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13 To See the World As It Appears: Vision, the Gaze and the Camera as Technological Eye

> My basic view of things is – not to have a basic view of things. From having been exceedingly dogmatic, my views on life have gradually dissolved. They don't exist any longer ...
>
> INGMAR BERGMAN[1]

> [B]ut Thou, O Lord [...] didst turn me round towards myself, taking me from behind my back where I had placed me, unwilling to observe myself; and setting me before my face [...] And if I sought to turn mine eye from off myself, and trustedst me before my eyes, that I might find out mine iniquity, and hate it.
>
> ST AUGUSTINE[2]

The Vision and the Gaze

A Brief Introduction

In this chapter, my aim is to take a phenomenological point of view toward the 'hard core' usage of surveillance technology, and particularly the ocularcentric ones. In so doing, my analysis will demonstrate aspects of seeing

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1   Stig Björkman, ed., *Bergman on Bergman. Interviews with Ingmar Bergman* (New York: Da Capo P. 1993), 17.

2   St Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Signet Classics, 2001), VIII.7.16.

and technology that are interdisciplinary, and contribute to the complexity of the subject of what it is to see, and what happens in different sorts of relations when we see, either through the camera lens, through our own eyes, or with an 'inner eye'. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on visibility and invisibility are particularly fascinating and useful to me in this investigation, since he strives to dismantle the distinction between subject and object, a problem Jean-Paul Sartre and other Western philosophers have struggled with since René Descartes.

In this chapter, Merleau-Ponty's arguments about seeing as a mode of perception will be discussed and related to the camera as a viewing apparatus. The questions I address will include that of whether we should differentiate between surveillant and non-surveillant modes of vision. If so, what is the basis of this distinction? Does the apparatus enhance perception in any way, or is it rather a question of the intentionality behind its use? How does 'the flesh', in Merleau-Ponty's sense of the concept, influence the experience of the relation between the apparatus and our bodies? Moreover, how may our understanding of an 'open' visibility versus a 'categorised' visibility influence our understanding of surveillance?

I concentrate on two main subjects. First, a mode of seeing between physical people in a room as they appear despite the camera; second, as they appear through the camera lens to us as observers – categorised as objects or as people who 'come out of the picture'.

A New Reality?

In one of his most famous films, *Fanny and Alexander* (1982), Ingmar Bergman deals with the question of seeing and with objects and people being illuminated or exposed by their environments and social surroundings. One scene in particular illustrates the way in which something invisible becomes visible, seen not with the biological eye, but in a kind of vision of something real yet hidden. Oscar Ekdahl, the father of Fanny and Alexander, sneaks into the children's bedroom on Christmas Eve, a few hours before the church service on Christmas morning. He asks the children what they are doing, explaining that he had heard their whispering from the next

room. He learns that Alexander has been exploring the cinematograph, a magic camera, which projects a moving picture onto the wall. Although picture and camera seem unconnected, there is an invisible link that joins machine, light and projection.

Ekdahl begins to tell a story about an unprepossessing chair – rickety, wooden and faded. 'This is a chair,' he declares, 'but not just any old chair.' He lifts it onto the table and shines the lamp on it. The children are curious. 'But don't be deceived,' he continues: 'This is the most valuable chair in the world.' As their father whispers, the children gather round and he asks 'Do you see the mysterious light shining from this little chair?', 'Why does it shine in the dark?. 'It's a secret. Whoever betrays it will die', the father explains. The children nods and swear to keep the secret.

Fig. 13.1: 'This is a chair, but not just any old chair'.
Credit: Susanne Wigorts Yngvesson.

