. Of course, villains continued to show greater levels of surveillance technology expertise, even on an innovative level - Red Skull, the 1940s villain to Captain America being a prime example- sometimes leaving some heroes seemingly anachronistic in their lack of technological reliance. Wolverine's nemesis, Viper, who featured in the 2013 film *Wolverine*, showed common place proficiency with a smartphone, while Wolverine maintained the stoic, old-fashioned approach of relying on his own abilities. Spiritually based heroes, such as Ghost Rider, Hellboy, The Spirit, and Thor maintained a distance from technology, but those around them increased their usage of technology during the study period. Then there were heroes who featured in multiple films where the use of technology increased, such as The Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, and Superman. All of these instances were a part of the *dissolved panopticon*, which leads to the second question.

The second question, which sought to seek out the existence of evidence, if it did exist, supporting the *dissolved panopticon* was answered in the affirmative. As was found in Chapter Five, of the three variables that make up the *dissolved panopticon* (Liquid Technology, Solid Technology, and Non Technology), it was Non Technology that dominated the types of the surveillance, lead by films such as *Unbreakable* and *Spider Man*. However, as the study period moved along, Solid Technology took on a much greater presence. By the latter stages of the study period, as surveillance instances continued a general upward trend, Solid Technology continued to be the leading type of surveillance. The intriguing aspect of this portion of the findings is that Liquid Technology grew tremendously, largely at the expense of Non Technology. Films such as *Iron Man 3* and *The Dark Knight Rises* continued the trend established by earlier films in each franchise. The *dissolved panopticon* is given greater credence because Non Technology was only diminished and not eliminated. While period films, such as *X Men: First Class*, buoyed Non Technology, there are many instances in a variety of films that suggest that Non Technology surveillance has a role to play and, thus, deserves to be a part of the conceptualization of the *dissolved panopticon*. It keeps the superhero from total reliance on technology, forcibly tied to its limitations. The actual act of watching serves to remind society that the superhero could be anywhere, for better or worse depending upon one's intentions. Furthermore, acting as a participant observer can allow for intelligence gathering that only comes from direct interaction with a villain

The third question asked if the number of surveillance instances increased from 2000 to 2013? This question was also answered in the affirmative. There are three indicators that provide evidence to support this claim. First, it was determined that while the *dissolved panopticon*'s Non Technology variable declined slightly over the course of the study period, the other two variables, Liquid Technology and Solid Technology, climbed considerably. In the case of the former variable, the rise was sharp. Second, the amount of surveillance instances did indeed go up in the second half of the study. Finally, Figure 1 of the Appendix, which illustrates how much surveillance occurred in each film, shows that the large majority of the highest ranking films come from the latter half of the study.

Finally, the fourth question asked: did the dominant type of surveillance change between 2000 and 2013? There are two ways to answer this question, at the overall level and the level of the variables. The dominant type of surveillance changed from non-technological surveillance to solid and then liquid technology. Notably, the shift combined the technological variables. Specifically, the watchtower (non technology variable) was key early on; shifting to video/CCTV and recorded visual/audio or two solid technology variables

In short, the normalization of surveillance is evident in superhero films. I have shown that there is a change in how surveillance is depicted in film. I argue that there is evidence to support the existence of a *dissolved panopticon*. The amount of surveillance in film has increased and has become more technological.

