



Surveillance, Spatial Compression, and Scale: The FBI and Martin Luther King Jr

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Abstract: In 1976, the Church Committee, a Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations, came to the conclusion that Martin Luther King Jr “was the target of an intensive campaign by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to ‘neutralize’ him as an effective civil rights leader”. This paper explores how the FBI surveilled Martin Luther King Jr between September 1957 and Dr King’s death in 1968 and how such surveillance relates to both spatial compression and scale. First, using FBI internal memos, government documents, social movement archives, mass-media accounts, and other sources, I reconstruct this history of state surveillance, partitioning it into three sequential phases. Then, I shift from description to analysis, exploring how surveillance—operating through the social mechanism of intimidation—compressed both the physical and tactical space that Dr King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference could comfortably inhabit. This paper also theorizes the relationship between state surveillance and scale within the larger process of state suppression of dissent since scale both demarcates the boundaries where socio-political contestation occurs and also plays an important role in how these contests play out.

Keywords: surveillance, political geography, Martin Luther King Jr, scale, dissent, suppression

Introduction

Surveillance is an important dimension of myriad social and spatial relationships. David Lyon (1994:ix) defines surveillance as “a shorthand term to cover the many, and expanding, range of contexts within which personal data is collected by employment, commercial and administrative agencies, as well as in policing and security”. Surveillance methods often meld quietly into routine social practices, benefiting “organizations that want to influence, manage, or control certain persons or population groups” (Lyon 2003a:5). In the context of dissident citizenship, surveillance is the ongoing observation of and collection of information about a person or group suspected of being involved in radical political activity. In the United States, the surveillance of dissident citizens is carried out by the domestic political surveillance apparatus, which has historically consisted of three interrelated networks: local police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and military intelligence. Surveillance of

dissident citizens is one of the most common forms of state suppression. In part this is because it can generate intense, reverberative effects at a relatively small cost.

This article—which examines how the FBI surveilled Martin Luther King Jr and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)—is nestled at the nexus of three fields of research: (1) geographic studies of space and scale, (2) surveillance studies, and (3) social movement studies. While numerous geographers and social scientists have analyzed the multifaceted relationships between surveillance, the state, and citizenship, very few have explored the relations between surveillance, the state, and *dissident* citizenship. That is precisely what this paper does, focusing on the social-control efforts of the FBI when Dr King and the SCLC were expressing their dissent. State surveillance can impinge on the practice of dissent, constraining spatial scales. But because of the fluidity of spatial scales, surveillance can also wedge open opportunities for ramped-up activism.

In *Boundaries of Dissent*, Bruce D’Arcus (2006:14) points to “an uneven geography of state power and antistatist dissent”. D’Arcus asserts that it is “important to understand how the state works to shape the geopolitical context in which dissent is articulated”. This article aims to excavate the geopolitical context and state–dissident relations that swirled around Martin Luther King Jr in the 1950s and 1960s. Along the way, I address the following questions. How does the state use surveillance to compress the micro-geographies of on-the-ground dissident practice? How are such compressed micro-geographies enmeshed in ever-shifting networks of power relations? How does this affect dissident citizenship on the uneven socio-political terrain of state–dissident relations?

Tackling such questions leads necessarily to interrogations of scale. As D’Arcus (2006:23) notes, “Like space itself, scale is not a thing, but rather a social relationship that involves drawing, redrawing, and transgressing various kinds of spatial boundaries. Scale is not simply there, but it is actively produced”. Martin Luther King Jr and the SCLC worked vigorously to contest spatial boundaries, acting concertedly to produce the “reinscription of geographic scale” (Smith 1992:60).

As Brenner (2005:8) explains, “scalar hierarchies are not fixed or pre-given scaffolds of social interaction, but are themselves produced and periodically modified in and through that interaction”.¹ As such, the scalar geometry of the surveilled social terrain is greatly contested; the production and reproduction of geographical scale often occurs in a highly charged political atmosphere. Scale both helps delineate the boundaries where socio-political contestation occurs and also plays an important role in how these contests play out. Miller (2000:17) adds, “Some actors will try to shift the scale of struggle to gain advantage, while others, favored by an extant scale, will attempt to lock it in”. While

dissident citizens may strive to rescale space, or to “jump scales” as a form of political resistance (Smith 1992:60), the state also can attempt to actively preclude scale shifting through the deliberate paralysis or roll-back of sociospatial relations. This paper’s case study, the FBI’s surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr, gives empirical texture to this abstract dynamic as it explores scale squelching, the inverse of scale jumping. In a dialectic of resistance and restriction Dr King tried to reorient the spatial distribution of resources while the state, via surveillance, attempted to stultify dissident re-scaling.

Surveillance has many forms and facets. Anthony Giddens (1985:15) suggests two forms of surveillance: (1) direct routes like spying and monitoring, and (2) indirect routes such as the accumulation and storage of “coded information” about individuals. Christopher Dandeker (1990:39) builds from this, pointing out the dialectical relation between the supervision and management of behavior on one hand and the collection and storage of information on the other. He asserts that they should be seen as “mutually reinforcing surveillance activities: the very collection of information normally presupposes a certain capacity to supervise and manage behavior and vice versa”. In the last 20 years, surveillance studies have expanded vastly and a great deal has been written on the interlocking surveillance matrices that engulf participants in modern society. Geographers and social scientists have analyzed a wide range of surveillance-related topics, including the role of closed-circuit television (CCTV) or web cams (Fyfe and Bannister 1998; Koskela 2000, 2003); the vamped apparatus of military forces (Graham 2006; Wright 2006); the medical field (Dubbeld 2006; Fisher 2006); the welfare system (Gilliom 2001; Eubanks 2006); spatial simulation technologies (Bogard 1996; Graham 1998); and the surveillance of target spaces like airports (Adey 2004, 2006), bus systems (Cameron 2006), or the workplace (Ball 2003; Zureik 2003). This array of possibilities for critical inquiry relates to what Lyon (1994, 2001) has dubbed “the two faces of surveillance”. One “face” enables people to more fully participate in society—such as medical surveillance that prolongs life—while another face constricts behavior—such as military technology that tracks and attacks individualized targets. Numerous surveillance technologies exhibit both “faces” simultaneously; for example, email allows us to communicate quickly and inexpensively with people geographically distant, but it also forges a techno-trail for state and commercial forces to track our actions and ideas. This article emphasizes the “face” of surveillance that channels, constrains, and controls behavior.