Bergman moves the camera towards the chair from an angle below the table, and then, as the story is related, moves into a close-up on the children's

faces, as if to suggest that the truth can be seen reflected in the eyes of those who believe what they are being told. The father explains to the children how this chair once upon a time belonged to an empress of China. After spending her entire life on that particular chair, she died and was buried, still sitting on the chair. For 2,000 years, she sat in her burial chamber until some thieves came and gave her a blow that reduced her to dust. The chair is made of a metal available only in China at a depth of 59,000 metres. It has a special aura that makes it glow in the dark. 'Now the most precious chair in the world belongs to you,' whispers the father, and gently lifts the chair from the table. While he is telling the story, the chair becomes the most valuable chair in the world from the children's point of view, as it does for the film's audience.

While the father speaks in the film a new vision of what is perceived as reality is induced. The words contribute to an image of seeing the objects in a new way. This new vision 'happens' both within the film as a story but also for the audience watching that scenery behind the curtain of the camera lens.

Phenomenology As a Way to Discover Realities

I have begun with this example of the visible and the invisible because it raises issues both of what is seen and how one sees. My aims in this chapter are, firstly, to identify the inner logic of seeing, using the ontology and dialectic of perception developed by Merleau-Ponty, and, secondly, to investigate how seeing as a categorisation of objects, that is human beings, can be related to CCTV-surveillance. With regard to this second aim, my goal is to relate an inner logic of seeing to CCTV-cameras as a categorisation of seeing or watching. By 'inner logic', I mean a system of interpretation, a grammar of understanding – in this case, what can be called the 'culture' of surveillance. I make a distinction between seeing and watching, where seeing is considered a 'broader form of' perception than watching, i.e., watching is to look or search for something particular.

My principal philosophical source is Merleau-Ponty's last work, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Although incomplete at the time of his death

in 1961, it is regarded as Merleau-Ponty's most important work after *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). There is some debate among philosophers about the relation between these two works, particularly about the issue of phenomenology versus ontology in Merleau-Ponty´s philosophy. I take Merleau-Ponty to be arguing for phenomenology as well as ontology. Merleau-Ponty's relevance for the present context thus lies in his arguments about perception as a phenomenological experience. Using the concept of 'situation', Merleau-Ponty develops a method of critical analysis – the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' – that seeks to expose the way in which abstract principles, that is, self-deception, attempt to cover the realities of the world. I will use this method to reveal what I understand to be the inner logic of surveillance. Further, Merleau-Ponty did not think of philosophy as a science in the sense of a positivist one, since he regarded positivism as a science inherited from a Cartesian dichotomy that he wanted to leave behind. Rather, he worked with a theory which involved him in the process; as 'the set of questions wherein he who questions is himself implicated by the question'.[3] Using this critical philosophical method, I shall seek to highlight different interpretations of the practices of seeing and watching as these relate to surveillance.

As noted, my principal source for this investigation is *The Visible and the Invisible*, not least because of its author's particular interest in the phenomenology of vision, a term he uses in his later writings in preference to the word 'perception' so central to his earlier work.[4] Although I will consider perception mainly as 'seeing', Merleau-Ponty investigates perception in relation to all senses. However, I argue, that in *The Visible and the Invisible*, he explores seeing and vision largely to the exclusion of other sensory experiences.

3   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 27.
4   Merold Westphal, 'Situation and Suspicion in the Thought of Merleau-Ponty: The Question of Phenomenology and Politics', in Galen A. Johnson, ed., *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty* (Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 168.

To See the World as it Appears

To appear in the world or in front of another person – to see the world appear – is a relational act. The meeting between myself and the world is relational, whether I see the world as either a physical manifestation or in my imagination. To appear is not the same as *to be*. Seeing is not just a particular act of seeing or being seen by another. Everything visible is in principle open to a stranger's gaze, but as Merleau-Ponty argues, the *perception* of others is not placed in concrete bodies or particular spaces. This argument recalls George Berkeley's (1685–1753) idea about distance which cannot be seen, only experienced, since distance is a matter of objects being close or far away. But to understand distance only through the eye, without the experience, is impossible. We could know distance 'no more than we would pretend to judge a man's thoughts by his pronouncing words we had never heard before'.[5]

