The culture of surveillance has become an increasingly central area of academic activity in Surveillance Studies, and it is both welcome and timely to see the first full-length monograph on surveillance in film and television. Lefait’s work is highly valuable and worth reading and yet, while this particular work will always retain the distinction of being that first book, I cannot see it becoming definitive. It omits so much and makes some very questionable arguments, such that it leaves a great deal of space for future monographs on the same subject. I will start with what I believe is problematic about Lefait’s approach.

Lefait makes a fundamental error, I think, in beginning with George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949). Orwell’s work is undoubtedly a touchstone for literary depictions of surveillance and indeed media and popular cultural understandings of surveillance more broadly, but it seems rather difficult to argue that it has the same weight within cinematic or televisual depictions of surveillance. Although there was a rather stolid BBC TV adaptation in 1954, and a largely forgotten 1956 big screen version, Orwell’s work itself was not widely seen in cinemas until Michael Radford’s 1984, released in time for the year of its title. And while, as Lefait rightly shows, there is a thread of films about surveillance that might be regarded as ‘Orwellian cinema’, including Terry Gilliam’s Brazil (1984) and George Lucas’s THX-1138 (1967/70) —although I would argue that the latter owes more to the mainstream SF dystopic tradition that comes down through Zamyatin’s Russian novel We (1921)—this really does not constitute in any way the mainstream or the core of surveillance cinema, and it makes a curious choice for an opening chapter which aims to lay down a theoretical marker. In addition, in equating Orwell directly with Foucault’s panopticism, it seems that Lefait is trying too hard to make cinema fit a conventional academic theoretical narrative of surveillance rather than asking how the depiction or use of surveillance in film and television might complicate or challenge such a narrative.

Lefait’s starting with Orwell also immediately marks the book out as generally rather ahistorical and lacking in engagement with real world politics in its treatment of surveillance, cinema and television. Thus, after consideration of the Orwellian / panoptic tradition, we leap straight into to a chapter that looks at cinema in an age in which Lefait argues that Orwell has come true, featuring a grab-bag of films from the sleazy, uncomfortable (and largely unseen), Look (2007), to the mainstream Hollywood conspiracy movie, Enemy of the State (1988). Both are however, highly interesting as cinematic depictions of surveillance, and throughout the book, Lefait does makes some very good choices of which films to analyse: for example, I was very happy to see that he pays serious attention to Michael Winterbottom’s Code 46 (2003), which so often gets overlooked in favour of the superficially similar but rather less complex, Gattaca (1997), as well as such as the Paranormal Activity series (2007-), One Hour Photo...
(2002) and others. However he also makes mysterious contemporary omissions: amongst others, Michael Haneke’s *Caché* (2005) and Andrea Arnold’s *Red Road* (2006) are both notable by their absence.¹

More fundamentally, one has also to ask why there is no analysis of any film made before the 1980s, aside from *THX-1138*. There is a whole distinct tradition of dystopian cinema of surveillance and control which starts with Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1924), and which arrived in the US with Lang to become ‘Film Noir’, as the chiaroscuro movies that Lang and his followers created in Hollywood became known. Indeed Lang’s final work, *Die 1000 Augen des Dr. Mabuse* (*The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*, 1960) is one of the most interesting if flawed pieces of surveillance cinema. Film Noir is the quintessential cinema of paranoia, and in the USA it fused with a particular kind of American anti-government, anti-big corporation, pro-little man tradition that, in the context of the Cold War, gave rise to television series like *The Fugitive* (1963-7) and *The Invaders* (1967-8), and with increasing revelations about domestic spying, to films like Coppola’s *The Conversation* (1974), Alan J. Pakula’s *The Parallax View* (1974) and *All the President’s Men* (1976), in which no-one is to be trusted and everyone is being watched (or indeed, listened to, as in the case of *The Conversation*). And there are several others: the seedy cinema of voyeurism in the slash / horror genre, which found its most artistic expression in Michael Powell’s controversial *Peeping Tom* (1965), but which persists in horror filmmaking today, for example.

Another problem, also foregrounded by Lefait’s founding everything on Orwell, is his treatment of other cinematic adaptations—a key example being Richard Linklater’s *A Scanner Darkly* (2007). Lefait identifies this as an adaptation of Phillip K. Dick’s 1977 novel of the same name, but then proceeds to attribute most of what is an almost entirely ‘straight’ adaptation—Linklater made very few changes to the novel’s themes and approach, although a lot had to be cut—to the director, not the original author. And he misses some of the few things that Linklater does introduce. One example is how Linklater shows the psychological breakdown of the protagonist not (just) though the lengthy monologues deployed in the book but with a visual language in which his high tech, camouflage ‘scramble suit’ crawls with religious symbols of death instead of the usual random and fractured display of images of other people. Another is the brief but telling insertion of Austin, Texas, shock jock and conspiracy theorist, Alex Jones, being bundled away into an unmarked van by armed military police. The point which Lefait misses is not that *A Scanner Darkly* is characteristic of a surveillance cinema which points to the doubtful objectivity of what is seen through the camera—which it is, of course—but that it is also making a deliberate political point about surveillance post-9/11 by using almost verbatim, and only lightly adapting, a novel that was produced in the climate of the revelations of internal espionage of the late 1960s and early 1970s that I mentioned above. It seems to me that although, yes, a book is one cultural artefact and a film, another, wilfully ignoring the source material for a film means that one will inevitably make misreadings.

Having said all this, I must reiterate that Lefait’s work is a both milestone in surveillance studies and full of good things. These include not just the attention paid to perhaps less canonical surveillance films, mentioned above, but something I have barely mentioned so far, the other half of Lefait’s subtitle: television programs – and not the Reality TV genre that has been well-covered by many other words. It seems to me that Lefait’s strength is not in the analysis of cinema but in the area of television, and although he ignores most pre-2000 television, he makes some remarkably interesting analysis of J.J. Abrams’ *Lost* (2004-10) and the recent version of *The Prisoner* (2009), in the latter case, actually making me want to re-watch what I had initially dismissed as an inferior remake. And the final chapter on cinema in a catoptic age, a time of everyone watching everyone else, is also ripe with insight and observations that warrant further investigation and development. If this is not the definitive book on surveillance cinema and television that one might have wanted, it is nevertheless required reading for anyone hoping to embark on any such project, or indeed who just happens to be interested in surveillance on screen.

¹ For an essential surveillance filmography, including all the films mentioned in this review, see the Surveillance Studies Network list, compiled by Dietmar Kammerer: [http://www.surveillance-studies.net/?p=310](http://www.surveillance-studies.net/?p=310)