Surveillance is frequently carried out covertly, without the target’s knowledge, but it may also be manifested overtly, in ostentatious fashion, in order to let dissidents know they are being monitored. Glick (1989:53) calls this latter type “conspicuous surveillance”, and argues that the objective is “not to collect information (which is done

surreptitiously), but to harass and intimidate”, thereby “scaring off potential activists and driving away those who [have] already become involved”. A common mode of ostentatious surveillance includes FBI or police interviews of dissidents. During these interviews, investigators can, either furtively or unequivocally, let dissidents know that their actions have been or are being tracked by state authorities. In a document entitled “New Left Notes—Philadelphia”, filed on 16 September 1970, an FBI agent described the merits of carrying out intensive interviews with dissidents and their “hangers-on”. The agent declared that the investigative interviews not only “enhance the paranoia endemic in these circles” but also “further serve to get the point across there is an FBI agent behind every mailbox” (document reprinted in Cowan, Egleson and Hentoff 1974:138–141).²

Intelligence gathering is another important aspect of surveillance. This intelligence can later be used to harass, intimidate, prosecute, and rally institutional support against dissident citizens. Indeed, it may be the most common activity of control agents. Donner (1980) asserts that intelligence, as gathered through surveillance, is used to address a central contradiction in the US political system: the challenge of protecting the political freedoms inherent to liberal democracy while at the same time maintaining the status quo. This status-quo enforcing mode of dissent suppression can take the form of electronic surveillance,³ wiretapping, mail opening, file storage, and “black bag jobs”.⁴ Surveillance can also be facilitated by informants who infiltrate dissident groups and movements.⁵

Regardless of the form surveillance comes in, it has the effect of compressing space, both corporeal and tactical. Surveillance compresses the physical space in which dissident citizens can comfortably operate, which, in turn, constricts dissidents’ tactical repertoires. Such spatial compression emerges from the strong relationship that surveillance has with the social mechanism of intimidation, as embedded within the process of social-movement demobilization. Spatial compression hinders dissident citizens from reorganizing spatial scales, which is “an integral part of social strategies to combat and defend control over limited resources and/or a struggle for empowerment” (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003:913). In this paper, the struggle over the production of scale will be explored through the FBI’s surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr during a sociospatial conjuncture spanning 1957 through 1968.

Surveillance and Martin Luther King Jr

The state has used surveillance to track the activities of a number of dissident groups in the United States, from the Black Panther Party to Students for a Democratic Society, from the Committee in

Solidarity with the People of El Salvador to the modern-day Global Justice Movement. Perhaps the quintessential example of a target of state surveillance was Martin Luther King Jr. The surveillance of King was carried out with great intensity by the FBI, in concert with local police forces, as King emerged as an important leader in the civil rights movement. This surveillance occurred in three sequential phases.

Phase 1: Forging Communist Connections

According to King scholar David J Garrow (1981:154–155), “no other black leader came in for the intensive and hostile attention that Dr King was subjected to in the mid-1960s”. Additionally, the Church Committee’s Final Report (US Senate 1976:81) maintains that “From December 1963 until his death in 1968, Martin Luther King Jr was the target of an intensive campaign by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to ‘neutralize’ him as an effective civil rights leader”.

While the FBI did intensely track King through his death, it actually continued to besmirch his name even after he was assassinated on 4 April 1968.⁶ Also, the Senate report is incorrect to recount the beginning of the FBI’s interest in King as December 1963. In fact, the FBI had been tracking King and his associates beginning in the middle of September 1957 when J G Kelly, a member of the FBI, clipped and mailed a newspaper article about King’s SCLC to the FBI’s Field Office in Atlanta. Kelly found the SCLC’s stated position against segregation as well as its two-pronged public promise to combat racial injustice and fight for voting rights for blacks to be worthy of FBI attention. Without offering specific proof, Kelly asserted that the SCLC was “a likely target for communist infiltration”, and therefore, he wrote, “in view of the stated purpose of the organization you should remain alert for public source information concerning it in connection with the racial situation” (Churchill and Vander Wall 1990:95). FBI Director J Edgar Hoover was responsive to such suggestions; he had already, in March 1956, sent a collection of reports to the White House depicting alleged Communist influence within another group fighting for racial equality, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Theoharis 1978:166–167). He responded to Kelly’s submission by sending out a memo on 20 September 1957 that, echoing Kelly’s words, told agents not to conduct an investigation, but to “remain alert for public source information” on King and the SCLC “in connection with the racial situation” (Hoover 1957).⁷ Therefore, as King and his allies worked to shift the scale of civil-rights contestation in order to foment more favorable political conditions, the FBI prepared to retrench scale, freezing it to the state’s favor.

This memo from Kelly, albeit speculative, wedged open the door for surveillance, and, in October 1962, Hoover called for a COMINFIL

investigation of the SCLC, with a focus on its leader, Martin Luther King Jr. COMINFIL was the FBI code name for Communist Infiltration investigations. The COMINFIL program was initiated in the 1950s to probe and track the activities of a number of groups and individuals whose work spanned the labor, social-justice, and racial-equality movements. This COMINFIL was ordered despite the fact that the Atlanta Field Office reported that its sources “had no information regarding any Communist Infiltration of the SCLC” (Nichols 1962). The Bureau had only tenuous, circumstantial evidence: King had been approached by black Communist Party member Benjamin Davis, after King presented a guest sermon at a church in Harlem in 1958; King associated with the Progressive Party when he was an undergraduate at Morehouse College in Atlanta in 1948; he had also publicly thanked the Socialist Workers Party for its backing in the Montgomery bus boycott, had voiced appreciation to Davis for donating blood after King was stabbed in 1958 while participating in a book signing and had written an article for *The Nation* magazine that supported speeding up integration (Scatterday 1961). The lack of an established Communist link aside, the inertial process of intense surveillance was set into motion.

A major part of the rationale for surveilling the spatial field in which King operated that Hoover offered to high-level officials like Attorney General Robert F Kennedy was King’s connection with Stanley Levison and Jack O’Dell, two men who had previous ties—some real and some imagined—with the Communist Party USA. Levison had broken ties with the Communist Party by fall 1955 and he had no active ties with the Party in 1956 when he began working with King. O’Dell, who had been hired by Levison to work in the SCLC’s New York office, never denied that he had worked with the Communist Party. He had been a member and party organizer from the late 1940s through the mid-1950s (Garrow 1981:41–43, 50).

In March 1962, with Robert Kennedy’s authorization, FBI agents placed a wiretap on Levison’s New York office telephone and broke into Levison’s office where an electronic bug was also installed (Churchill and Vander Wall 1990:96). The FBI sent summaries of subsequent phone calls between Levison and King to Vice President Lyndon B Johnson, Attorney General Kennedy, and President John F Kennedy’s aide Kenneth O’Donnell (Garrow 1981:46). Although the alleged Communist ties that justified the FBI’s surveillance of Levison and (eventually) King were never substantiated, except through FBI agent and CP infiltrator Jack Childs, these suspected connections allowed for continued surveillance. Indeed, the surveillance was actually ramped up. Hoover and the FBI fashioned a pattern whereby once they used surveillance to establish ties—however tenuous these ties may have been—between King and Communism, they were able to continue to justify to the Attorney General (whether it be Kennedy, Nicholas Katzenbach, or Ramsey Clark)

the need for continued or even heightened surveillance. Essentially, they were able to devise a self-reinforcing circle of logic to justify continued spatial compression through surveillance.

