

# Gamification of the Panopticon: Exploring the Post-panoptic Surveillance Culture in the Film *Nerve*

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## Abstract

This research study attempts to examine the techno-thriller film *Nerve* (2016) in order to locate the developments of Michel Foucault's concept of panopticism within the spaces of the post-panopticon of liquid surveillance. Panopticism refers to a form of social control where external surveillance is internalised such that one disciplines his or her own behaviour at the fear of being watched by a powerful entity, creating a self-regulated bio-political prison. Within today's postmodern culture of liquid modernity, where prior frames and references to social norms and institutions are increasingly disintegrating, traditional surveillance practices can be seen undergoing vast transformations as a result of the contemporary society's digiphrenic existence. The proliferation of mass media and social media has destabilized the unidirectional view of Foucault's panopticism, constructing a post-panopticon surveillance culture that democratizes the power to gaze across the participation of the larger community. *Nerve* (2016) directed by Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman explores the perils of technology and social media surveillance across the dark journey of Vee, an introverted youth who gets drawn into a sinister virtual game, 'Nerve'; a heightened version of 'truth-or-dare' that begins to manipulate her reality. *Nerve* depicts the gamification of reality, where principles of game and mobile application design are applied to everyday experiences, augmenting reality by simulating a veil of childish contentment. Although, the post-panopticon has deconstructed the hierarchies of the conventional model of surveillance, *Nerve* reflects how gamification operates to disguise the panopticon's functions to repress and regulate human society, by reproducing it as a medium of self-expression. Hence, across the theoretical perspectives of Foucault's panopticism and David Lyon's and Zygmunt Bauman's post-panopticon of liquid surveillance, this study aspires to trace the developments of the culture of surveillance in the film *Nerve*, in order to expound upon the impact of gamification in the reproduction of surveillance practices from one of bio-political governance to a platform for identity formation.

**Keywords** - panopticism, post-panopticon, liquid surveillance, gamification, social media

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