Although my thesis is only able to demonstrate the use of surveillance techniques, I believe there are larger implications. While Lacanian theory (Lacan, 1949) would warn us that societal reflections can be warped, the Althusserian conception of interpellation (Althusser, 1971) suggests that surveillance is something we recognize. It could be said that it is essential that we recognize it (Simon, 2005). Given the push-pull of tension of overt governmental policies that demand increased surveillance powers, we give permission to curtail civil liberties, despite our reservations, under the provision that such surveillance eliminates the risk of harm and the threat of terror that permeates the news headlines. Paradoxically, we have never been more secure, yet are never satisfied with the truth of it (Daems & Robert, 2007). Cheering on the superhero in his/her attempt to defeat some menace by any means necessary, which as of late includes a sophisticated and complicated relationship with technological surveillance, allows us to more readily accept a harsher panoptic surveillance. We accept the conditioning of docility without feeling too oppressed (Foucault, 1995[1975]). Our acceptance is made doubly so when at the same time as accepting harsh panopticism as a necessary means to control deviance, it is understood that the modern sources of great convenience and/or empowerment (such as cell phones), with its softer, darkly seductive consumptive basis (chronic dependence), can also contribute to the solution for risk management, even though such an overload of choice also helps to contribute to the sense of unease (Bauman, 2012[2000]). Because much of what seduces us is tied to the digital realm, from the requirement of credit cards

and smartphones to internet access for all things including filling out government forms (from tax filings to social assistance documents) there becomes less and less avenues for impactful individual resistance (Graham & Wood, 2003). To resist is to become paralyzed in modern society. In that sense, seduction can be used against the seduced in order to protect future seduction. The wider implication of seduction in capitalism is that it relies on keeping the populace fearful and on edge, then coming to the rescue by offering shelter from the storm for the right price, at least for as long as profits remain high (2012[2000]). However, difficulties and conflict can arise when the state and capitalism collide, threatening to remove the seductive veil, such as in the on-going conflict between Apple and the Federal Bureau of Investigation over the latter's demand that the former unlock the smartphone of a terrorist involved in the San Bernardino, California killings that occurred in late 2015 (Lever, 2016). In a bit of foreshadowing, while Batman created a similar system to find one person in *The Dark Knight* (2008), he built in a self destruct feature. The Federal Bureau of Investigation is asking for a code, which could give them access to everyone's built-in cameras and microphones (Lever, 2016). They would have a ready-made sonar system-as surveillance network cloaked in the seductive package of a smartphone. The problem lies in issue of temptation. A piece of technology or computer code can be created for a specific use and then destroyed. However, the temptation to use it again and again is enormous. Can it be used in other cases of equal or greater concern? Traditionally, once a technology of control exists, it is unlikely to disappear. If power is knowledge, as Foucault suggests, then it behooves society to be aware that all of this seduction masks what is done with our information, how it is sorted, and how we can not avoid the implications of what it says if we find ourselves sorted to the wrong category (Foucault, 1995[1975]; Bauman, 2012[2000]; Lyon, 2001).

7.3 On rewind: the road to the final showdown

In this thesis, I have shown how superhero films naturalize surveillance techniques and how this has changed overtime. I argue that this also demonstrates how film may be used to present a specific topic (in this case surveillance), in a manner that

contributes to its naturalization and acceptance in the larger society. Superhero films were selected as the genre to study because of how steeped superheroes are in themes of justice and order. While some think the films are superficial in nature (Bukatman, 2011), and tell us very little, others suggest embracing the films for the fantastical escapism they can produce (Treat, 2009). While the superhero films tend to deviate from their comic book origins, they hold true to the idea that superheroes are guardians, protectors of civil society who watch over citizens and go take extreme measures that law enforcement cannot. Superhero's are presented as holders of great panoptic power. Their grasp is open to great challenges, in the form of super villains.

Theoretically I have presented three concepts that directly related to surveillance and the power it unlocks Foucault's panopticon, Bauman's liquidity, and a synthesis of these namely, the dissolved panopticon.

Foucault's conceptual interpretation of the panopticon is based on the underlying principle that power is derived from knowledge (1995[1975]). In order to hold power, its possessor will attempt to create docility within the disempowered. When docility is achieved, the disempowered will exercise self-control, whether or not the powerful are watching (1995[1975]). My position is that superheroes hold that form of power. While Foucault intimated that docility would be achieved with enough repetition, resistance is probable (Simon, 2005). Super villains prove to be the only ones capable of actively resisting docility with a chance to topple the superhero. The films generally portray the superhero as unbeatable, despite the level of threat put to them. However, in some films, such as *The Dark Knight* and *Captain America: First Avenger*, the hero pays a heavy price and may not win the day cleanly.