King responded to allegations of Communist infiltration by saying that there were “about as many Communists in this freedom struggle as there are Eskimos in Florida” (Branch 1998:411). Years later, the Church Committee corroborated this assessment, saying of King’s relationship with Levison and O’Dell that “we are unable to conclude whether either of these two Advisers was connected with the Communist Party when the ‘case’ was opened in 1962, or at any time thereafter. We have seen no evidence establishing that either of those Advisers attempted to exploit the civil rights movement to carry out the plans of the Communist Party” as the FBI had suggested was the case. The report went on to declare, “the FBI has stated that at no time did it have any evidence that Dr King himself was a Communist or connected with the Communist Party” (US Senate 1976:85). Nevertheless, the government exerted great pressure on King and the SCLC to disassociate from anyone with a red-hued past. At the behest of Attorney General Kennedy, who feared that King’s associations with Communists might jeopardize the civil rights legislation that was being proposed by the Kennedy administration, John Seigenthaler, Kennedy’s administrative assistant, warned King that he was consorting with alleged Communists. On 17 June 1963, pressure on King reached the highest level when President John F Kennedy took King on a stroll through the Rose Garden, telling him that in order to salvage the civil rights legislation being proposed, he needed to ditch Levison and O’Dell. “They’re Communists. You’ve got to get rid of them”, he reportedly said. The President also noted, “there was an attempt (by the FBI) to smear the movement on the basis of Communist influence” and warned King, saying, “I assume you know you’re under very close surveillance”. King stood up for Levison, demanding that Kennedy provide proof (Garrow 1981:44–45, 60–61; US Senate 1976:97).⁸

Due to the intense pressure put on King and the SCLC, King eventually opted to end regular, direct contact with his much-valued consultant, Levison, and instead communicate with him through a third party, Clarence B Jones. However, as Donner (1980:12) points out, “the secrecy and caution bred by repression in turn become proof of subversion” and so even after King severed his direct ties to Levison and publicly disassociated himself from O’Dell, surveillance continued. It is hard to overestimate the importance of Levison’s counsel to King and the civil rights movement. A trusted friend, discreet confidant, and unswerving supporter, Levison was one of King’s closest and most reliable advisors. King scholar David Garrow (2002:88) goes as far as to say that were it not for the FBI’s surveillance-dredged information on Levison that linked him to communist activity, “the Kennedy and Johnson administrations would most likely have embraced both King and the entire

southern black freedom struggle far more warmly than they did". Thus, during pivotal historical moments, state surveillance contained efforts to scale jump from the local to the national stage, thereby preventing the civil rights movement from reconfiguring geographic scale to its advantage. The seemingly safe tactical space King and Levison inhabited was converted through surveillance to what Koskela (2000:251) calls "power-space" or "a space impregnated with disciplinary practices" that "is constantly shaped and changed by social power relationships".

Part of the reason for increased surveillance is the intense personal disdain that the Director of the FBI, J Edgar Hoover, held for King, and for African-Americans more generally. In the margins of an FBI memorandum Hoover referred to King as "no good" (Bland 1962), and then on 11 May 1962 Hoover (1962) stated in an internal memo that King "should be placed in Section A of the Reserve Index and tabbed communist". According to FBI regulations, during a "national emergency", people who were placed in Section A of the Reserve Index would be rounded up because they "are in a position to influence others against the national interest or are likely to furnish material financial aid to subversive elements due to their subversive associations and ideology" (US Senate 1976:87). This would give the FBI the legal pretext to detain King in the case of a "national emergency".⁹ William Sullivan, who was one of Hoover's top-level associates at the FBI, and who played a major role in the surveillance and harassment of King, explained to the Church Committee in November 1975 the belief system from which Hoover's hatred for King arose: "I think behind it all was the racial bias, the dislike of Negroes, the dislike of the civil rights movement . . . I do not think he could rise above that" (US Senate 1976:91).¹⁰

Phase 2: Discrediting King's Character

In 1963 and 1964, this personal, racism-fueled animosity led to two important shifts in the surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr: (1) the surveillance of King increased markedly, and (2) the purpose of the surveillance changed from focusing on ostensible connections between King and Communists to a preoccupation with King *as a person*. Despite these shifts, though, the central aim of the surveillance—discrediting King, specifically, and the civil rights movement more generally—did not change. What did change, though, is that in 1963–1964 the Bureau began to concertedly pursue the neutralization of King, reflecting an explicit aspiration to besmirch his reputation by bringing his private affairs before the public eye. Such efforts to sully King's image support Miller's (2000:18) assertion that "contested framings of the appropriate geographic scale at which to address particular social issues may dramatically affect the legitimacy of a movement", in this case the civil rights movement. This process of neutralization also points to one way the

state uses surveillance to impose and enforce “a normative space–time ecology” on dissident citizens and their potential supporters (Graham 1998:491).

King and his colleagues were intent on riding the momentum of a successful campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, where civil-rights leaders reached a settlement in May 1963 that was a significant step forward for the movement. In the 10 weeks after the 10 May agreement, civil-rights demonstrators engaged in horizontal scale reconfiguration (Swyngedouw 1997:147), with more than 750 protests erupting in 186 US cities (Branch 1998:84). With national interest in civil-rights issues on the rise and fundraising efforts increasingly successful, the time was ripe for vertical “scale jumping” and King knew it. Building from the struggle in Birmingham, King pressed for a vertical scale shift to the national stage, renewing his call for President Kennedy to put forth an executive order banning segregation at the federal level. In telephone conversations recorded via FBI surveillance, King and Levison strategized, deciding that the local victory in Birmingham would allow them to pressure the Kennedy administration to more forcefully pursue national-level civil-rights legislation at a faster pace. Levison suggested King demand a face-to-face meeting with the president to personally push the issue, which King did via telegram on 30 May. The next day, the FBI passed along a report of the recorded King–Levison strategy session to the Kennedy administration, relaying the thinking behind the desired meeting. The day after that, one of the president’s assistants told King that Kennedy was too busy to meet with him (Garrow 1986:264–265). This rebuff staved off the scale shift King so urgently wanted, sending him and his colleagues back to the strategic drawing board.

After King’s “I Have A Dream” speech in Washington in the summer of 1963, a speech FBI Assistant Director William Sullivan deemed “demagogic”, the Bureau, in an internal memo penned by Sullivan, came to the conclusion that “King stands head and shoulders over all other Negro leaders put together when it comes to influencing the great masses of Negroes. We must mark him now, if we have not done so before, as the most dangerous Negro of the future in this Nation from the standpoint of communism, the Negro and national security” (Sullivan 1963a). So, again, while King attempted to shift scale to the movement’s political advantage, the Bureau primed itself to generate a disjuncture in the geographic scale of King’s process of articulation.

In October 1963 the FBI received the go-ahead from Attorney General Robert Kennedy to place wiretaps on King’s home as well as on his SCLC office lines in Atlanta and New York. Attorney General Kennedy had previously, in July 1963, rejected an FBI request to place a wiretap on King’s home and office (US Senate 1976:100–102, 111–116). Kennedy changed his mind for political reasons. Edwin O Guthman, Press Chief for the Justice Department during Kennedy’s tenure as Attorney General,

testified to the Church Committee that Kennedy eventually approved the wiretap on King because “he felt that if he did not do it, Mr Hoover would move to impede or block the passage of the Civil Rights Bill” (US Senate 1976:92). Kennedy was also miffed by King’s unwillingness to cut off ties with Levison (Garrow 1981:91). The wiretaps allowed the FBI to track communication involving the SCLC’s Atlanta offices from 24 October 1963 to 21 June 1966 and King’s home from 8 November 1963 to 30 April 1965, when the King family changed residence (Pepper 1995:113).

