



Article

Conspiracy Theorizing Surveillance: considering modalities of paranoia and conspiracy in surveillance studies

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that the notion of paranoia can inform a post-panoptic theory of surveillance, without simply functioning as a pre-emptive dismissal of a critical engagement with technologies and regimes of surveillance as *just* paranoid. Rather, I seek to address how paranoia can be rearticulated to serve a productive, non-pathological function in an analysis of logics of surveillance. To this end, I consider the manner in which paranoia is characterised in popular cultural narratives and how the advent of cultural paranoia can be understood in the context of the expansion of state and corporate surveillance, especially in the UK and post-9/11 North America. Drawing on this notion of cultural paranoia, I then argue for three modalities of paranoia-as-surveillance theory. The first modality, the paranoia of the subject of surveillance, addresses the divergent panoptic subject who rejects the disciplinary logic of the panopticon; the second modality considers how the paranoid as the suspicious subject could be used to characterise the expansion of surveillance regimes through an ever-present need to observe; and the third modality of conspiracy theory proposes that a paranoid logic, akin to that of the conspiracy theory, sutures over epistemic gaps in the interpretation of information in instances of analytic deficit.

“Paranoids are not paranoids (Proverb 5) because they're paranoid, but because they keep putting themselves ... deliberately into paranoid situations.”

Gravity's Rainbow (Pynchon 2000, 292)

Paranoia – as a theme, an undefined noun, a vague proposition – haunts the academic study of surveillance. The term is more often than not employed pejoratively, rather than clinically, and even rarer still is it invoked to bear any theoretical weight. Frequently, the notion of paranoia is noticeable only in its absence: that which cannot be uttered, lest the whole endeavour of critically examining surveillance somehow be revealed as paranoid, as a pathological and unwarranted phobia. As David Harper notes – in one of the few theoretical discussions of surveillance and paranoia – suspicion of surveillance can function as sufficient grounds for a commentator to be positioned as paranoid (2008, 4), to the extent that that “speakers wishing to be suspicious feel the need to defend against an implied accusation of paranoia” so as to avoid the “powerful regulatory effects” of such an accusation (2008, 16). The assertion of paranoia, in the context of surveillance studies, can thus be understood to evoke the fear that one is *not* being watched: in that the accusation of paranoia implies that the scholar of surveillance is *just* paranoid and their research lacks any real legitimacy or urgency. In this manner, the accusation of paranoia constitutes

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an argumentum ad hominem against a commentator that situates their concerns, and the wider project of surveillance studies, as unwarranted and irrational.

However, the term ‘paranoia’ need not function only as a sceptical dismissal of surveillance-related concerns. Rather, as I argue in this paper, notions of ‘paranoia’, and the commingled sense of conspiracy that accompanies them can be considered more than just inevitable impediments to be overcome when addressing surveillance; they can also be productive. The purpose of the current work is, then, to work through the ways in which paranoia can be taken up in the study of surveillance, without necessarily calling into question the legitimacy of critical research regarding surveillance technologies and regimes. Beginning with an examination of the proliferation of paranoid discourse and conspiracy culture in post-war consumer societies, this paper will consider how paranoia may be theorised as a response to social surveillance and, in particular, how paranoia can function within and beyond the model of panoptic consciousness to account for resistant and deviant anti-surveillance practices. I then propose a bipartite model for understanding of surveillance-related behaviours based upon two alternate modalities of paranoia: the first of which corresponds to a fear of constant observation of the self, which I will refer to as paranoia-of-the watched, and its counterpart, paranoia-of-the watcher, which addresses a corresponding need to be constantly privy to all information in order to address potential threats. This discussion then leads into a consideration of how the logic of conspiracy theory can be used to characterise the assumptions of seeing and knowing that motivate surveillance. I conclude by considering the manner in which these modalities might constitute a model for the productive integration of paranoia into a post-panoptic theory of surveillance.

Given the strong connotations of psychiatric illness attached to the notion of paranoia, the clinical literature could be considered a pertinent place in which to locate an initial definition or understanding. However, in a clinical sense the classification of paranoia bears little obvious relation to its more popular understanding and does not even necessarily refer to a psychological condition defined by irrational suspicion. Moreover, there is little consensus regarding the use of the term between the different psychiatric classification systems. The United States National Library of Medicine uses the term “paranoid disorder” to describe any mental disorder characterised by “an insidious development of a permanent and unshakeable delusional system (persecutory delusions or delusions of jealousy), accompanied by preservation of clear and orderly thinking” (Medical Subject Headings 2009), while in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, paranoia was renamed “delusional disorder,” in order to avoid confusion arising from the more specific lay usage (Munro 1999, 45-6), which has more in common with what are clinically understood as persecutory delusions. The more particular “paranoid personality disorder,” on the other hand, refers to a condition that while suspicious, is not solely concerned with observation or surveillance (International Classification of Diseases-10 2007). Hence, though these clinical definitions may inform the discussion at some level, the discourse of paranoia within wider society and popular culture is by no means bound by them; and for the purposes of this discussion it therefore becomes necessary to emphasise certain aspects or manifestations of the paranoid condition as they are more widely understood.

