The Politics of Paranoia: Paranoid Positioning and Conspiratorial Narratives in the Surveillance Society*

David Harper[1]

Abstract

The notion of paranoia is often implicitly reproduced in the work of surveillance researchers. However, in this article I will argue that this notion needs to be interrogated since current conceptions of paranoia are inherently dualistic: viewing paranoia solely at an individual or intra-psychic level; or, alternatively solely at a societal level. Inevitably, either perspective is limited. Here I will attempt to break down this dichotomy by, firstly, drawing on the notion of discursive positioning to: analyse the cultural discourses which "produce" paranoia; examine how subjects (i.e. individuals, communities, societies etc.) become positioned by others as paranoid; and explore the effects of such positioning. Secondly, I will investigate the discursive positions through which people may position themselves as paranoid and describe some of the effects of such positioning. I conclude by drawing out some implications of a more nuanced view of paranoia for the field of surveillance studies.

| Harry Wyckoff: | He's probably just paranoid. Yeah, he loves a conspiracy. |
| Paige Katz: | Don't we all? |

(*Wild Palms*, dir. Oliver Stone, 1993)

The paranoid is the person in possession of all the facts

(William S. Burroughs)

[1] School of Psychology, University of East London. mailto:d.harper@uel.ac.uk

Introduction: beyond the dualism of research into paranoia

In a recent editorial in *Surveillance & Society*, Wood (2005) called for more of a focus in surveillance studies on "the human dimensions of surveillance" (474). One of the effects of surveillance reproduced in many such discussions is that of paranoia either in a general sense of a heightened self-consciousness and suspicion or, on the other hand, as an indication of some form of delusional pathology. Indeed, it has become commonplace for commentators on surveillance culture to note that, as surveillance has increased, so we are all becoming paranoid (or should be). At the same time, post-Modern society has seen a rise in the circulation of conspiracy theories, facilitated by the growth of the internet[2]. We have also seen a growth of a popular conspiracy theory literature (Kossy, 1994; Newton, 2005; Ramsay, 2006; Ronson, 2001; Vankin & Whalen, 2004), so popular, that Vankin and Whalen's (1995) *Fifty Greatest Conspiracies of All Time* has been revised four times in nine years with *Eighty Greatest Conspiracies* appearing in 2004 (Vankin & Whalen, 2004).

Although one could argue that surveillance, paranoia and conspiratorial interpretations are different from each other, they are connected, if only in the sense that the rise of surveillance sets the conditions for the development of conspiracy theories which, in turn, leads to paranoia about surveillance. Yet, in the accounts of cultural commentators, notions like paranoia and conspiracy theory are taken for granted. There is little critique of the limitations of these concepts and little discussion of what the effects are of positioning oneself as paranoid or of labelling others as paranoid.   In this paper I foreground the notion of paranoia rather than surveillance *per se*.   First, I examine evidence of a paranoia/conspiracy culture which functions as a counterpoint to surveillance culture. Second, I criticise the conceptual resources usually brought to bear in understanding this culture. I argue that researchers have failed to break out of their disciplinary regimes – either viewing such culture as arising from respectively, individual psychological processes or cultural processes. Third, I contend that discourse analysis and positioning theory offer a way of overcoming some of these limitations. Finally, I go on to illustrate how one might use these resources to examine some of the *effects* of both positioning the other (an individual, group, organisation, nation and so on) as paranoid and of adopting a conspiratorial position oneself. In other words, what do we *do* when we call others paranoid and what do we *do* by believing in conspiracy theories?

The rise of a paranoia culture

Concepts like paranoia serve both as psychiatric and everyday explanatory categories thus an investigation of such categories needs, by definition, to be inter-disciplinary.   The work of writers like Thomas Pynchon, Philip K. Dick (see e.g.: Freedman, 1984; Parker, 1996; Sutin, 1995), together with crime and spy writers has contributed to the embeddedness both of conspiratorial and surveillance-aware narratives in modern culture. O'Donnell (1992) has traced some of the contours of this fascination, arguing that the work of a variety of authors evidences the rise of a "cultural paranoia" flowing from the

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[2] Wikipedia helpfully lists some of the more popular theories.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_theories_(a_collection)

construction of a "knowing" subject, noting that "paranoia, like power after Foucault, ranges across the multi-discursivity of contemporary existence" (1992:181).