Also, Hoover and the FBI liberally interpreted Kennedy’s authorization so that it also applied to the hotel rooms in which King stayed. Indeed, at that time FBI guidelines did not necessitate obtaining the Attorney General’s permission in order to install microphones in King’s hotel rooms (US Senate 1976:111–112, 318). Shortly after *Time* magazine named King its “Man of the Year” for 1963, the FBI planted bugs in the Willard Hotel in Washington, DC, where King was staying. The “Man of the Year” honor was only one of many to come to King around this time. King was awarded a number of honorary degrees by universities and colleges. He was also invited to speak at a ceremony in Germany that honored President Kennedy after his assassination. He also met with Pope Paul VI in Rome and, in October 1964, was named as the Nobel Peace Prize winner, an award he would receive that December. These awards only deepened Hoover’s fury toward King and hardened his resolve to bring him down. In fact, the Bureau attempted to prevent King from receiving such honorary degrees, from earning an audience with the Pope, from gaining the support of church groups, and even from having a “welcome home” party after receiving the Nobel Prize (US Senate 1976:141–145). The planted bugs at the Willard Hotel constituted the first time the FBI used a bug to surveil King (Garrow 1981:104). It turned out that the FBI had fairly specific hopes for what that bug would turn up, and, at the Willard Hotel, those hopes would not go unfulfilled.

While Kennedy may have been concerned about King’s associations with Communists, the FBI had other reasons for the heightened surveillance. According to internal memos, the FBI wanted to stop nothing short of painting King as “a fraud, demagogue, and scoundrel” in order to “take him off his pedestal and to reduce him completely in influence” (Sullivan 1964). FBI Director Hoover was even more direct about the aims of the surveillance: “to neutralize or completely discredit the effectiveness of Martin Luther King Jr, as a Negro leader” (Hoover 1964). To reach this goal, the FBI set out—through stepped-up surveillance—to collect information about Dr King’s personal life. The Bureau focused on his extra-marital relationships with women and his drinking. Internally, the FBI was quite explicit about why it was surveilling King; in the words of William Sullivan, the Bureau did this so that “we may

consider using this information at an opportune time in a counterintelligence move to discredit". He also declared that "We will at the proper time when it can be done without embarrassment to the Bureau, expose King as an immoral opportunist who is not a sincere person but is exploiting the racial situation for personal gain". Sullivan vowed to, as soon as possible, "expose King for the clerical fraud and Marxist he is" (Sullivan 1963b).

It did not take long for the FBI to generate material via surveillance to use toward these goals. Bugs installed at the Willard Hotel in Washington, DC on 5 January 1964 captured 19 reels of tape, and these reels included exactly the kind of information the Bureau had anticipated: drinking and extra-marital sex. According to Sullivan, when a "highlight" reel was spliced together and presented to Director Hoover, he exclaimed, "This will destroy the burrhead". Hoover, who deemed Dr King "a 'tom cat' with obsessive degenerate sexual urges", pressed forward with electronic surveillance of King in hopes of turning up even more discrediting information from his hotel stays (Garrow 1981:106–107). Over the course of 1964–1965 the FBI placed at least 15 microphones in King's hotel rooms in various cities spanning the United States (US Senate 1976:120, 318).

Electronic surveillance the FBI obtained through bugging King's hotel rooms turned up audio of King making an obscene comment about President Kennedy's wife Jacqueline while watching a re-run of the president's funeral in March 1964. Hoover quickly passed along the captured intelligence to the president's brother, who replied that the information was "very helpful" (Branch 1998:250). According to Branch (1998:27), "Subversion politics" allowed the Kennedy administration "to deflect blame through the FBI back into the civil rights movement itself", thereby slowing the pace of change. The civil rights movement needed the upper echelons of the government firmly in its corner in order to jump scales from local victories to national legislation. Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr had a complicated relationship that involved both reciprocated suspicion and mutual mistrust, as well as shared goals and aligned aspirations. The FBI's surveillance of King clouded their relationship, straining it in ways that only surveillance could. Robert F Kennedy's FBI-induced resentment toward King thus hampered King's plans for scale shift, even if in the short term. Here we see the politics of scale taking the form of "a temporary sociospatial compromise that contains and channels conflict" (Swyngedouw 1997:146).

With information gathered from the Willard Hotel and other hotels in which King stayed in the early months of 1964, the FBI cobbled together an eight-page "Top Secret" report that it distributed to key individuals—including Attorney General Kennedy—in order to inject doubts into their minds about King's moral character (US Senate 1976:124–126). This report was periodically updated and disseminated to members of

Congress, UN Representatives Adlai Stevenson and Ralph Bunche, prominent church leaders, and other influential figures who considered forming alliances with King. Again we see how scale is inherent to the process of social-movement demobilization. “Highlights” from the hotel surveillance audiotapes—replete with episodes of drinking and carousing with assorted women—were also compiled into a single tape, which was sent to King at the SCLC Atlanta office in November 1964, approximately a month before he was due to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. A note to King accompanied the tape (34 days before he was to receive the prize, to be more precise, which is why this specific number is mentioned in the letter). It read, in part:

King,

In view of your low grade . . . I will not dignify your name with either a Mr or a Reverend or a Dr And, your last name calls to mind only the type of King such as King Henry the VIII . . . King, look into your heart. You know you are a complete fraud and a great liability to all us Negroes. White people in this country have enough frauds of their own but I am sure they don't have one at this time that is anywhere near your equal. You are no clergyman and you know it. I repeat you are a colossal fraud and an evil, vicious one at that. You could not believe in God . . . Clearly you don't believe in any personal moral principles.

King, like all frauds your end is approaching. You could have been our greatest leader. You, even at any early age have turned out to be not a leader but a dissolute, abnormal moral imbecile. We will now have to depend on older leaders like Wilkins a man of character and thank God we have others like him.¹¹ But you are done. Your “honorary” degrees, your Nobel Prize (what a grim farce) and other awards, will not save you. King, I repeat you are done.

No person can overcome facts, not even a fraud like yourself . . . I repeat—no person can argue successfully against facts. You are finished . . . And some of them pretend to be ministers of the Gospel. Satan could not do more. What incredible evilness . . . King you are done.

The American public, the church organizations that have been helping—Protestant, Catholic and Jews will know you for what you are—an evil, abnormal beast. So will others who have backed you. You are done.

King, there is only one thing left for you to do. You know what it is. You have just 34 days in which to do this (this number has been selected for a specific reason, it has definite practical significance). You are done. There is but one way out for you. You better take it before your filthy, abnormal fraudulent self is bared to the nation (US Senate 1976:160; Garrow 1981:125–126).

The “grim farce” may have actually been that the FBI thought it could get King to commit suicide after receiving such a letter, if that was indeed what the Bureau was attempting to achieve. At the very least, though, the Bureau hoped that the threat of shifting the micro-scale into macro-view would create a rift between Dr King and his wife, Coretta Scott King. In fact, it was Coretta Scott King who first came across the tape and threatening letter when on 5 January she was cataloguing tapes of her husband’s public speeches that were received at the SCLC office. Upon discovering that this tape was not the average public speech, and then finding the accompanying letter, she called her husband immediately. King listened to the tape three times, and then called a meeting of his most respected advisors—Ralph Abernathy, Bernard Lee, Joseph Lowery, and Andrew Young—and they listened to the tape together. King realized that the hotel rooms had been bugged and that he should expect such treatment in the future. He and his advisers also came to the conclusion that this surveillance was the work of the FBI. Clearly rattled by the episode, and feeling like a moral failure, King said, “They are out to break me” (Branch 1998:556–557).