Yet even the formulation of a more colloquial definition proves difficult, because as Harper argues “there is no singular and coherent cultural image of paranoia,” with some media texts representing the paranoid figure as a destructive threat, while other conspiracy theories gain greater traction in the general public (2008, 10). For the purposes of the current discussion, I will be concentrating on the particularly *conspiratorial* iteration of paranoia concerning surveillance as it is popularly understood and disseminated in media texts. Cinematic examples extend from classic touchstones of conspiracy discourse, such as *The Conversation* (1974) and Oliver Stone’s *JFK* (1991), to a slew of more recent offerings since the nineteen nineties, including *Sliver* (1993), *Conspiracy Theory* (1997), *Enemy of the State* (1998) (which functions as something of a homage to *The Conversation*), *The Truman Show* (1998), *The Matrix* (1999), *Minority Report* (2002), *Cache* (2005) and *Eagle Eye* (2008), all of which recount narratives of intrusive

observation by threatening forces. Literary touchstones can be traced back as far as the early modern period (Farrell 2006, 1-3), with more contemporary manifestations including the work of Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961) and any number of airport thrillers and variations on Dan Brown's Robert Langdon books which address conspiracy-centric narratives. Serious contemporary television iterations would include *The X-Files* (1993-2002), which, as one of the most popular television shows of the mid to late nineties, brought a paranoid conspiracy mentality to primetime, and more recent serial shows such as *24* (2001-), *Prison Break* (2005-2009), *Heroes* (2006-), *Lost* (2004-) and the BBC's *Spooks* (2002-), all of which feature prominent characters and situations that conform to the popular understanding of paranoid or conspiratorial behaviour or depict the actions of those with access to almost omniscient surveillance. Arguably just as influential as serious depictions of conspiratorial characters, comic interpretations of paranoia on television comedies, such as numerous *The Simpsons*' episodes, most notably "Brother's Little Helper" (1999), *South Park* episodes, such as "Mystery of the Urinal Deuce" (2006) and the recurring character of Dale Gribble in *King of the Hill* (1997-), also serve to reinforce popular paranoid characterisations through the mobilisation of overblown caricatures. Finally, the work of an author such as Jon Ronson, the author of *Them* (2001) and *Men Who Stare at Goats* (2004), carries this depiction further, by taking up this popular culture representation of the paranoid subject in the context of a work of popular non-fiction and thereby situating this fictional archetype within real world situations.

Such texts, through their depiction of paranoid subjects and/or surveillance regimes, help construct and reinforce perceptions of paranoia as a condition primarily characterised by a pronounced suspicion with respect to outside forces who are thought to be not only manipulating historical and social events, but also maintain close observation of individuals, particularly the protagonist. Moreover, though the above representations cover a wide range of possible interpretations and narrative treatments of paranoia – and though in most of the cited texts the paranoid character is vindicated in their suspicions – their characterisation of the paranoid personality have strong similarities in their excessive and irrational characterisations. Paranoid characters commonly display anti-social tendencies which can range from low-level suspicion and hostility to a full blown retreat from society, such as Gene Hackman's character in *Enemy of the State*, and the adoption of markedly abnormal behaviours, perhaps best symbolised in Bart Simpson's adoption of the classic paranoid accoutrement, the tin foil hat, in "Brother's Little Helper." Therefore, in this particular strand of popular culture texts dealing with paranoid and conspiratorial themes, a relatively stable representation of the paranoid character begins to emerge as a figure who, through a fearful relationship to an all-seeing other, or "Them," adopts behaviours which are depicted as abnormal, if often not entirely unwarranted, within the diegetic context. Paranoia, as described above, has thus been predominantly deployed as a dismissive idea: one that conjures up images of tinfoil hats, blurry photographs and wild eyes. Within the realm of popular and literary culture, to be paranoid is to be irrationally fearful of exterior attempts to observe and manipulate oneself, often with antisocial consequences. There is an implication within these texts that paranoid or conspiratorial concerns that deviate from socially conventional awareness are inherently irrational and that – even though the texts in question often vindicate the fears of their paranoia protagonists – the threats which a paranoid conspiracy theory might posit, be they lizard-men or intrusive CCTV regimes, are non-threatening or even nonexistent when considered rationally and soberly outside of the texts' diegetic worlds.

However, this is not the only way in which paranoia is used in contemporary speech, nor is it arguably, even the dominant way. For when an author such as Timothy Melley writes of a "culture of paranoia and conspiracy" as a consequence of liberal individualism (2000, 14), or Susan Harding and Kathleen Stewart evoke the notion of "paranoid culture" (2003, 264) in contemporary America, they are obviously not suggesting that we are a society composed of pathologically paranoid subjects or that our culture somehow suffers from delusions en masse. Yet neither are the two understandings completely unrelated. Rather, they are both suggesting that we participate in a culture in which conspiratorial and paranoid narratives, some serious, others not so much, circulate freely and frequently in film, television and

literature, as has been addressed above, as well as art, magazines, video games, comic books, the internet and other media. Fredric Jameson tracks this growing fascination with conspiracy in the postwar period extensively in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992, 9-86), which having been published in 1992, predated the arguably ultimate mainstreaming of paranoia in the television series, *The X-Files*, which has since been widely discussed, in both popular and academic press, in terms of paranoia (examples include Kellner 200, 205-32; Cantor 2001, 111-98). With the success of the *X-Files*, in addition to the other texts mentioned earlier, conspiracy and paranoia became legitimate and successful references for entertainment purposes, which can be regarded as symptomatic of a resonance within wider culture (Harper 2008, 11). Moreover, in the post-9/11 world, paranoia can be thought to have undergone a further mutation in status, such that in some circles paranoia and conspiratorial consciousness are regarded as necessary preconditions for political awareness and action, as evinced in the rise of the 9/11 Truth Movement. This trend can be seen to have only exacerbated the long-standing gap between paranoia in its lay and clinical uses, such that the term has, following this expansion and induction into the entertainment mainstream, lost most of its strict psychological connotations, and though it doubtless still frequently operates as a statement of deviance and a term of dismissal, this ‘secularisation’ of paranoia has created the conditions for George Marcus to suggest the oxymoronic concept of “paranoia within reason” (1999, 7).