Merleau-Ponty describes the process of seeing as a birth: 'The other is born from my side'.[6] Seeing as a pre-conscious act is not an act that occurs in front of me as a perception. It is happening in every moment that *I* exist, just as Sartre proposes that the self is an ongoing project in the world. It is not alien to me, but comes from an experience of exteriority. Following Sartre, Merleau-Ponty argues that this experience reveals the world outside me to be nothingness, since 'I do not *know* the others, in the strong sense that I *know* myself'[7], and since in the eyes of others I must seem to be the same kind of nothingness, what Merleau-Ponty calls 'negintuition'. This is to say, nothingness inexists wherever being is. Such 'negintuition' is related to Sartre's 'négatité', that is, negativity as an integral part of the structure of human activities. Contrary to Sartre, however, Merleau-Ponty argues that we, as humans, are not just the sum of our choices, but also 'something else', 'an other who is not a thing'.[8]

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5   George Berkeley, 'An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision', *Berkeley's Philosophical Writings* (New York, London: Collier Books, 1965 [1709], §2, 20.

6   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 59.

7   Ibid., 61.

8   Ibid., 61.

Merleau-Ponty's metaphor of being born from my side comes from the account in Genesis of how God created woman using Adam's rib, for whom she becomes 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'.[9] They are one, but not the same: similar but different. Human beings come from nothingness into being, into the world that God, according to Genesis, created through His Word and vision, albeit not as a process of cause and effect. God sees what God creates, and God also sees what still does not exist: nothingness. Nothingness and Being belong together and are not opposites; rather they belong, side by side, to the same Being. The *ex nihilo*-argument has been interpreted as a dualistic world-view, but Merleau-Ponty opens up another possibility, one that, as I will show, is also relevant for my argument here.

Merleau-Ponty proposes a four-part system of relations between the self and others in the world through a phenomenological vision: 'my being for me, my being for the other, the being for itself of another, and his being for me'. These aspects of vision are relations of Being and Nothingness. In many ways his schema corresponds to Sartre's distinction between three categories of being – being in-itself, being for-itself, and being for-others – although Merleau-Ponty argues that the main experience of the gaze of the Other is not shame, but an 'intersection of my universe with that of another'.[10]

Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty talk about the awareness of perception in different situations, but their interpretations differ in a strong sense with regard to the intentions and effect of the gaze. Sartre argues that to perceive is to *look at*, and to be the object of the gaze is to be conscious of *being looked at*. The effect of that gaze is to be aware that I am vulnerable. The gaze causes an effect that is not in the first instance that of seeing an object, but an awareness of one's situatedness in the world: 'I can not in any case escape from – *I am seen*'.[11] For Merleau-Ponty the gaze and visualisation represent not a frightening closedness, but openness. Indeed, he argues that it is 'through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible'.[12] Sartre's theory of

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9   Genesis 2:23.
10   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 80.
11   Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003 [1943]), 282.
12   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 143.

the gaze has been interpreted as 'a narcissistic fear of splitting the body from the self'. This argument is developed from a revolt against an omniscient God whom Sartre recognises as having an 'absolute look', a look that is not negotiable.[13] Merleau-Ponty has criticised Sartre on this point; for Merleau-Ponty, the gaze can be open or closed, yet it is not so distinctly invested with power as it is for Sartre. Another way to describe the difference between their theories of the gaze, suggested by Martin Jay, would be to define Merleau-Ponty's standpoint as aletheic, that is, a condition of unclosedness that implies sincerity, and not something passively unfinished, and Sartre's as 'hostile to any redemptive notion of vision' and an 'ocularphobia'.[14]

A relation can, according to Merleau-Ponty, be described as open or closed. The philosophical question is not whether the world as it appears exists or not, 'we are asking what it is for it to exist'.[15] Perception starts with a pre-consciousness of what we identify when we perceive, a pre-consciousness that is not separate from human reality but part of it. This is not the opposite of consciousness or awareness; it is a part of the same world yet different. Pre-consciousness confers upon these perceptions a degree of doubt. The purpose of doubt here is to remain open to the gaze, to an awareness that we do not have to identify perceptions with things 'as they are', or 'the constructed significations whose terminal product one supposes the world and the things to be'. In shutting down the gaze, we categorise the world and make it into an object without a 'horizon of brute being and of brute mind'.[16]