President Johnson’s Attorney General, Nicholas Katzenbach, readily grabbed the baton of surveillance authorization from his predecessor, Robert Kennedy. While in March 1965 Katzenbach insisted that the Bureau resubmit all its wiretaps for reauthorization, he proceeded to approve the wiretap on the Atlanta SCLC office (Donner 1980:245). Katzenbach changed procedures slightly by making Attorney General approval a requirement for both wiretaps and the implantation of bugs; prior to this procedural modification, the FBI had been able to freely bug places via surreptitious entry (and this, at the same time, allowed them to sidestep getting Attorney General approval for wiretaps). Elsur bugs are more intrusive and more thorough in their capability to capture information. Nevertheless, although he tightened formal procedures, in terms of black bag jobs and the installation of electronic surveillance, Katzenbach approved Elsur of King’s hotel rooms in July 1965 (US Senate 1976:367–368, 126–130). Even when President Johnson released a directive that limited wiretaps to national security matters (as certified by the Attorney General), the level of surveillance of King did not abate, in large part because of Katzenbach’s compliant attitude toward Hoover’s requests. This only changed in 1966 when Senator Edward V Long of Missouri instigated an investigation of the use of electronic surveillance by federal police and law enforcement agencies. Concerned that the FBI’s complex network of surveillance activity against one of the most revered US Americans might be placed under the spotlight of public exposure, Hoover opted to cease electronic surveillance of King. Therefore, in the final two years of his life, King never again experienced microphone surveillance (Garrow 1981:148–150). This tightening up of standards also had something to do with the new Attorney General

Ramsey Clark, who also curtailed the placement of wiretaps on the SCLC office in Atlanta (Donner 1980:245). Accordingly, the FBI's investigation of King and the SCLC "was strikingly quiet from the summer of 1966 through February 1967" (Garrow 1981:207). Nevertheless, this phase in the surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr and the SCLC allowed the FBI to identify potential pressure points within the civil rights movement and to stultify the movement's efforts to restructure scale in its favor.

Phase 3: Prefiguring Civil Rights Movement Activities

Amidst these procedural changes for intelligence activities, and the overall decrease in surveillance, a notable shift occurred in terms of the reasons for the surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr. According to Garrow (1981:172), in the fall of 1965, the objective of surveillance shifted from discrediting King to prefiguring the civil-rights-related activities of King and the SCLC. This phase of surveillance aimed to gain political intelligence that would allow the Bureau to more effectively disrupt the movement.

This change in purpose was facilitated by the infiltration of an informant. The FBI had numerous informants working inside the SCLC. Because of the onerous amount of transcribing and paperwork that a wiretap or Elsur generates, the Bureau had been looking for an infiltrator since at least the middle of 1963 (Garrow 1981:173). By the fall of 1965, the Bureau had its man: James A Harrison, a young accountant in the SCLC who agreed to double as an FBI informant. Codenamed "AT 13878-S", Harrison worked closely with Atlanta Agent Alan G Sentinella; they met weekly, with Harrison providing particulars on King's itinerary and travel plans (Churchill and Vander Wall 2002:55; Branch 2006:369). They also communicated by telephone. Harrison also recounted for the FBI specific conversations between King and his top aides, proffered lists of cities and rural areas where King aimed to recruit supporters, and accompanied King and a number of other SCLC workers to Memphis during the final weeks of King's life. Harrison produced substantial information on the SCLC's internal affairs to the FBI. For his efforts, the Bureau paid Harrison more than the salary King and the SCLC paid him (Branch 2006:662, 668).

Harrison was not the only person to penetrate the SCLC's ranks. As part of an expanded program to infiltrate and surveil the Poor People's Movement, FBI informants wedged their way into the campaign where they deliberately disrupted organizing activity. In Chicago, Detroit, and Washington, DC, FBI informants stultified the campaign by "staging dirty tricks and fanning internal dissension" (Garrow 1986:607). Civil-rights organizer Hosea Williams reportedly lost 200 recruits because of Bureau whisper campaigns that wafted through both the on-the-ground

mobilizing sessions and the mass media (Branch 2006:709). The Poor People's Movement was designed to scale shift from various localized anti-poverty struggles to a descent on Washington, DC where thousands of protesters were to demand from Congress a federally legislated economic bill of rights. The program ultimately collapsed in June 1968, two months after King's assassination, thereby finalizing the FBI's scale squelching through various forms of surveillance.

The change in the purpose of state surveillance also coincided with King's radical turn, where he deeply and publicly questioned US militarism and imperialistic tendencies. Along the way, he began to interrogate capitalism as the system that gave rise to such trends as it objectified human beings. Therefore, Garrow (1981:208) writes, "In the last twelve months of his life King represented a far greater political threat to the reigning American government than he ever had before. An intensified interest in his political activities was perfectly in keeping with that development".

King's cross-examination of capitalism and its intersection with militarism was articulated forcefully on 4 April 1967 when King delivered an anti-Vietnam War speech at Riverside Church in New York where he said that the United States was "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today".¹² The FBI responded aggressively to King's speech and his mounting anti-imperialist critique of the military-industrial complex by initiating a COINTELPRO against the SCLC under the "Black Nationalist—Hate Group" rubric. The FBI's stated purpose of its Black Nationalist—Hate Group COINTELPRO was to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black-nationalist, hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership and supporters to counter their propensity for violence and civil disorder". King was listed specifically as a "primary target" of the COINTELPRO. All FBI Field Offices received official directives that delineated the following "long-range goals".

- 1 Prevent the coalition of militant black nationalist groups ... An effective coalition of black nationalist groups might be ... the beginning of a true black revolution.
- 2 Prevent the rise of a "messiah" who could unify and electrify the militant black nationalist movement. Malcolm X might have been such a "messiah;" he is the martyr of the movement today. Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, and Elijah Muhammad all aspire to this position. Elijah Muhammad is less of a threat because of his age. King could be a real contender for this position should he abandon his supposed "obedience" to "white, liberal doctrines" (nonviolence) and embrace black nationalism. . . .
- 3 Prevent militant black nationalist groups from gaining respectability, by discrediting them (Hoover 1968).

This COINTELPRO was in effect through King's assassination on 4 April 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee.¹³

Surveillance, Spatial Compression, Intimidation, and Scale

As Neil Smith (1992:62) states, "the production of geographical scale is the site of potentially intense political struggle". Dissident citizens like King attempt to achieve "the *concrete production and reproduction of geographical scale* as a political strategy of resistance" (Smith 1992:60, emphasis in original). One way to do this is to "jump scales . . . over a wider geographical field", which for Smith means "to organize the production and reproduction of daily life and to resist oppression and exploitation at a higher scale" (Smith 1992:60). Social-movement scholars (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001:331) use a similar concept, "scale shift", which they define as "a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities". For instance, earning the Nobel Prize in 1964 afforded Dr King an opportunity to "jump scales" or achieve "scale shift" in the ever-present battle to redefine scale and reorient the geography of social power. This focus of this article, however, is how the FBI, through surveillance, attempted to *prevent* such "scale jumping" or "scale shift". As Swyngedouw and Heynen (2003:913) note, "territorial and networked spatial scales are never set, but are perpetually disputed, redefined, reconstituted and restructured in terms of their extent, content, relative importance and interrelations". State surveillance, then, is designed to, in the midst of this social disputation, prevent "scale jumping" or "scale shifting" through the refortification and compression of spatial boundaries by regulating the spatial field in which dissident citizens strategize and maneuver. Such social compression, in turn, aims to reinforce the asymmetries of social power. Brenner asserts that in the dynamic battles over scaling and rescaling:

Scales evolve relationally within tangled hierarchies and dispersed interscalar networks. The meaning, function, history and dynamics of any one geographical scale can only be grasped relationally, in terms of its upwards, downwards and sideways links to other geographical scales situated within tangled scalar hierarchies and dispersed interscalar networks (Brenner 2001:605, emphasis in original).