The notion of paranoia within reason, taken up by Marcus in a cultural and social context, implies that under certain socio-political conditions paranoia is not only not irrational but actually the *most* rational response, and thus that there exists “a substantial paranoid potential in the most rational or commonsensical frames of thought that readily emerges at certain moments” (Marcus 1999, 2). This assertion at the level of culture echoes the more clinical verdict of the American Psychology Association, who also acknowledge the possibility of “healthy paranoia” in groups who have been subject to discriminatory behaviour (American Psychology Association, 1993). Who gets to decide when, where and what is “healthy” or “within reason” is, of course, up for grabs and reflects the wider distribution of ideological power and epistemological regulation within society. As Harper suggests “texts can be made to seem normally or pathologically suspicious depending on context,” though this account seems to imply a level of intentionality which, I would argue, is not necessarily required (2008, 9). For example, paranoid fears regarding the infiltration of the US administration and entertainment industry by communist agents were not only regarded as within reason by those in power, but had real concrete effects on the day to day lives of thousands, if not millions, of American citizens during the nineteen fifties: however subsequent ideological reorientation has made such historical concerns regarding “Reds under the Bed” appear deeply unwarranted, if not pathological, in most sectors of contemporary life. The shift in public opinion from supportive to derisive of claims of Communist infiltration was not a consequence of any sustained attempt to make such beliefs appear to be pathologically suspicious, but is instead better understood as a result of broad shifts in public politics coupled with the unveiling of new evidence, or lack thereof. Conversely, suspicion of the international tobacco industry and accusations of a conspiracy to cover up evidence of health concerns, while once dismissible as paranoid or as the purview of “cranks” (Snowdon 2009, 6), has now become an almost universally held position and few would not deny the existence of a link between cigarettes and lung cancer. Thus, a position historically regarded as paranoid may be become seen as legitimately suspicious and vice versa, in line with the dominant ideology of the time and place. The acceptance of claims of wrongdoing and suspicious activity are bound up within wider social claims regarding normality, as well as competing political positions and projects, and thus may be legitimated or called into question by either revealed facts or shifts in public opinion and mechanisms of institutional validation. Moreover, there exist numerous conspiracy theories within various subsets of contemporary society – such as the Roswell cover-up, the US government’s involvement in the 9/11 attacks, and concern regarding the fluoridation of water – that may gain more or less favour at any given time and thus, though widely regarded as fanciful in the current moment of the late 2000s, could possibly one day come to be perceived as within reason. Thus, with respect to surveillance practices and technologies, the distinction between irrational suspicion and paranoia within reason can be seen to be equally bound up within wider social narratives, such that the wider acceptance of critical attitudes towards surveillance may come to be

seen as more or less legitimate as a consequence of shifts in systems of belief and value much too vast and complex to be mapped out here.

An argument can be made, though, that the rise of a culture of paranoia and conspiracy, particularly in the nineteen nineties, can be understood as an example of paranoia within reason given its correlation with the expansion of surveillance technologies in many liberal democratic nation-states during the period. Though in no way wanting to propose a mechanical direct relationship, as if the expansion of the surveillance state somehow ‘produced’ a culture of paranoia, I would suggest that there is some sense of alignment between the two tendencies with, on the one hand, an increasing production and consumption of stories of paranoia and conspiracy in the popular media and, on the other, the widespread implementation of electronic eavesdropping, monitoring equipment (Whitaker 2006, 143-4), closed circuit television (CCTV) systems in the UK, and less so in the USA (Monahan 2006, 3-6) and workplace drug testing (Campbell 2006, 58-61). What’s more, the rapid development of surveillance studies in the mid-2000s can also be possibly regarded as an example of paranoia within reason, correlating, as it does, with the dramatic expansion of the US government’s expansion of surveillance measures following the events of September 11, 2001 (Lyon 2002, 1-2). The 2001 terrorist attacks in New York created a social and political climate – or excuse if you agree with some of the more paranoid writers on surveillance – in which advanced surveillance technologies and techniques, such as data-mining, risk profiling, and questionable commandeering of private sector information could be implemented by the United States government in order to gather information on its citizens (Whitaker 2006, 141-61). It is therefore almost to be expected that some writers, working within a culture of paranoia, would adopt a paranoid tone – particularly pronounced in volumes such as Mick Farren and John Gibb’s *Who’s Watching You?* (2007) – when discussing the ramifications of the expansion of surveillance capabilities. Similarly, it is not at all unlikely that some sectors of a paranoid and surveilled society would exhibit a paranoid relationship towards that surveillance, particularly those, such as anti-capitalism protestors, who challenge the political and economic status-quo and thereby are the most likely to feel the effects of state or corporate surveillance.