The second concept is Zygmunt Bauman's liquidity (2012[2000]). Unlike the panopticon, which is based a semblance of structure, requiring a subject as its target, liquidity is much more amorphous (2012[2000]). It is a flow of data based information, where an individual, but not necessarily a subject, is the center of surveillance. The information an individual generates reduces the time required to track him/her and the space in which to operate. While much of the conceptual idea of liquidity is based on the seductive aspects of consumerism, much data is related to telecommunications use, internet activity, and financial transactions. However, there is the problem of finding an

individual that is not a subject (Simon, 2005). Enough information can be gathered to create a surveilled individual that does not exist; therefore, it becomes imperative for surveillers to have a subject (2005).

Bauman accepts that the panopticon has not gone away. He acknowledges it is being used mostly for those who refuse to be swayed by the seduction of acceptable consumerism, their level of deviance extreme enough to be deemed criminal requiring incarceration (Bauman & Lyons, 2013). However, there is little doubt that data driven information is forming the backbone of contemporary surveillance technology. Therefore, I introduced the *dissolved panopticon* as a way to synthesize the two concepts. The dissolved panopticon understands surveillance as both panoptic and synoptic. That is to say, one can see the many while at the same time the many can see the one. It brings together the relentless flow of information with an actual subject. It is conceptualized here as having three parts, or variables- Liquid Technology, Solid Technology, and Non Technology. Liquid Technology focuses on space-free surveillance technology such as the data derived from telecommunications or biometrics, which rely on a subject to generate the data but do not need a specific space to do it. Films such as *The Dark Knight*, *Iron Man 3*, and *Marvel's Avengers* best reveal the variable. Solid Technology refers to the kind of surveillance technology that requires a subject to be present in a particular space, such as a street corner which can be viewed through closed circuit television. Films such as *Watchman*, *V for Vendetta*, and *The Green Hornet* provide prime examples of the variable. Finally, Non Technology refers to surveillance that requires actual visual contact of a subject by a surveiller. The act of spying on someone from across a room without the subject's awareness is one example. Films such as *Unbreakable*, *Spider-Man*, and *The Legend of Zorro* all provide excellent examples of non technological surveillance in action.

Within the *dissolved panopticon*, it was found that Non Technology was a dominant form of surveillance in the early stages of the study when surveillance was not as prevalent. However, as the study period moved along, surveillance increased across all of the variables, but more so for Solid Technology and Liquid Technology. By the end of the period, Solid Technology was consistently the highest scoring variable but Liquid

Technology surged in the last few years. Importantly, while surveillance was increasing off screen, it was also increasing on screen, in superhero films at least.

By identifying resistance to surveillance, I also argue that on screen heroes, villains, and the civilians were not strictly passive subjects. They could, and did, act against being watched. In fact, as the rate of surveillance increased so did the rate of resistance. The increase in the average per film by more than 25% compared to the 36% increase in surveillance use seems diminished until one considers that 28 of the 100 instances of the first half of the study came from one film (*V for Vendetta*). Much like the play between the forces for law and justice and the forces of deviance and wickedness leading to the rise of superheroes and super villains in the comic and film mythologies, the increase in surveillance did lead to an escalation of resistance to being watched.