To take film as one example, we have a range of conspiracy movies from *Blow Up* (Antonioni, 1966), to *The Conversation* (Coppola, 1974). Perhaps the doyen of conspiracy directors, Alan J. Pakula, has brought us his "paranoid trilogy" (Ryan & Kellner, 1988) of *Klute* (1971), *The Parallax View* (1974) and *All the President's Men* (1976), to which we must now add *The Pelican Brief* (1993). Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991) and *Wild Palms* (1993) TV serial, Chris Carter's *X-Files*, Richard Donner's *Conspiracy Theory* (1997) and Tony Scott's *Enemy of the State* (1998) continued the trend through the 1990s with Ron Howard's (2006) film of Dan Brown's (2004) *Da Vinci Code* and Richard Linklater's (2006) film of Philip K. Dick's (1977) A *Scanner Darkly* maintaining the genre's persistence into the twenty first century. These films position the audience so we are unsure whether the characters' vigilance about surveillance (by intelligence agencies, Opus Dei etc) is a sign of paranoid delusion or is warranted, playing on the dilemma at the heart of the classic paranoia joke "just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get me."[3]

Of course, the rise of a paranoia culture is matched by a concomitant rise in our awareness of the ways in which populations are surveyed. Gary Marx (1988) has documented the use of surveillance by police and law enforcement agencies and the recent special issues of *Surveillance & Society* on surveillance and criminal justice have elaborated on the ways surveillance is being taken further by these agencies. The UK's Office of Surveillance Commissioners' (2006) report details the large scale of surveillance currently conducted. During 2005-2006 there were: 435 intrusive surveillance authorisations; 2,310 property interference authorisations; 23,628 directed surveillance authorisations; and 4,559 Covert Human Intelligence Sources recruited by law enforcement agencies. These figures do not include surveillance by the security or intelligence services whose warrants are monitored by the Interception of Communications Commissioner (ICC). In the fifteenth month period from January 2005-March 2006 the ICC reported that the number of interception warrants issued in England, Wales and Scotland was 2,407 plus a further 5,143 "modifications" making an overall total of 7,550 (Statewatch, 2007). The ICC also reported that there had been 439,054 requests for communications data (i.e. traffic data for phone calls, mobile phone calls, faxes, e-mails and internet usage) from service providers by public authorities (e.g. domestic security agencies, the police, local authorities but excluding GCHQ, MI6 and the police service of Northern Ireland).

The Prisoner and the Panopticon: panoptical culture as a condition of possibility for paranoia

One of the most prevalent themes to emerge from examples of paranoia and conspiracy culture is that of surveillance. The world conjured up in many texts is of an active and malevolent observer and these worlds are realised most fully in dystopian fiction and accounts of life in totalitarian states (Los, 2004; Marks, 2005). Although the power of interpretation lies with the subject, power in the situation lies with the observer about

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[3] Indeed, within psychology and psychiatry, the notion that a paranoid delusion may have a kernel of truth is recognized in the so-called "Martha Mitchell effect" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martha_Mitchell_effect

whom we are usually told little. The image of an anonymous yet powerful observer, is reproduced in a number of texts. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel* (1966) – which itself draws heavily on Yevgeny Zamyatin's (1921/1993) *We* – opens with a description of a telescreen in the background which both receives and transmits all that is audible and visible. Here, surveillance is mediated by electronic means. Thus the observer (if there is one watching at the other end) is rendered even more anonymous. Great play is made of such technology within spy and science-fiction genres. For example, in the cult British 1960s TV serial *The Prisoner* (Incorporated Television Limited, 1967), the character, Number 6 (played by Patrick McGoohan) is, at first:

> unaware that all the while his every action has been observed by Number 2 and a disquieting bald-headed Supervisor on a giant screen in an impressive Control Room whose walls are covered with huge maps of the world, terrestrial and celestial. A small army of cameramen [sic] work in shifts to keep the Village and its surroundings including the inside of the houses under constant surveillance.
>
> (Carrazé & Oswald, 1990: 38)

Of course, both *1984* and *The Prisoner* predate Foucault's (1977) description of Bentham's panopticon but it is with his work that we see a theoretical elaboration of the panoptical organization of space in Western culture and how this indicated a shift from physical regulation by others to governance of the self by the self. Rabinow (1984) notes, in a resumé of a foucaultian view of surveillance in culture, that "through spatial ordering, the panopticon brings together power, control of the body, control of groups and knowledge ... it locates individuals in space, in a hierarchical and efficiently visible organization" (19). The cultural and spatial organization of society means that we are continually surveyed, constantly regulated by a panoptical gaze. Surveillance, while conceptually distinct from suspicion, is materially and discursively connected to it. In the culture Foucault describes, surveillance necessarily entails suspicion on the part of those observed. Thus, it could be argued that the increased surveillance of the population noted by a number of writers (e.g. Rose, 1985, 1989) has been one of the conditions of possibility (Blackman, 1994) for paranoia – which is not to deny that individuals before this time might have been suspicious. When suspicion is a condition of surveillance, any comment on that surveillance embroils the speaker in suspicion – their own – and they are thus positioned as paranoid. Blaska describes the real-life world of the psychiatric in-patient:

> You can't even listen, to each other, without someone spying, reporting, recording, and charting. And then calling you paranoid if you notice.
>
> (Blaska 1992: 283-4)

One of the ways in which fictional characters are seen as paranoid is because they cannot provide sufficient evidence to document their surveillance. However, in the non-fictional world evidence has begun to emerge about the scale of surveillance to which many were subject although the evidence was not available to them at the time. Sometimes, the scale is so massive that it sounds ludicrous. For example, during the trial of two Welsh nationalists in March 1993, Security Service (MI5) officers gave evidence that, on one day, an estimated 38 MI5 agents followed one man as he joined a small nationalist protest

march (Norton-Taylor, 1993a). A few days earlier more than 20 Security Service surveillance officers had tailed another man. A recent BBC TV (2002) series *True Spies* revealed how many of the reports by trade unionists and peace campaigners that they were under surveillance during the 1970s and 1980s were corroborated by police Special Branch officers. As the programme's reporter, Peter Taylor notes:

> Mr Taylor said he used to dismiss as "exaggerated paranoia" the stories of extensive phone tapping and surveillance. "But they were not, the files were vast," he said.
>
> (Wells, 2002)

Marx (1988) provides illustrations of a wide range of undercover law enforcement operations in the US including one where a Ku Klux Klan informant was "instructed 'to sleep with as many wives as I could' in an attempt to break up marriages and gain information" (149). Marx (1988) also describes how, in one operation, the FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) wrote anonymous letters to spouses of activists accusing them of infidelities.

Another BBC investigation (BBC News Online, 2005) obtained documents from the Metropolitan Police Special Branch's 30 one inch thick files on the Anti-Apartheid Movement, gathered between 1969-1995. Included in them were reports from members-only meetings and local groups "attended by as few as six people, of whom one must have been the police informant" (BBC news online, 2005). Attenders' car registration numbers were noted as well as their political affiliations. Reports of demonstrations even included reports of the banners carried and slogans chanted. A serious discussion of this surveillance would quickly take the form of conspiratorial discourse, a discourse that would then inevitably and ineluctably become read as paranoid.

One consequence of feeling watched is to render the subject self-conscious and fearful, caught within a "text of fear" (Lopez, 1991) and experiencing the "chilling effect" of surveillance (Campbell, 1988: 355). This has been ably demonstrated by writing on the internal security agencies of totalitarian states (e.g. Los, 2004). For example, in East Germany, the State Security agency, the Stasi, recruited possibly one sixth of the population as informers and many East Germans had files on them (Funder, 2003; Garton Ash, 1997[4]). Romania's Securitate conducted similar surveillance (BBC news online, 2006). As Los (2004) observes, the massive scale of this State surveillance means that not only is each citizen aware of the possibility of others being informers but they are aware that others, by the same token, view them as potential informers too. Undercover work may have consequences for the watchers too – Marx (1988) notes how the undercover FBI agent "may develop a cynical, suspicious, and even paranoid worldview and feel constantly on guard" (170).

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[4] Although Anna Funder's book on the Stasi is more well-known, Garton Ash's (1997) book is a complementary work in that he describes the experience of reading his own Stasi file. Garton Ash was a journalist in Eastern Europe during the Cold War and decided not only to read his Stasi file but to trace and interview those who informed on him. He writes about this in a compassionate manner and sensitively discusses the variety of factors and pressures leading to people becoming Stasi informers.