Moreover, while such paranoid concerns may not be widely voiced within the main currents of the political arena this does not necessarily invalidate claims regarding an increased cultural sense of paranoia more generally. A wide audience exists for those films, television shows and other texts discussed above, the popularity of which can be taken to indicate some interest among the wider consuming public as regards notions of surveillance and paranoia, even if this interest does not translate directly into personal concern. As Mark Johnson and Conor Gearty suggest in their analysis of survey data regarding British attitudes towards civil liberties, while British concern regarding civil liberties has stayed relatively consistent or even declined in recent years, there is likelihood that acceptance of the extension of government surveillance reflects an assumption among respondents that these regimes will target “‘other people’ and so it is not their own freedom that they are sacrificing” (2007, 169). Individuals may thereby retain a wariness regarding personal surveillance, but believe that they have nothing to fear at the current moment because they presume that they are not the targets of observation. Nor has the lack of any marked increase in public concern with surveillance prevented the steady publication and dissemination of anti-surveillance civil libertarian viewpoints within the mass media (Johnson and Gearty 2007, 143), which would suggest that such views are regarded as at least legitimate enough to enter into the public discussion as opposed to other more marginalised political views. Thus, paranoia, as it is employed here, should not be understood to refer exclusively to an abnormal or unacceptable mindset, or be interpreted as a condemnatory stance. Instead, following on the work of George Marcus, it can be understood that under certain historical and social circumstances – and many would argue the current historical moment, with the extension of the security state and the proliferation of consumer surveillance, is just such a circumstance – it can be seen as completely legitimate to take steps to resist, oppose or escape the extension of technologies of observation and monitoring that conflict with received views regarding civil liberties. While this is particularly true under conditions of authoritarian repression such as existed in the East Germany of the Stasi or the North Korea of today, there is also grounds on which one could consider

paranoia legitimate, to a greater or lesser extent, under the surveillance regimes currently in place in contemporary liberal democracies: not only in the case of those who go to great efforts to avoid evade state security cameras, but also with those who refuse to participate in social-networking websites or make use of customer loyalty plans for fear of surrendering control of their personal data to surveillance networks.

Beyond an understanding of the current social circumstances, the notion of “paranoia within reason” can now also be taken up productively in theoretical terms in a consideration of, and addendum to, the panoptic model of surveillance: indeed, the theoretical articulation of the notion can serve to illuminate its social resonance discussed above, and vice versa. While many have sought to critique and move beyond panopticism as a model for theorising surveillance, the panopticon, as David Lyon notes, “refuses to go away” (2006, 4). In light of this theoretical intransigence, I suggest that paranoia can serve as a useful means to nuance and extend upon the panoptic model to help take into account the “conundrum” noted by Lyon that “the most powerfully panoptic schemes seem to generate high levels of resistance while the softest and most benign-seeming produce sometimes startling levels of compliance” (2006, 18). In the current context, I am taking up a slightly modified understanding of the panopticon in line with Majid Yar’s “third strand” of panopticism wherein the model of the panopticon is retained in a revised and extended form as an “ideal type, rather than [a] empirical generalisation” (2003, 257). By considering the subject of the panoptic regime, rather than its conditions of operation, paranoia offers a way to conceptualise and make sense of this seeming contradiction through a consideration of how the experience of surveillance may be more reliant upon the individual subject than any concrete institutional presence. Paranoia and surveillance find common ground in their recourse to Foucault’s panoptic model, which has functioned as a central theoretical model through which both paranoia (Sass 1992, 251-4) and surveillance have been conceptualised. To quickly recap, in Foucault’s panoptic model, the subject of the panopticon is an individual exposed to the *possibility* of constant visibility. The panoptic prison thus keeps its inmates in check not by constantly watching them, but by ensuring they never know if they are being watched or not: unable to determine if they are observation at any given moment, the subjects of the panopticon (or of a panoptic surveillance society) behave as if under constant observation, thereby internalising the controlling gaze and its normalising function (Foucault 1979, 200-3). It must be noted as well, that though a system of surveillance may not be truly panoptic in its reach or its influence, this does not mean it cannot be experienced as such by its subjects. Thus, the subject position engendered by the panopticon can be considered somewhat akin to paranoia, in that the subject of the panoptic-surveillance society acts as if they are under constant observation – here extended beyond the visual register to encompass other forms of surveillance such as aural and data-based observation – by powerful forces, even in the actual absence of verifiable observation; paranoia functioning in a manner akin to a sort of “psychic panopticon” (Harper 2008, 6). Conversely, an actually existing panopticon could be considered to constitute a material manifestation of the delusions of the paranoid – a concrete paranoia to match a psychic panopticon – wherein the subject is surveilled and controlled, while simultaneously being prevented from observing their observers. This correspondence between the objective panopticon and subjective paranoia thereby points towards the ways in which paranoia can be considered as a manifestation of the most disturbing and intrusive aspects of a panoptic regime on a psychological or subjective level.

An understanding of paranoia as akin to the panopticon overlooks, however, a major aspect and motivating force of the panoptic regime. For whereas the panopticon functions as a tool of governance in order to ensure the perpetuation of a culturally-specific, dominant form of normality, the subjective experience of paranoia is understood, by virtue of its designation as a psychological condition as well as its wider cultural resonance, to be a decidedly “abnormal” way of being and comprehending the world. This abnormality is, of course, only understood as such from the perspective of a culturally-determined and contingent sense of the normal. Thus, while the formulation offered above accounts for the ideology of persecution that characterises paranoia with respect to the panopticon, it fails to address the way in which paranoia is imagined as a practice that is often fairly un-“disciplined” in a Foucauldian sense.