The paradox of doubt and of thinking the negative is that we cannot say that the negative is for itself, isolated from positive being. Sartre, too, identifies two aspects of human reality, the in-itself and the for-itself, as constituting the ontological root of human ambiguity. Every given factual moment manifests our situation, in Sartre's sense of the situation as the only thing that gives humans freedom. This aspect of freedom for Sartre include also experiences of something transcendent, which is an experience

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13   Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1994), 277.

14   Ibid., 275f.

15   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 96.

16   Ibid., 97.

of the fluid and dynamic for-itself. For Sartre, the consequence of this ambiguity is freedom. For Merleau-Ponty, doubt itself is the answer, a flow of constant change which means that nothing perceived can ever be completed or fully explained:

> For it is quite obvious that there is pure negation only in principle and that the existent For Itself is encumbered with a body, which is not outside if it is not inside, which intervenes between the For Itself and itself.[17]

The process of perceiving or seeing with an 'open' gaze is somehow to realise or experience that there is no direct contradiction between the objects I see and the I who sees them. Things 'attract my look' in the relation, and thereby reveal their complicity.[18] Here, in the world as it appears, Merleau-Ponty also regards the imaginary as 'not an absolute unobservable' because it *is* incarnated in the world.[19] What he describes as an imaginary incarnated in the world as it appears can be interpreted as a process of creating from bodily experience – or bodily experience as a creation of the imagination.

However, Merleau-Ponty is not an immaterialist or dualist in a Cartesian sense. For him, the imaginary world is incarnated in the flesh of the world. It is an experience of belonging to the same system of being. In its incarnation, the flesh of the world appears as thing, world, and history. In the relation between me and the other, the gaze is predetermined in the body to be a 'mirror of me as I am of him'; seeing another involves not two images but 'one sole image'. This means, for example, that awareness of myself and distance from the other is not contradictory; rather, each is the reverse of the other.[20] Merleau-Ponty argues for a holistic perception of the world, in contrast to a Cartesian dualistic and objectivist worldview that he believes has for centuries distorted the possibilities of perceiving world as it is. And yet, within this holistic worldview, Merleau-Ponty offers different interpretations of the functions of visions and bodily experiences. I will return to these in due course.

17   Ibid., 68.
18   Ibid., 76.
19   Ibid., 77.
20   Ibid., 82–3.

To close one's vision is an act of totalisation. The starting point of pre-existing experience must instead be a belief in a 'there is': '[O]ne does not arouse being from nothingness, *ex nihilo*; one starts with an onto-logical relief where one can never say that the ground be nothing'.[21] The open gaze is dialectical and does not completely identify itself with itself, since dialectical thought is always 'proceeding toward the opposite term'.[22] Dialectical thought, according to Merleau-Ponty, is not philosophy; rather, the process is one of intuitive, self-reflexive critical thinking, an awareness that any *thesis* about that which is identified is a form of idealisation. Being is 'bound wholes where signification never is except in tendency'.[23]

One of Merleau-Ponty's central ideas is that the body is a kind of consciousness. There is nothing between my body and the flesh: 'Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself'.[24] Pace the Cartesian view of consciousness as structured, there is no subject and object. *It* or *you* belong to the same world as *I*. This idea prompts an interesting question about me and my relation to the camera (or any technology that surrounds me): what is happening in the relation between the *I* and the camera? Is the camera also a part of my flesh?