Normalization could also be found in unexpected places. Some films took historical liberties (*Captain America: First Avenger*) while others twisted the time to suit the premise of the film (*Superman Returns*). Though not common, such liberties occurred enough to be noticeable, if not all that clear about the motivation behind them. What has become quite common in the films is the high level of militarization, which affects surveillance because of the military's access to sophisticated technology. Another Superman film, *Man of Steel*, placed the military front and center, both in terms of the hero's arch nemesis in the film (Krypton native, General Zod) and his assistants, the United States Army. The SHIELD organization that plays a role in nearly all of the Marvel Studios films is the prime example of a militarized surveillance agency. They feature black suited agents, highly skilled soldiers, and a nuclear weapons carrying air force. And they have superheroes to cap off their list of assets. All of this seems fine until one considers what could happen if such an all-seeing, extremely muscular government agency (or for that matter, a corporate agency) were to fall under the control of nefarious forces (which happened to be the central storyline of the second Captain America feature, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, released in 2014).

The military angle was involved in the *Dark Knight Trilogy* of films featuring Batman. This is significant because it is argued in this thesis that the second film in this series, *The Dark Knight*, is the key film in this study, having been the most loaded down in surveillance themes and implications. It is the film that best represents the *dissolved*

panopticon and why it is important to keep a subject at the heart of any discussion on surveillance. It is imperative to remember that subjects will not necessarily accept wholesale the trappings of docility that envelope a given subject who is exposed enough to the inducement to self governmentality. What the film showed was that while much deviance can be controlled with the threat of a panoptic presence, and most would be quite content to be seduced by consumerism, there are others that would reject both panopticism and the data-based surveillance of the digital age. If there is a Batman, then there is likely to soon be a Joker. While using the film as an analogy for the rise of Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, United States President Barack Obama compared the group to Joker (similarity resting on a common willingness to watch the world burn) (Goldberg, 2016). What President Obama left out is that it was the actions of the United States during the Iraq War that destabilized the region and gave rise to Islamic State. The irony is that President Obama used a film that was a critique of the Bush Administration while not acknowledging Batman's role as an agent of President Bush's policies in the criticism (Kellner, 2010). In *The Dark Knight*, this Joker (as opposed to Jack Nicholson's portrayal in the 1989 film *Batman*) uses the traditional means of surveillance against the agents of order which forces them to cross lines that violate civil liberties and crush psychological barriers that can not be walked back in order to eliminate an existential threat. Joker ultimately loses the fight with Batman, but with the demise of the 'white knight', Harvey Dent, he wins the much bigger war by corrupting the ideals of freedom in civil society.

7.4 Conclusions to consider

The nature of surveillance and the manner in which it is evolving is evident in superhero films. Buried within the spectacle of visuals and sound, lies a singular insight; that the modern mythology of superheroes saving the world using their own capabilities alone is no longer possible. In order for the hero to truly manage the risks of villainy, they must enhance themselves. The films suggest that the humanist powers of the authority - the state with its military and police force, or the corporate with its private security and mercenary forces - have little choice but to enhance their surveillance

capabilities because evil, in the form of manifest villainy, continues to escalate the level of risk society is feeling.

Like early films dealing with surveillance, including *Touch of Evil*, *Rear Window*, or *The Conversation*, there is a morally unsavory quality to surveillance that is reinforced in many superhero films. Historically, either the act (*Touch of Evil*, *Rear Window*), or the character (*The Conversation*) is perceived to be morally questionable. Such is the case in superhero films in the first part of the 21st century. Initially, villains were most closely tied to the technology of surveillance. State and corporate power also lent themselves to greater reliance on surveillance technology. The collective surveillance capabilities of the military in *Hulk* and *The Incredible Hulk* and the layers of security at the Oscorp building in *The Amazing Spider-Man* are all examples. Perhaps this explains, in part, why superheroes were often seen to be able to appear out of nowhere when evil was afoot. Daredevil just knew that Kingpin was plotting to destroy Hell's Kitchen. Elektra had a sixth sense for predicting future conflict. Then there was the Punisher, who merely blazed a trail to the mobsters and murderers he pursued, using an arsenal of weaponry to do it, but never really explained how he was able to track them down. He just did. Meanwhile, the heroes that came with a spiritual background, such as Ghost Rider or the Spirit stumbled upon criminality or wickedness and dealt with it as it came.