Hence, I suggest that paranoia can be better understood as a systematic extension of the logic of the panopticon to a point of inversion, where, under certain conditions, the internalisation of the warden's eye can become so profound that it fosters deviant, rather than "normal," behaviour. Though when subject to the panoptic regime the internalised function of power is supposed to lead to the production of normalised, and therefore "normal," subjects, in the case of the paranoid subject of conspiracy culture, the awareness of surveillance does not lead the individual to operate in what would be described as a "normal" or disciplined manner: rather the exact opposite is true. The paranoid subject, instead of submitting to the discipline of the panoptic regime, is imagined to adopt extremely abnormal regimes of behaviour in order to attempt to escape the surveilling gaze: such abnormal regimes are what drive many action-based surveillance films, such as *Enemy of the State*, *Conspiracy Theory* and even *The Truman Show* wherein the narrative is carried along by the protagonists attempts to escape a surveillance regime through life-endangering and property-damaging chases and stunts. Surveillance motivates these characters to take up modes of behaviour that are abnormal within the diegetic world they inhabit, rather than disciplining them to the diegetic standards of normality. Furthermore, while within the narrative situations of their respective texts, these actions, though paranoid, are still actually within reason for these characters given the experience of intrusive and threatening surveillance, the text still frames their behaviour as entirely abnormal: hence the excitement they engender. Similarly in the comic texts discussed earlier, it is the abnormality, which is to say the departure from diegetic norms, of a character who attempts to escape surveillance which creates the humour of the text through the generation of incongruous and absurd situations. Under these circumstances, the panoptic regime can thus no longer be imagined to be maintaining bodily and social discipline in these situations, but instead is represented as fostering excessive and aberrant behaviour.

Moreover, in addition to these popular imaginings of abnormal behaviour in film and television, paranoid reactions to surveillance can also emerge in the material world, most explicitly through art projects and activist programs. For an example, we can consider the iSee application, which was developed by the Institute for Applied Autonomy in order to allow New York residents to avoid surveillance cameras (Institute for Applied Autonomy 2005). The iSee application comprises a map of New York City with the position of all known CCTV cameras marked. Users enter their starting location and destination and the application plots an (often ludicrously) indirect "path of least surveillance". The user thereby departs from what would be considered a "normal" regime of behaviour which would involve following the shortest or most readily accessible path between destinations in the name of the guiding ethic of efficiency, and instead follows an alternative, "abnormal" path motivated by a desire to avoid surveillance. The iSee application can thus be considered paranoid in a lay sense because it is motivated by suspicion of powerful forces and a desire to escape observation, and, in doing so, it fosters abnormal, rather than normal behaviour: it is an example of surveillance technology disrupting, rather than promoting, desired social rhythms. It should be noted, though, that these are not abnormal behaviours in any total sense, but are abnormal insofar as they depart from a socially and culturally dominant sense of the normal. In a similar vein, one can consider the work of the Surveillance Camera Players (SCP), an activist group based out of New York, who can be considered one of the leading proponents of a performance brand of surveillance art. The SCP, who refuse the label "paranoid" due to the irrationalist connotations (Surveillance Camera Players 2005), perform silent adaptations of plays, often addressing themes of surveillance, in areas subject to unmarked surveillance in order to draw public attention to the ubiquity of surveillance technologies and practices. While dramatic performance per se is not often regarded as abnormal behaviour, the staging of such performance – unannounced and in a public place – does challenge dominant conventions surrounding theatre and public behaviour as Yar notes with particular reference to the SCP (2003, 266). That such behaviour occurs in response to the presence of surveillance constitutes another situation in which abnormal behaviour arises in response, and in opposition to, surveilling technologies and as such can also be constituted as paranoid (within reason), despite the protests of the participants themselves who adhere to a more pathological definition of the term. The willingness of activists and artists to depart from conventional everyday behaviour in the face of surveillance, of which

the two aforementioned examples are only the smallest fraction drawn from similar cultural situations, indicates that paranoia as conceived of in popular cultural texts is by no means restricted to the realm of fiction. Rather, these examples demonstrate how those concerned with surveillance are willing to take up actual abnormal regimes of behaviour in the face of what they perceive to be unwarranted surveillance of themselves and the general public as a protest or an act of defiance. Thus, not only fictional characters, but also political actors, can be considered paranoid in the sense laid out here insofar as they actively depart from normative scripts when faced with the actuality of surveillance.