Such relational interscalar endeavoring is central—whether at the conscious level or not—to the success and failure of dissident social movements.

But how, more precisely, does the state prevent "scale jumping" or "scale shift" through surveillance? To answer this question, one must consider social mechanisms, and more specifically the mechanism of

intimidation. According to Stinchcombe (1991:367), a social mechanism is “a piece of scientific reasoning” that helps explain “a component process”, thereby “increasing the suppleness, precision, complexity, elegance, or believability” of a theory. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001:24) define mechanisms as “a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations”. Mechanisms inhabit the middle-level theoretical space between universal laws and historiography, between covering law and description.

State intimidation—the discouraging or inhibiting action through explicit or tacit threat—is a social mechanism that operates at both the individual and collective level. In the mobilizational milieu prior to the emergence of this mechanism, social movement organizations—and the individuals who comprise them—are largely concerned with the *external* goals and aspects of their dissident activity: pursuing social-change goals, attempting to gain recruits, trying to generate positive media coverage, and securing support from key social groups. The mechanism of intimidation imposes a new logic on social movement activity, as it forces participants to seriously consider the *internal* consequences of their activities. Individuals must ask themselves: What could happen to me if I opt to dissent? What could happen to the future of my social movement organization? As such, intimidation reorients relations from a sociospatial process of mobilization to a different process with different organizing principles and a distinct logic of interaction: demobilization (Boykoff 2006). Thus, state surveillance, as mediated through intimidation, *causes* spatial compression, whereby both literal space is compressed and tactical space compacted so dissidents feel less able to act freely. As such, surveillance via intimidation constitutes a process of “scalar structuration [that] generate[s] contextually specific causal effects” (Brenner 2001:606). In other words, causation is embedded within the patterned matrices of sociospatial relations on the uneven geographical terrain. Such a view on causality clicks puzzle-piece-like with what Robert K Merton (1968:39) described as “theories of the middle range”.

The new logic that the mechanism of intimidation imposes on actors leads to altered strategies and tactics. By forcing actors to consider the internal consequences of their actions, intimidation leads to amplified paranoia as well as increased secrecy in group relations. Indeed, “paranoia” was a common word in the FBI’s classified-document lexicon of the 1960s and 1970s. Such resultant secrecy often breeds a significant decrease in internal democracy in group decision-making processes. It also complicates intra- and inter-group brokerage. Thus, the process of spatial compression and the stultification of “scale jumping” alters the organizing premises of social transactions in significant ways.

Clearly, the surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr and the SCLC affected morale and altered tactics within the civil rights movement. According to his colleagues and friends, King would often make jokes about how the FBI was surveilling him, saying that any offhanded remark might be captured, chronicled, and commemorated by one of the FBI's concealed microphones (Garrow 1981:218). Because "they were bugging just about every place we went", recounted Andrew Young, "we had a running joke of who all was a member of the 'FBI Golden Record Club' . . . When somebody said something a little fresh or flip, Martin would say, 'Ol' Hoover's gonna have you in the Golden Record Club if you're not careful'" (Raines 1977:427–428). Jack O'Dell later recalled,

Surveillance by the FBI and for the FBI and the whole range of dirty tricks were constantly part of our problem. I mean, I can remember in Albany when we used to hold meetings at Dr William Anderson's house. Dr King had to get out of that house to talk about what we were going to do. He operated on the assumption that the place was bugged and the phones were tapped and the house was under surveillance and that any information they got would be used against us. We were always operating in a treacherous environment (Schultz and Schultz 1989:284).

By early January 1965, when King encountered the tape of himself carousing with women, he was "worried about spies and microphones to the point of whispering" (Branch 1998:557).

But lowering one's voice was only a part of King's surveillance-induced problem. "Inevitably, surveillance and even the fear of surveillance on the part of those not actually monitored", asserts Donner (1980:6) "produce a pervasive self-censorship". Harry Wachtel, one of King's lawyers, advisors, and confidantes, described to the Church Committee how the political intelligence gathered through surveillance impinged on the group's ability to plan effectively:

[I]t affected the strategies and tactics because the people you were having strategies and tactics about were privy to what you were about. They knew your doubts . . . Decision-making . . . had to be limited very strongly by the fact that information which was expressed by telephone, or which could even possibly be picked up by bugging, would be in the hands of the President (US Senate 1976:184).

Surveillance also led to the attrition of key social-movement figures, thereby hindering scalar restructuring. As O'Dell put it, "[I]f Martin was speaking somewhere, I'd stay clear because I'd figure they were surveilling it" (Schultz and Schultz 1989:288). For example, it was because of intense surveillance that O'Dell knew he had to resign from the SCLC due to the fact that his former ties to the Communist Party were leading to intense pressure on King (Schultz and Schultz 1989:286).

Furthermore, as Gary Marx (1979:99) has pointed out, “Knowing that agents are gathering information on it may make the social movement less open and democratic, require that limited resources be devoted to security, and may deter participation”. As open and democratic as the civil rights movement was, relatively speaking, the fact that it was so heavily surveilled most assuredly affected the overall flexibility of its organizational apparatus. The Church Committee concluded that the FBI’s surveillance and discreditation programs made an “unquestionable” impact on the movement. The FBI’s surveillance and rumor spreading also, according to Church Committee findings, “had a profound impact on the SCLC’s ability to raise funds” (US Senate 1976:183).

So, surveillance has a special relationship with the mechanism of intimidation, especially when the targets know they are being surveilled. As Zald (1978:91) points out, “Surveillance can also be thought of as a form of sanction. At least, target element awareness of surveillance is likely to lead to a perception that the probability of sanctions is increased. Thus, periodic surveillance can be seen as a control device even without the imposition of fines or allocations of subsidies”. Wachtel, King’s advisor, described how this works in the real world, as he explained how surveillance affected people working with the SCLC: “When you live in a fishbowl, you act like you’re in a fishbowl, whether you do it consciously or unconsciously . . . I can’t put specifics before you except to say that it beggars the imagination not to believe that the SCLC, Dr King, and all its leaders were not chilled or inhibited from all kinds of activities, political and even social” (US Senate 1976:184).

Bahry and Silver (1987:1066, emphasis in original) pinpoint the quotidian connection between surveillance and intimidation:

An equally important instrument of collective coercion against the individual . . . is the individual’s lack of trust in others, a sense that risks lurk not only in the overt activities of the agencies of coercion but also in one’s most ordinary contacts with co-workers, bosses, friends, and even relatives. It is this set of perceptions—of the coercive potential of the political police and other people—that we call the *intimidation factor*.

In other words, day-to-day interactions become instruments of social control, and the mechanism of intimidation animates this dynamic. Scale is constituted and re-constituted through quotidian, boots-to-the-pavement social struggle. Yet, in the perpetual battle over scalar structuration, the state often uses surveillance in order to limit social-movement scale shifting.