The Camera as Technological Eye: Seeing the World Through a Camera Lens

Allow me to return briefly to the scene in *Fanny and Alexander* described earlier, in order to think about the possibility of eternity in the film. Through the camera lens, and the frame it produces, people are fixed. The single camera cannot, any more than a single human eye, see the whole picture or

21   Ibid., 88.
22   Ibid., 90.
23   Ibid., 94.
24   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002 [1945]), 407.

the world behind the camera, that is, the world that the director (or God, or someone in a position of surveillance) chooses not to show. Once people are depicted, and the film is developed from the negative (assuming it is not a digital film), they are stuck in a repetitive status quo – or, in the case of CCTV, framed but unseen, unless there is a particular reason to show them. Oskar can tell his story as many times as the audience is willing to hear and see it, while the people outside the frame grow up, have children, and die. Allan Edwall, the actor who plays the father, died in 1997, but those still alive in the world 'outside' the film can see him in the film in a state of a technological eternity. He actually also dies in the picture as Oskar, but show himself to the children several times from 'the other side'. We see Allan Edwall in the film even after 1997, and yet it is not he, he has left behind a shell within the frame of an *I* – a shell of Being and Nothingness.

The Gaze as Producer of Shame or Integration into the World?

What is happening with the perceptions the film produces? We see the people filmed; they do not see us; they are there, yet they are elsewhere: 'films have the *appeal* of a presence and of a proximity', to quote film theorist Christian Metz, who provides a phenomenological interpretation of films and perception.[25] Metz makes a fascinating point about how we experience movement as something real, more so than a still photograph: 'Movement is insubstantial. We see it, but it cannot be touched, which is why it cannot encompass two degrees of phenomenological reality, the "real" and the copy.'[26]

  Another possible clue lies in the perspective offered by Merleau-Ponty and Sartre on the process of seeing as always entailing alienation of the viewer from the one being seen – in Sartre's terminology, alienation of the subject from the object. Such alienation forms part of the gaze, with or without the camera. In his critique of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty refers to emptiness and the exterior of the self. For Merleau-Ponty, however, such

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25 Christian Metz, *Film Language. A Semiotics of the Cinema* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 4.

26 Ibid., 8.

emptiness is not frightening but a kind of being, which integrates me into the world. It is a basic condition of being seen in the world:

> I have to be this emptiness, to make it be in the world, I take up again on my own account my body and my situation and the other's gaze which I see posed on this exterior that is me. For me there is no activity and presence of another; there is on my part the experience of a passivity and of an alienation which I recognize concern me, because, being nothing, I have to be my situation. [...] [T]he other's gaze which suddenly congeals me adds to my universe no new dimension – it only confirms for me an inclusion in being which I knew from within.[27]

Merleau-Ponty agrees that shame can be an effect of the gaze, but argues there must be more to it. Where Sartre understands the gaze as a polarisation between subject and object, Merleau-Ponty regards it as entailing the possibility of an intersubjective phenomenon: the experience of being one among many in the world sharing the same experience. The criterion for an experience to be intersubjective is that it has to be symmetrical, but since self-consciousness is asymmetrical, Merleau-Ponty cannot understand this experience other than as two sides of one and same phenomenon.[28] For Merleau-Ponty, this intersubjective condition would not change if we added a camera or another apparatus to the perception, any more than spectacles influence the intersubjectivity of the gaze; in this relation, the apparatus is not aware of itself. Instead it gives us, in Metz's words, 'the feeling that we are witnessing an almost real spectacle'.[29] The camera does not see; rather, it is used for seeing or watching – an apparatus is a prosthesis in an Aristotelian sense; as an extension of the experiences and capabilities of the body.

It is the intention of the camera user that influences the symmetry or asymmetry of the perception. In a very immediate sense, using a camera can influence the relation in a situation in which someone holds the camera in front of them, since their eyes are hidden from the other who is, so to speak, 'veiled' by the camera – and the awareness of being photographed will make you perform in front of it. This is in line with the way the French literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes describes his own experience of

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27   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 70–1.
28   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 394.
29   Christian Metz, *Film Language*, 5.

the awareness of being photographed, as a kind of theft or transformation beyond his control:

> I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing', I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. This transformation is an active one: I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice.[30]