Following this understanding, the paranoid subject can therefore be seen to be abnormal, not in spite of, but because of the presence of paranoia-inducing panoptic surveillance; the abnormalising logic of the paranoid transcends the normalising logic of the panopticon. However, in contrast to those accounts that perceive in this moment, where surveillance produces resistance rather than discipline, the breakdown of the panoptic model (Haggerty 2006, 34-5), I want to suggest that this deviation from the theoretical model can be accounted for if panoptic paranoia is taken into account. I argue that this moment, which threatens to unsettle or even invalidate traditional panoptic accounts of surveillance, can be productively theorised in terms of paranoia – as *paranoia-of-the-watched* – understood as a reversal of the function of surveillance that occurs when the panoptic model is pushed to its limits, in a manner surprisingly analogous to that described by Marshall McLuhan’s “tetrad of media effects” (1988, 227-8). Just as in McLuhan’s examples the calm and poise of the cigarette smoker when pushed to its limit becomes the nervousness of the addict, or the freedom and convenience of the car when pushed to its limit becomes the traffic jam (McLuhan 1988, 134, 148), the discipline and normalisation of the panopticon when pushed to its limit becomes the deviance and resistance of paranoia. Thus, while Harper constitutes paranoia as form of governance via a “psychic panopticon” (2008, 6), I would argue that this understanding simply constitutes business as usual in a panoptic society: the panopticon is always already psychic because it operates through the induction of, in Foucault’s words, “a state of consciousness” (1979, 201). What is actually different in the case of paranoia is that the panopticon no longer functions as an effective tool of governance, because rather than producing a disciplined subject under certain conditions panoptic observation instead gives rise to an individual exhibiting, in both popular and clinical terms, psychologically abnormal behaviour: which is to say behaviour at odds with the dominant normative codes of behaviour. Nor is this non-normative response to surveillance limited to cultural texts or the playful responses of artists and activists. Linda Rhodes notes a similar situation with reference to the self-mutilating behaviour of prisoners under intensive surveillance regimes, where “the ‘perfection’ of the disciplinary mechanism calls forth its opposite” (1998, 286): which is to say, abnormal non-disciplined behaviour. Likewise, *paranoia-of-the-watched* could be potentially taken up in order to theoretically account for non-normative behaviour in other, more explicitly repressive contexts, such as Samizdat printing in Eastern Europe. In the case of *paranoia-of-the-watched*, the function of surveillance is thereby reversed such that it produces “deviant” individuals who break with the systems and regulations of everyday life and indulge in socially-unsanctioned behaviour, often in an attempt to resist the system and escape observation. *Paranoia-of-the-watched* is a way in which to conceptualise the active behaviour and belief that arises out of surveillance regimes and which leads, contrary to the logic of the panoptic model, to abnormal and resistant forms of behaviour that attempt to escape, disrupt or critique the surveillance that produces the response. This is perhaps most productively conceived not as a critique of the panoptic model, but as a necessary addendum that accounts for its potentially non-normative effects. Specific forms of resistance to surveillance regimes can thus be usefully theorised as paranoia (within reason)-of-the-watched: a position that acknowledges the ways in which critical surveillance practice is inflected, and indeed often inspired, by paranoia – and thus is based in non-normative or oppositional ways of being and thinking – without surrendering any analytic force to self-effacement.

Paranoia-of-the-watched is, however, simply the first modality of paranoia within the context of surveillance culture: paranoid reactions to surveillance cannot be reduced to a simple fear of being observed. Rather, the paranoid subject is often imagined to be just as concerned with watching their own

surroundings as they are with being watched. This tendency is noted in the secondary clinical literature which suggests that those suffering from paranoid personality disorder may be constantly watchful for hidden connotations and marked by “extreme suspicion” (Millon 2001). The subject who is watched themselves becomes watchful: attentive to previously unseen patterns and tells in their environment. Moreover, these two aspects, watcher and watched, cannot be meaningfully separated, because it is only through interrogation of their environment that the paranoid comes to believe that they are being watched. That paranoia can manifest itself as a mistrust of surveillance technologies has been established above, but just as relevant is the way this suspicion manifests through the application of surveillance techniques and technologies. Thus, paranoia as a theoretical model does not, therefore, just describe the watched, but can also be employed to meaningful conceptualise the watchers; for example the need to monitor and observe populations by government and corporations. This does should not be taken as an assertion that all surveillance is inherently paranoid: the watching of animal activities or the tracking of customer purchases for the sake of advertising could not easily be characterised as paranoid. However there are other activities – from CCTV security systems in stores to electronic surveillance of populations to uncover terrorism and even medical surveillance of the body for signs of disease – that can be characterised as paranoid in that they represent a desire for close and sustained observation of the everyday and the banal in order to uncover hidden threats, even in the absence of any evidence to indicate the presence of said threats in the first place. In the compulsive desire to determine and understand the dangers posed by everyday surroundings, the paranoia-of-the-watcher can be understood as something akin to Ulrich Beck’s concept of the “risk society” (1992, 19-22), with the added proviso that the paranoid watcher believes their surroundings actively intend to do them ill. The paranoid logic of the watcher is the belief that observation is always necessary, even, or perhaps especially, under conditions of banality, in order to prevent the actions of possibly ubiquitous hostile forces. Thus, a counterpoint to the paranoia-of-the-watched can be posited: the paranoia-of-the-watcher.