While I have focused on how surveillance can inhibit dissident “scale jumping” and lead to scale squelching, it is crucial to note that, given the fluidity of spatial scales, state surveillance can have multiple and varying effects, depending on the socio-political context. State surveillance

is imbricated in a complex matrix of social formations that play out in fluid, sometimes counterintuitive, ways. Dissident citizens and the state forces that are trying to suppress them are operating in relational “webs of interaction among social sites” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001:23) that are not necessarily driving dissidents down the deterministic road of social-movement demobilization. As Swyngedouw (1997:140) asserts, “Scale, both in its metaphorical use and material construction, is highly fluid and dynamic, and both processes and effects can easily move from scale to scale and affect different people in different ways, depending on the scale at which the process operates”. He goes on to write that “different scalar narratives indicate different causal moments and highlight different power geometries in explaining such events. Scale is, consequently, not socially or politically neutral, but embodies and expresses power relationships”. Social-movement scholars like Tilly (2005:222) have come to the similar conclusion that different causal configurations in different sociospatial settings produce different outcomes, noting “it makes little sense to treat mobilization as something that dissidents do by themselves and repression as something that authorities do by themselves; looked at more closely, those phenomena resemble complex dances”. While these “dances” occur on uneven social terrain, the suppression–mobilization nexus is a *transaction* not a monolithic, one-sided process. State surveillance does not invade space and impose social control in deterministic fashion; nor does it infiltrate spaces of dissent in the same one-size-fits-all form. We need to fend off the tendency to view state surveillance as having totalizing, sociospatial impacts that are monolithic and deterministic rather than multifaceted and contingent.

The surveillance-laden relationship between dissident citizens and the state plays out in various and complex ways, since, as Harvey (2001:223) notes, social movement activity does not transpire within “a fixed spatial frame” but rather as frame that is “malleable and variable (relative and relational)” and “an actively produced field of spatial ordering that changes sometimes quickly and sometimes glacially over time”. Amid sociospatial struggle, state suppression—as mediated through the social mechanism of intimidation—can inhibit “the spanning of multiple social sites”, instead confining resistance to “existing social sites” and perhaps squelching it there, too (Tilly 2005:223). But because spatial scale is relational, the opposite can also occur. State suppression via surveillance and other methods can actually *increase* mobilization levels, thereby allowing for scale shift, if the ferocity or timeliness of such suppression divides elites or galvanizes new allies (Tilly 2005:224–225). State suppression can foment brokerage between dissident groups so that two or more previously unconnected sociospatial sites of struggle are linked in solidarity (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tilly 2005).

These possibilities take us back to the fluidity of spatial scale, which is socially derived in the crucible of heterogeneous conflict, multi-pronged

resistance, and perpetual flux. “Scale”, writes Swyngedouw (1997:140), becomes the arena and moment, both discursively and materially, where sociospatial power relations are contested and compromises are negotiated and regulated. Scale, therefore, is both the result and the outcome of social struggle for power and control”. As the case of Martin Luther King Jr and the SCLC shows, not only are such open, fluid scalar battles a matter of historical accuracy, but also, on the normative level, a cause for hope.

Conclusion

Martin Luther King Jr, the SCLC, and the civil rights movement more generally tried to rescale spatial relations through innovative strategies and tactics that challenged the dominant scalar order of their historical conjuncture. In this complex sociospatial power struggle the FBI responded with the surveillance of dissident citizens in order to compress space and prevent scalar restructuring. The FBI’s surveillance of Martin Luther King Jr passed through three distinguishable phases: (1) the attempt to forge a connection between King and communism, (2) efforts to discredit King as a social-movement leader, and (3) the desire to prefigure what actions civil rights movement would do next.

Surveillance often takes the form of a seemingly innocuous (and sometimes even helpful) legibility project, and many of these projects have subtly but surely become a largely unquestioned part of the social structure (Marx 2006; Scott 1998). Parenti (2003) calls this “the soft cage of massive routine surveillance” that leads to the internalization of the state’s gaze, thereby setting into motion—if not normalizing—spatial compression and the stultification of dissident rescaling via the mechanism of intimidation. Intimidation, then, is a cumulative, self-regulatory effect of how the gaze of the state affects the practice of dissent. In other words, through intimidation, people police themselves. Simultaneously, intimidation diminishes the possibility of gaining external assistance from potential movement supporters and therefore mitigates against “scale jumping”.

Despite the attempts of the Church Committee to place restrictions on the surveillance activities of the FBI (US Senate 1976:370–371), the Bureau was hardly de-toothed. In fact, in 1981 President Ronald Reagan issued Executive Order 12333, which allowed the FBI to again more freely engage in wiretaps and black-bag-job type break-ins (Reagan 1982). Also, recent legislation—such as the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001—makes it markedly easier for the FBI to carry out surveillance on potential dissidents in our contemporary moment. More specifically, Section 213 of the USA PATRIOT Act permits federal agents to carry out “sneak-and-peek searches”, which are searches of an individual’s home or office that do not require showing a search warrant until after

the search has occurred. This delayed notice may occur as long as the Bureau can show “reasonable cause to believe that providing immediate notification may have an adverse result”. Thus the “reasonable cause” standard quietly replaces the probable cause, a common feature of the law. In practice, under a “sneak-and-peek” warrant the FBI can covertly enter a residence when the occupant is not there and can seize the occupant’s possessions, copy, photograph, or alter them, and not inform the occupant of this for a “reasonable period thereafter” (US Congress 2001:Sec 213).

Section 215 of the Patriot Act also relates to surveillance and therefore spatial compression. Section 215 allows the FBI to obtain “any tangible things (including books, records, papers, documents, and other items)” as long as these items are “relevant” to a terrorism investigation. The law does not require the FBI to demonstrate that the records are those of a person linked to suspected terrorists (US Congress 2001:Sec 215). The original PATRIOT Act permanently gagged people who fulfill these orders, preventing them from telling anyone about the Bureau’s inquiries. Under the US Congress’s reauthorization of the Act, this gag order was changed from everlasting to a one-year period, after which information providers can challenge the restraint (Stolberg 2006).

Many dissidents experiencing heightened surveillance made possible by the USA PATRIOT Act have asserted that surveillance has affected their ability to practice dissent or to attract recruits for fear of being dubbed “criminal extremists”. In a sense, the watchword “communism” has been replaced by “terrorism”, and by blunting the probable-cause requirements for surveillance, this legislation has afforded the FBI renewed and capacious space to carry out widespread surveillance for anti-terrorism, national-security purposes. Surveillance-induced deterrence has been fortified by recent revelations that the National Security Agency (NSA) has been surveilling US citizens without a warrant (Risen and Lichtblau 2005). In general, the combination of high technology and recent legislation like the USA Patriot Act is likely to extend surveillance as a staple mode of spatial compression for years to come.

Since 1976 when the Church Committee issued its Final Report, technology has advanced significantly, and, as technology has advanced, so has the possibility of ever more surreptitious forms of surveillance. Herbert Marcuse (1964:xv) wrote, “Technology serves to institute new, more effective, more pleasant forms of social control and social cohesion”. Perhaps with the Internet and ever-advancing tracking technologies (Shoval and Isaacson 2006)—including the US military’s “global surveillance and power projection” networks (Graham 2006:250)—this assertion has never been truer. Ever-faster computer networks with sky-rocketing storage capacities qualitatively alter modern-day surveillance, facilitating complex regimes of dataveillance that are quietly embedded in the routines of everyday life. Data warehouses allow for the

storage of information that may seem innocuous today but that may be incriminating tomorrow, thus allowing for “social sorting” (Lyon 2003b; Parenti 2003). Marcuse astutely points us toward an important dialectic for dissident citizens to consider: the relational nature of technology-facilitated opportunity and suppression via surveillance-induced spatial compression.