Sartre relates a similar experience from his childhood when he performed in front of the camera or under the gaze of his parents. Faced by a (real or imaginary) camera, he recalls, 'I would stop moving, I would lean forward, I was a runner getting set, the little birdie about to spring from the camera'. But his sense of the absolute look was not restricted to the camera. It was primarily a sense of power so strong as to warrant description as a panoptic experience, that is, an experience of being subject to an array of gazes: 'I had learned to see myself through their [his parents'] eyes [...] When they were not present, they left their gaze behind, and it mingled with the light'.[31]

Fig. 13.2: Performing in front of the camera? On my way to summer camp.
Credit: Sig-Britt Wigortsson.

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30   Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage Classics, 2000), 10–11.
31   Quoted in Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 279.

Frightening or otherwise, what Sartre here describes is also an experience of being categorised, either as an individual or as a member of a particular group. At family gatherings, the camera is used to store memories of that particular moment. When made aware of the camera, people try to look relaxed; they perform for it. In contrast, in the first instance at least, closed-circuit cameras are located in a public space either to record criminal actions or to register surroundings or people. Their purpose is to foster a sense of public safety as well as to collect evidence, should a criminal act occur. What we see through the camera lens is thus related to whatever we are already looking for. The camera is often used for categorising the visible. In his account of the genealogy of punishment, Michel Foucault confirms this conclusion: 'A glance at the new art of punishing clearly reveals the supersession of the punitive semio-technique by a new politics of the body.'[32]

Once an individual is registered by a surveillance system there can be reason to investigate the intentions of an action, because such intentions will categorise one's perception of what is being seen. One can describe it, with Merleau-Ponty, as an act of totalisation, a closing act of one's vision. This is one of the main critical points I would like to raise when it comes to the technological eye or the gaze of the human watcher: it is programmed to see something particular, and therefore it closes off vision. The moral and ethical consequences of this could mean that people and bodies will be dominated by the inner logic of surveillance. Some examples here might be ID cards, check-points, passports, and the social control they add. To prove to the world that your identity is what you proclaim it to be, you need an ID. The particular card, though, is just the tip of the iceberg as it also reveals other data about you. David Lyon describes the relationship between screen and identification as 'stretched screens'; screens that look beyond the surface of the body and its movements.[33]

This kind of seeing already has an order or a 'political technology'. It is mapped. The surveillor or originator of the gaze has decided what to

32   Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995 [1977]), 103.

33   David Lyon, *Identifying Citizens. ID Cards as Surveillance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 85.

see, and thus the political technology of surveillance will close the gaze for the 'invisible' or the unexpected objects of vision. Such 'closed' categorised viewing is in some respects similar to the point of view of a fundamentalist in that it is a way of seeing only what one chooses to see. Indeed, it is also fundamentalist in how the viewer identifies what she sees with the truth 'as it is' – identifying that which is being observed with a perceived 'reality'. It is a perception that diminishes the world as 'what it is for it to exist'.[34]

The Camera and the Creational Act

It is not the camera in the first instance that constructs a particular way of seeing; it is, rather, the situatedness of the viewer that enables or prevents sight, and guides it towards a particular way of seeing that is related to a political technology or an inner logic of photographing or surveillance. Moreover, the camera is also not neutral in its intent. The design of the apparatuses and the places they are installed or used speak a political language of semiotic and cultural awareness.

However, as the scene from *Fanny and Alexander* suggests, the camera can also reveal a world that initially seems to be ordinary or mapped. In this creative act, both words and believers make possible a vision of the chair as the most valuable object in the world. 'The movie spectator is absorbed, not by "has been there", but by a sense of "There it is"'.[35] Merleau-Ponty elaborates this idea in his phenomenology of perception and seeing, as a process of dispensing with categories and fundamentalist approaches:

> The analytic of Being and Nothingness is the seer who forgets that he has a body and that what he sees is always beneath what he sees, who tries to force the passage toward pure being and pure nothingness by installing himself in pure vision, who makes himself a visionary, but who is thrown back to his own opacity as a seer and to the depth of being.[36]

34   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 96.
35   Christian Metz, *Film Language*, 6.
36   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 77.