Then, in the wake of the World Trade Center attacks, with governments and Hollywood having had time to absorb the shock and then react to it, the superhero started to more noticeably adopt the tools of technological surveillance as essential weapons in their arsenal. Unlike Professor X of the X-Men films, whose tool to enhance his abilities was never a central source of power in itself, characters such as Iron Man, Batman, and The Green Hornet made surveillance technology as essential a power as flight was to Superman or elasticity was to Mr. Fantastic (from *Fantastic Four*). Origin stories of superheroes soon required the addition of technology as a key signifier that the hero was fully formed, capable of taking on the role of protecting society in a sophisticated way, such as Kick Ass or the rebooted Spider-Man film, *Amazing Spider-Man*, which was a significant difference from the original Spider-Man trilogy (2002-2007). Then there is the issue of the merger of superheroes and the governmental elements to create a super heroic surveillance apparatus. The main example is that of the Avengers' controlling

organization, SHIELD, alluded to earlier as a militaristic governmental agency that utilizes a sophisticated surveillance system combined with massive military might (including nuclear weapons, as seen in *Avengers*) and the skills of the superheroes that make up the Avengers team (including the aforementioned Iron Man and Hulk, but also including Captain America, Black Widow, Hawkeye, and Thor).

What can be expected in the future? While it is difficult to say whether the volume or frequency of surveillance will continue to grow, it is likely that the surveillance that does occur will lean towards technological surveillance. It is unlikely that non technological methods will disappear, but it will likely continue to diminish in importance. This is because of the technology that exists and resides in the hands of individuals in society. If film is a reflection of reality, or at least a mechanism for highlighting the trends in society, then it follows that films will continue to tie in to the data-driven reality of modern life, complete with the implications of data based surveillance in a post-Snowden world. The implications of reflecting society are determined by the position they take. Do films challenge the trend of greater mass surveillance or merely fold its reality into the story. Taking either tack will go a long way to determining in the future whether the slow creep of surveillance normalization was in the direction of acceptance or rejection.

7.5 Limitations of this study and future directions to explore.

While this thesis was able to explore the types of surveillance technologies in order to establish the *dissolved panopticon* in superhero films, there were also some limitations. First, the research was not able to make the historical link between surveillance and the greater society. Second, there was no investigation into how audiences were impacted by the exposure to surveillance in the film. Third, the study did not focus in on the how the superhero characters represent a manifestation of surveillance between those who technological, metaphysical, or spiritual in nature. Finally, gender was largely ignored, both in terms of the audience and the characters in the films.

While there were limitations that were unavoidable, there are also some intriguing possibilities that could spin out from this research in the future.

The first direction may be to apply the *dissolved panopticon* to a second group of films. One could wait for a window of time to pass to conduct research that attempts to identify what, if anything has changed in the post-2013 superhero filmography. This would create a longitudinal body of research that establishes a record of the shift in the application of surveillance, and the further development of the *dissolved panopticon*. One could also look back to the 20th century, with films dating back to the 1960s, the longitudinal data could reveal just how far back the normalization of technological surveillance began.