Vincent Boudreau (2002:30) notes that “Over time, interactions between state repression and social movements created sets of *relational possibilities* between social and state actors. Repression influenced whether social allies were physically, organizationally, or ideologically available to potential state defectors”. This article attempts to imbue such an assessment with notions of space and scale since these “relational possibilities”, which include spatial compression and the stultification of “scale jumping”, are inherently geographical processes. In the United States, the state apparatus has consistently acted to contract the scale of dissident practice. The case study of Martin Luther King Jr and the SCLC highlights such scale squelching, the inverse of what Smith (1992:60) dubs “scale jumping”.

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Endnotes

¹ In this article I do not focus on the “hierarchy” dimension of “scalar hierarchies” as it is not vital to this empirical study. At the same time, I do not abandon scale in favor of “a flat ontology” (Marston, Jones and Woodward 2005:422) since scale offers a constructive way to gain analytical traction to better understand the surveillance-drenched social relations at hand.

² This document only became known to the public because on 8 March 1971, the Citizens’ Commission to Investigate the FBI burgled an FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania and made off with thousands of pages of information from classified files. When the *Washington Post* printed a summary of these documents the next week, people first became aware of the FBI’s reticulation of counter-intelligence programs, or COINTELPRO (Churchill and Vander Wall 2002:39–40).

³ Or, to use the lexicon of the FBI, “Elsur”. This procedure is more colloquially known as “bugging”.

⁴ The Church Committee, a Senate Select Committee assembled in 1975 to investigate FBI malfeasance, defined “black bag jobs”, as “warrantless surreptitious entries for purposes other than microphone installation, eg physical search and photographing or seizing documents” (US Senate 1976:355). Thus, surreptitious entries, or break-ins, constitute the wider category, and “black bag job” is a more specific term. In 1966 J Edgar Hoover officially abolished black bag jobs, though in practice surreptitious entries continued, if at a reduced rate.

⁵ While this article focuses on surveillance, the state uses many other methods of suppression that contribute to constraining scale shift. Other forms of state suppression

include direct violence, public prosecutions and hearings, employment deprivation, and harassment arrests (Boykoff 2006).

⁶ For example, the Church Committee (US Senate 1976:183) found that in March 1969 the FBI tried to prevent Congress from passing a law declaring King's birthday a national holiday. The Bureau's Crime Records Division recommended that key members of Congress be briefed by FBI agents in order to learn that "King was a scoundrel". Then in April 1969, a memorandum from the Atlanta office to Hoover recommended "to entertain counterintelligence action against Coretta Scott King and/or the continuous projection of the public image of Martin Luther King". Hoover replied to Atlanta that "the Bureau does not desire counterintelligence action against Coretta Scott King of the nature you suggest at this time" (Hoover 1969).

⁷ The FBI memoranda cited in this article can be found in an array of sources: David Garrow has edited a 16-reel microfilm—"The Martin Luther King, Jr, FBI File"—with roughly 17000 pages of FBI documents related to King. Numerous libraries in the United States have this collection, including Portland State University where I was able to access it. Also, the Marquette University Library's Department of Special Collections and University Archives holds extensive archival files entitled: "FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) Records Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Investigation File, 1957–1980" and "FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) Records SAC (Special Agents in Charge) Letters". For a full list of Marquette University's FBI-document archives, see: <http://www.marquette.edu/library/collections/archives/Mss/FBI/mss-fbi-index.html>. In addition, approximately 200 relatively uneventful pages of Martin Luther King Jr's FBI file are available online at <http://foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/king.htm>. Finally, a number of books, including Churchill and Vander Wall (1990), have reprinted facsimiles of key documents.

⁸ King later joked with Andrew Young about the incident. According to Young, "Martin came back saying that the President was afraid to talk in his own office, and he said—and he was kinda laughing about it—he said, 'I guess Hoover must be buggin' him, too'" (Raines 1977:430).

⁹ In November 1962 King fanned the flames of ire between himself and Hoover when, in response to a report by Howard Zinn and the Southern Regional Council about the police and FBI's unfair treatment of protesters in Albany, Georgia, King said the Bureau and local police forces combined to enforce segregation (US Senate 1976:89–90). This critique followed previous unfavorable assessments of the FBI. For example, in February 1961 King wrote an article for the *Nation* that alluded to racial discrimination in the federal law enforcement agencies. King's November remarks, which were reported in newspapers across the United States, ignited a firestorm at the Bureau. During an interview the next day, Hoover told a gaggle of reporters that "In view of King's attitude and his continued criticism of the FBI . . . I consider King to be the most notorious liar in the country". Hoover also said that King was "one of the lowest characters in the country" and that he was "controlled" by the Communists who were advising him (Branch 1998:526). Hoover expanded his verbal assault in a subsequent speech at the Chicago Loyola medical school where, in reference to King and the SCLC, he attacked "pressure groups that would crush the rights of others under heel", and whose members "think with their emotions, seldom with reason". His attack built to a crescendo, as he said that these dissident groups "have no compunction in carping, lying and exaggerating with the fiercest of passion, spearheaded at times by Communists and moral degenerates" (Branch 1998:530).

¹⁰ One must keep in mind, though, that at the time Sullivan said this, he was doing everything he could to exculpate himself from the emerging revelations about COINTELPRO. Also, Hoover was an easy target, as he had passed away in 1972.

¹¹ Roy Wilkins was a leader in the NAACP. He and King held divergent views on many civil rights issues, strategies, and tactics. Wilkins met privately with the FBI's Cartha

“Deke” DeLoach in November 1964 to discuss the “derogatory” information that the FBI had on King (DeLoach 1964).

¹² Mainstream media coverage of this speech was scathing. *Newsweek* called his speech “an extravagantly vituperative attack on his government” that “carelessly mixes political and economic arguments”, engages in “specious arithmetic”, and conflates moral and political values. The magazine concluded, “He can only serve his people poorly in any case, by essaying the smoothest mimicry of their roughest extremists” (Hughes 1967:17). The *Washington Post* attacked King for offering irresponsible analysis based on “sheer inventions and unsupported fantasy”. The *Post* concluded, “Many who have listened to him with respect will never again accord him the same confidence. He has diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country, and to his people” (“A tragedy” 1967:20). *Life* magazine went further, asserting in an editorial that King “goes beyond his personal right to dissent when he connects progress in civil rights here with a proposal that amounts to abject surrender in Vietnam” and that therefore he “comes close to betraying the cause for which he has worked so long”. *Life*’s editorial condemned the speech as “demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi” (“Dr King’s disservice to his cause” 1967:4).

¹³ Pepper (2003) has assembled evidence that the FBI and the US Army were surveilling King right up until his death, and that, in fact, this surveillance may have been an important piece in the assassination puzzle. While years after King’s assassination Pepper (1995, 2003) meticulously tracked the intersection between the work of federal law agencies and the efforts of Martin Luther King, Jr, the first public disclosure that King had been wiretapped came a mere two months after his death (Garrow 1981:201). This was done for political reasons: to taint presidential candidate Robert F Kennedy, since it was the Attorney General who had approved surveillance of King and the SCLC. However, when Kennedy himself was assassinated in June 1968, the story died with him.

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