Paranoia-of-the-watcher differs from that of the watched in that it is, predominantly but not always, a form of paranoia exhibited by socially and politically dominant groups, and hence it is expressed at the level of the community or the state and usually only available to those with economic and cultural capital. As such the paranoia-of-the-watcher is typically (re)presented and regarded as within reason because, as mentioned earlier, ‘within reason’ is defined by the dominant ideology, of which the state structure has historically functioned as a central determinant. The state’s desire to watch its citizens or citizens’ desire to watch one another through surveillance technologies can, however, be considered just as much an expression of paranoia as the resistance to those same technologies: both forms of paranoia are characterised by extreme distrust and a conflation of observing and understanding, a notion that will be returned to shortly. Paranoia-of-the-watcher is institutionalised in official surveillance structures like the Echelon system, the international dataveillance network used to surveil electronic communications (Campbell 2002, 158-68), as well as in more mundane ways, such as the constant expansion of surveillance technologies for public and privates security purposes in liberal democratic nations. As with paranoia-of-the-watched, the paranoia-of-the-watcher can be conceptualised as an amendment to the panoptic model of surveillance, in particular, as a legitimating logic that supports the continued expansion of surveillance capacity even in the absence of any evidence that such actions result in safer or more “disciplined” communities. For example, the proliferation of CCTV systems across the United Kingdom, despite the lack of any evidence as to their efficacy in preventing antisocial behaviour or having any meaningful impact on crime rates (Monahan 2006, 3-6), can be considered an example of the logic of the paranoia-of-the-watcher. Moreover, this paranoid logic should not be thought to compete with economic or political explanations for the surveillance surge as either a profit-driven or politically-advantageous process, but instead can be understood to undergird or even motivate these other logics: the reason that communities and administrative areas are willing to purchase surveillance equipment in the first place, or the reason that public support is behind the extension of surveillance technologies, can be considered, at least in part, a consequence of this particular paranoid logic. Thus, the fact that surveillance continues to proliferate, ostensibly to prevent crime, despite a complete dearth of data as to its efficiency as crime-prevention

device, can be taken to suggest that panoptic logic has instead been supplanted by a paranoid logic, whereby a failure on the behalf of existing surveillance to effect a change in behaviour is taken as an indication of the need for further surveillance, observation and investigation, despite all rational evidence to the contrary. This logic is not restricted to centralised seats of power, but is often shared by the wider community, who are also paranoid (within reason or not being a subject of strenuous and constant debate) as regard the potential of unseen threats and are thus consequently supportive, rather than sceptical, of the expansion of surveillance. Hence the paranoia-of-the-watcher serves to justify a seemingly irrational proliferation of surveillance technology.

The logic of paranoia, of both the watched and the watcher, is one that privileges observation as a site of power, an assumption that draws upon the panoptic model but also moves beyond it; inspired, or troubled, by what the panopticon fails to see. This logic, which seeks to observe all in order to know all, can be considered akin to the logic of conspiracy theory, which is closely affiliated with the cultural understanding of paranoia that has been discussed so far. As with paranoia, conspiracy is a deeply suspicious state of being: ever fearful of the dangers posed by external factors and agents. Indeed, paranoia has been offered before as an essential aspect of conspiracy-minded thinking (Mason 2002, 47; Willman 2002, 21-2). The US government's briefly lived Total Information Awareness (TIA) programme is perhaps the most extreme example of paranoid surveillance's attempt to know everything and thereby to achieve literal total awareness through "advanced surveillance technologies of various kinds, from bio-recognition technologies to sophisticated translation systems", as well as data-mining and electronic interception (Whitaker 2006, 156-8). Evident in the TIA programme then – but also present perhaps in the fears of those social and artistic projects that seek to resist surveillance – is an underlying belief in the equivalence of observation with knowledge: to observe is to know and to be observed is to be known. The consequence of such a logic is a surveillance regime that is never satisfied with any situation short of omniscience, because anything less constitutes a gap in knowledge which could potentially invalidate all prior observations. Hence this approach towards surveillance may be compared with that conspiratorial logic that is forever "haunted... by what hovers beyond the edge of the visible" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, 288). Consequently, both paranoia-of-the-watched and paranoia-of-the-watcher can be seen to be structured by a conspiratorial worldview, in which the purpose of surveillance moves beyond a desire to discipline or even to carry out post-panoptic projects such as the securing of dominion or care, and the prevention of disease (Haggerty 2006, 31, 35) but instead functions as part of a wider project of aspiration towards an "impossible vision of totality," which Jameson writes of in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992, 79). Thus, the tendency towards omniscient surveillance for the ends of unlimited knowledge can be understood as evidence of the paranoia-of-the-watcher working in a conspiratorial mode.

This unrealisable drive towards ever-present observation is not, however, the only or even the most worrying aspect of a paranoid surveillance regime. Writing elsewhere, Jameson has described conspiracy theory as "the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age" (1988, 356), where cognitive mapping is an attempt to understand the complex interactions of global capital, culture and politics (1988, 353). Ignoring his uncharacteristically classist language for the time-being, Jameson's dismissal of conspiracy theory here can be understood as a reference to its simplifying function. As Fran Mason suggests in her interpretation of Jameson:

Conspiracy theory is a degraded version of cognitive mapping because it cannot adequately represent [the] complexities [of the postmodern world] ... It generates a map of the world that is actually a map of a different world entirely, a parallel or imaginary world of misrecognised social systems and power structures. (2002, 40)

Moreover, conspiracy theory can be understood to manifest an inability to accept any sense of incoherency or indeterminacy in the world it observes. Instead, when faced with information that challenges their pre-existing understandings of the world system, the conspiracy theorist reframes that

information in such a way as to reinscribe and resupport their pre-existing understanding, such that incredibly complex global flows can be reduced to individual psychologies directing extensive networks of control. Conspiracy is thus not a solution, in Jameson's conception, to the dilemma of representing the world system, but rather constitutes an epistemological shortcut that, in the absence of corroborating evidence, deploys a paranoid logic to sustain the fiction of total awareness. Thus, when Mason argues that conspiracy theory is less an example of flawed cognitive mapping than "a paradigm of 'everyone's cognitive mapping'" in an era of postmodern reflexive subjectivity (2002, 54), this can be seen in terms of the mode of surveillance mobilised by the paranoia-of-the-watcher, and hence can be thought to feed back into the earlier discussion of an entire culture of conspiracy and paranoia. Much like paranoia, then, conspiracy can be seen to be structured by "the apprehension that what other people do is full of significance and interpretable" (Humphrey 2003, 182) and thereby constitutes an extreme mode of suspicion and engenders a strong desire for surveillance.