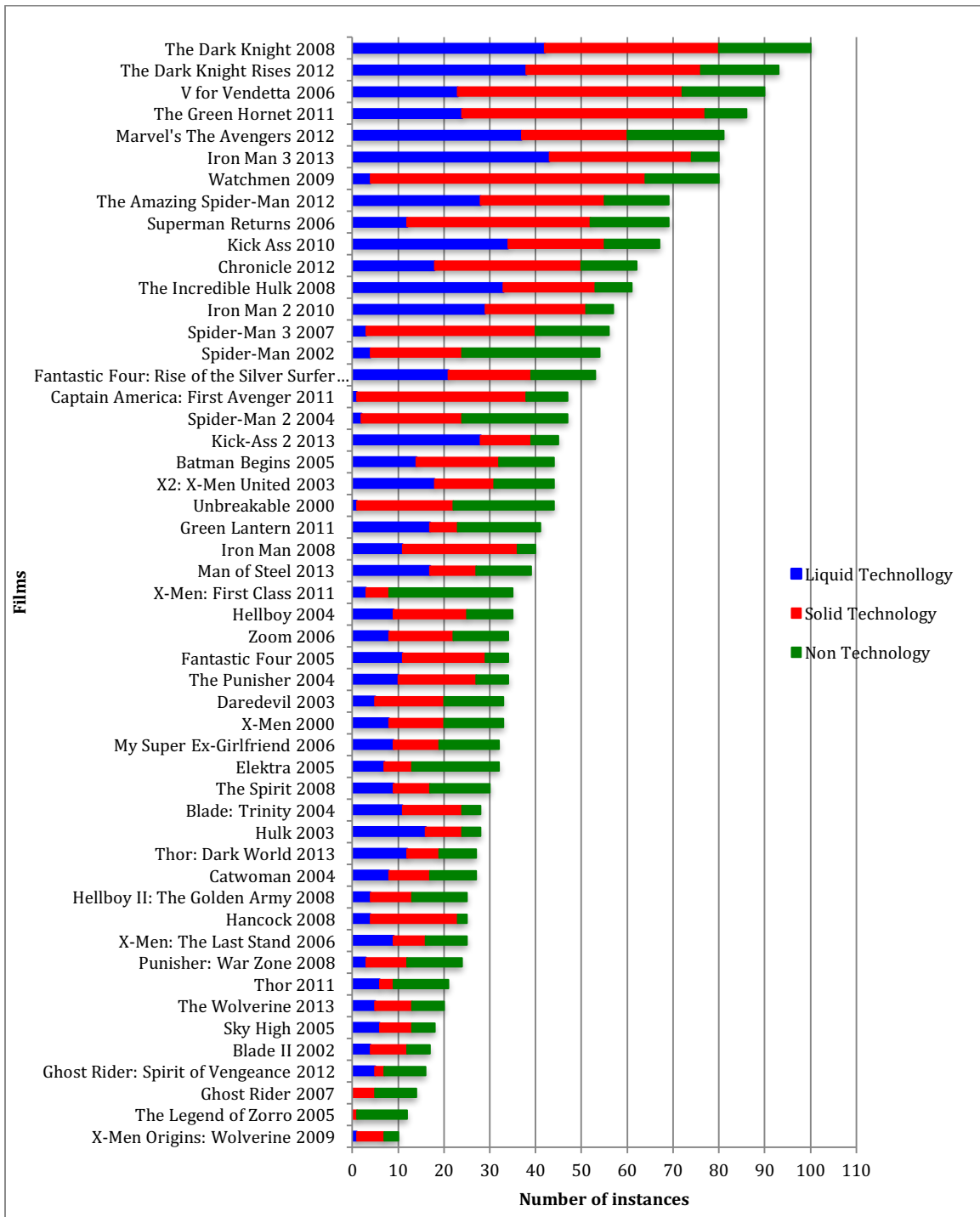
Another avenue to explore involves a deeper exploration of which characters are predominately using surveillance. Understanding the relationships heroes and villains and those in the middle of the binary can lead to a greater understanding of how surveillance is understood.

There is also the option to get outside of superhero films. One could attempt to apply the *dissolved panopticon* to other genres of films; science fiction and action films stand out as the most obvious choices. Superhero films do cross over to other genres, but the removal of the trappings of the superhero film makes for more ambiguous protagonists and antagonists, leading to a deeper understanding about the morality, or amorality, of surveillance and its technology.

Finally, future research could focus on the audience. Specifically, how does the frequency of surveillance messaging affect those who go to the theatre or view the films at home. The *dissolved panopticon* is a useful concept for identifying surveillance technologies, but it is also important to gauge whether audiences register and react to possibilities such technologies hold in the real world.

Appendix

Appendix 1: List of films



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