Merleau-Ponty describes a kind of awareness of seeing, that is, an action of placing oneself 'above' or 'outside' the perceptional experience. He also compares this kind of seeing with madness: I am exploring the world itself even as I enter a world that 'do[es] not coexist without me'.[37] Even though it is a process of change, we do not leave ourselves (even if this were possible) but, rather, install ourselves 'in pure vision'. We become an active part of the seeing; we become visionaries even as we learn that our faculty of vision cannot be mastered. It is being and nothingness at one and the same time – not as opposites but in parallel.

The camera is similar to the biological eye, or God's eye, in the matter of perspective, since both are able to behold the world 'from behind'. Regardless of where a perceiver is situated, or where she is present in the world, she can be said to be 'inviting' the environment to interact. She meets the world she perceives as it is presented to her: 'The world is always around me and never simply before me'; and 'It is true that I see what I do see only from a certain angle, and I concede that a spectator differently placed sees what I can only conjecture'.[38] Merleau-Ponty does not discuss the gaze of the camera or the possibility of considering an apparatus as a perceiver, but I believe his claims about perspective can reasonably be applied to the camera, since we are here considering the world and all that is in it as a part of all of our perceptions, though it would be wrong to say that Merleau-Ponty ascribes consciousness to an apparatus. It is rather a kind of phenomenological prosthesis that brings the world to the person, who is both perceiver and sender of perceptions. Metz touches on this point when he writes about the spectator and the film as a medium:

> The spectator is indeed 'disconnected' from the real world, but he must then connect to something else and accomplish a 'transference' of reality, involving a whole affective, perceptual, and intellective *activity*, which can be sparked only by a spectacle resembling at least slightly the spectacle of reality.[39]

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37   Ibid., 75.
38   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 394.
39   Christian Metz, *Film Language*, 11–2.

Like the eye, the camera is often calibrated to particular objects where some things are seen and others are hidden from our conscious vision. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty argues that perceptions of the world are subject to certain preconditions, such as the accessibility of objects moving within the space of the subject's perceptual field. Not everything is possible in perception, because the subject needs a relation to the world that is congruent with its capacities in order to interact with it.[40] This interpretation of perception is both similar to and different from the eye's and the camera's 'gaze'. The first of these differences is that the camera can enlarge details invisible to the human eye; the second is that it can freeze particular 'settings' for later study, which then form part of a new perception; the third is that the gaze of the camera stays at the surface and it shows something with a kind of distance to the object, while the human eye has the option of engaging the gaze. Unlike the Aristotelian, Merleau-Ponty does not use the notion of teleology. One reason for this, I suspect, is that he proposes a holistic worldview, independent of the object-subject dichotomy or any view of events as an interaction of cause and effect, despite treating perceptions as comprehensible and sometimes, if not always, conditioned by intentionality.

This raises the question of whether the camera creates new realities in the world itself. Do vampires exist? Of course they do: we see them on the screen. Do terrorists exist? Yes, of course: there is a category of human beings who act against states and people in a particular fashion and are thus by definition 'terrorists'. The surveillance system has a particular grammar of security and terrorism (and several other subjects) that are categorised according to particular objects and rules. But if no one ever saw or experienced vampires or terrorists, would they nonetheless exist? Rather than simply replying in the negative, our response must take into account what a thing is when it is *visible*. As for objects made visible, are the procedures for the visibility a moral matter of responsibility? In this sense, the camera is an apparatus that not only observes the world, but enables a person or a data programme to create perceptions of visions and fantasies, such that

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40 Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011), 85.

they become parts of our perceptions of the world as it appears. The camera makes it possible to extend the visible through the archive of the 'here and now'. In this sense, surveillance techniques are not merely an issue of registration and observation, they are an act of constructive creation, directed by the inner logic of surveillance.

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