Paranoid surveillance is thus an attempt to realise the goal of the conspiracy theorist: to make visible the invisible intents and motivations of those it observes. A description offered of surveillance – to transform reality into "transparent images" through intense scrutiny often with the aid of instrumentation (Weibel 2002, 209) – could as easily express the desire of the conspiracy theorist. For just as the conspiracy theorist reads old photos for truths of presidential cover-ups or faked moon landings, the surveillance operator, human or computer, interrogates images and data trails in search of criminals or terrorists (or the surveillance resistor avoids cameras for fear of being observed, also therefore equating observance with knowledge). Both conspiracy and surveillance are therefore invested in an equivalence of observing and understanding, and therefore are committed to an increasing accumulation of data despite the possibility of an "*analytical* deficit", which arises when "the collection capacity of intelligence agencies [and other sites of surveillance] has outstripped their analytical and managerial capacities" (Whitaker 2006, 160, emphasis in original). Conspiracy theory offers a theoretical model for how paranoid forms of surveillance might deal with an excess of data: the problems of interpretation that invariably arise when the goal is total awareness, whether across a country, a telephone network, or in a shopping mall. They do so through the creation of knowledge akin to conspiracy theory, wherein epistemological shortcuts are taken in order to fashion a unworkable glut of data into a useful form and draw conclusions as if one did possess the desired total knowledge. Yet, unfortunately these shortcuts are often closely tied to prejudicial aspects of the dominant cultural norms, such that racism or nationalism become the means by which the information gap is sutured over. There is also the possibility that the application of necessarily limited interpretive frameworks to incomplete data can lead to the construction of premature conclusions: a conspiratorial logic with very real consequences, as became evident in the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes by London police in 2008, after he was thought to be a potential terrorist when his everyday behaviour was mistakenly interpreted as counter-surveillance tactics (Times Online 2008). A paranoid logic is evident in the (over)analysis of everyday behaviour displayed by surveillance analysts which, when combined with tacit racist assumptions, led to speculative conclusions of wrongdoing and the death of an innocent man. It is in this analytical deficit that the conspiracy theory of surveillance arises, a "diagnostic overload" that, in the absence of any satisfactory interpretive framework can lead to assumptions of threat rather than contingency and arbitrariness and thereby produce a "paranoid style" (Humphrey 2003, 181). In this manner, paranoid conspiracy theory functions to patch the epistemological cracks that arise from surveillance's inability to sustain the fiction of equivalence of seeing and knowing. Whether the Echelon system, the CCTV system at a convenience store or biometric screening, contemporary surveillance technologies can be argued to be driven less by a panoptic logic of discipline and more by a paranoid logic of conspiracy that seeks to uncover hidden information and realities through the monitoring and interrogation of a world reduced to data.

The paranoia model of surveillance – understood above in the multiple modalities of watched, watcher and conspiracy theory – provides a means of theorising surveillance that retains aspects of panopticism, but also seeks to account for that model's explanatory lapses in accounting for resistance practices, the

expansion of surveillance for non-disciplinary purposes, public support for surveillance, and the interpretation and extrapolation of surveillance data. Paranoia thus speaks to the “peculiar and paradoxical outcomes of panoptic power,” (Lyon 2006, 9) while also gesturing beyond Foucault’s model towards alternate understandings of surveillance. An awareness of paranoia as a theoretical construct allows us to understand how surveillance may lead to non-normal or resistant behaviours beyond the purview of expected social interaction and cultural expression. Thus I suggest that paranoia could be considered to be one of these post-panoptic spaces that suggests a different way in which surveillance works to shape society, when it has become evident that neither the security camera nor data-mining is enough to ensure “discipline,” but instead often produces unexpected or contrary effects. The cultural imagining of the paranoid individual represents the possibility that discipline is only one possible outcome of surveillance; though many may ignore it, and others may embrace it as a source of pleasure, a few, at least, may fear it. This fear, or paranoia, of surveillance is evinced both in the popular media narratives of conspiracy and paranoia that circulate in popular culture, and in the limits to which some will actually go to escape, or disrupt, technologies of observation. By moving beyond a dismissal of paranoia as something inherently irrational or pejorative, it becomes possible to imagine new ways of considering the experience of those both under, and in charge of, surveillance: this in turn allows us to open up new spaces for both exploring and understanding the ways in which surveillance is imagined as well as modelling the logic by which it is both expanded and resisted. While the world we live in may be neither Orwellian nor Foucauldian, this does not mean it cannot be experienced as such: even if we have moved to a Deleuzian society of control, this does not rule out the continued cultural consciousness of histories and possibilities of discipline. By accepting the ways in which paranoia may be taken up as a legitimate response to a postmodern world often experienced as threatening and confusing, a paranoid theory of surveillance can offer a useful way to conceptualise the increasing importance of surveillance regimes and practices in contemporary society, and the social imaginings and responses they provoke.

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