There is no escape since, as Gandy (1993, 2003) has demonstrated, panoptical surveillance is mediated not only through direct visual and auditory means in physical space, but also through all manner of electronic data-mining. Smail (1984) has noted how this experience of continual surveillance leads inevitably to the inscription of anxiety into the lives of those surveyed. However, since in most paranoid discourse, the Other has malevolent intent, the result is not only anxiety but self-regulation and suspicion. In Sass's (1987) analysis of Daniel Schreber's paranoia he argued that, because of persecutory child-rearing by his father, Schreber became "a quintessentially panoptical being" who experienced an internalized surveillance "thus watching himself watching himself watching himself watch" (1987: 144). Such a comment concurs with that of Žižek (1992) who sees in the concept of paranoia a kind of material superego which sees all and knows all. Thus paranoia could be seen as a system of governance, a psychic panopticon. Although surveillance seems common across Western society, its specific forms may vary from society to society and so we should not be surprised that, for example, those diagnosed as having paranoid delusions in the US are commonly preoccupied with the CIA whilst in Italy neighbours are a dominant theme (Gaines, 1995). Moreover, although surveillance is a dominant theme in Western culture, the depiction of paranoia is varied and contradictory and this offers, as we will see later, some clues to its construction.

Recent work in surveillance studies has begun to critique the view that surveillance is inherently a negative social force or even uniformly experienced as repressive (e.g. Lianos, 2003; Yar, 2003) and that, even in fictional representations, there is a more nuanced view possible (Albrechtslund & Dubbeld, 2005; Marks, 2005). However, the increasingly endemic nature of surveillance (Murakami Wood, 2006; Lyon, 2003) is not the only setting condition for paranoia and conspiracy culture. Another factor is that, in a post-Watergate age, the public are much more sceptical of official accounts. This scepticism is increased when we know that security and intelligence agencies have conspired in the past and, no doubt, still do (Blum, 2003; Porter, 1992). One of the symptoms of a lack of trust in the State and political debate is the increasing hold of conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories will always circulate in an age of fast transfer of information, highly complex and fast-moving events involving large numbers of people with only partial or ambiguous information. In the wake of the September 11 2001 attacks many conspiracy theories have developed, for example that the Pentagon was hit by a missile, not a plane (Reynolds, 2006); that the attacks were an "inside job" (Gillan, 2006) or that the World Trade Centre buildings were brought down by pre-planned controlled explosions (Pope, 2006). These theories have gained ground – Gillan (2006) reports that a recent poll found that 36% of Americans believed it "very likely" or "somewhat likely" that their government was involved in allowing the attacks or had carried them out itself. In a time of increased scepticism of official accounts, the tendency for bureaucracies to cover-up their errors and mistakes can appear to be evidence for conspiracy. As Robin Ramsay, editor of *Lobster* magazine puts it "in situations where the shit is flying bureaucracies go into cover-up mode automatically" (2005: 33). Bronner (2006), for example, discusses how the chaos in the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) was not adequately conveyed in the 9/11 Commission hearings (National Commission on Terrorist Acts Upon the United States, 2004). These unofficial narratives have become so widespread that the US State

department has developed guidance about misinformation which includes post 9/11 internet conspiracy theories (State department, 2005), the media have published detailed rebuttals of claims about the attacks (Popular Mechanics, 2005) and even George Bush felt the need to rebut them only two months after the attacks:

> Let us never tolerate outrageous conspiracy theories concerning the attacks of September the 11th; malicious lies that attempt to shift the blame away from the terrorists themselves, away from the guilty.
>
> (Bush, 2001)

Harper (2004) has argued that conspiratorial accounts might be more likely to be adopted by those who are powerless and work by Mirowsky and Ross (1983) suggests this may be the case. They noted that social positions characterized by powerlessness and by the threat of victimization and exploitation were linked to paranoid beliefs. Goertzel (1994) provides additional support for this view. He reported that black and hispanic respondents and younger people were more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than white respondents and older people. This suggests that conspiratorial accounts are more likely to be adopted by those in powerless positions because they appear to reflect and explain the conditions of their lives. People in powerless positions may adopt paranoid beliefs then, because it makes sense in a world where others really do have power over you.

Waters (1997) however, reporting a survey by the *New York Times* and *WCBS-TV News*, comments that African Americans who indicated belief in a number of conspiracy theories were better educated, more politically active and more aware of community problems than non-believers. She argued that this was because they were "more keenly aware of the continuing disparities between Blacks and Whites" (121) because of their social mobility and she went on to dispute the view that conspiracy theories must always be viewed as pathology, noting a range of documented conspiracies.

However, scholars in the social sciences have struggled to keep pace with the rise of paranoia, conspiracy and surveillance cultures. Often research has been hampered by disciplinary divisions and so it is to the conceptual resources brought to bear on these cultures that we now turn.

The limitations of traditional theorising about conspiratorial or "paranoid" narratives

Traditionally, in analysing conspiratorial/paranoid narratives, writers seem to have adopted one of two approaches: viewing these narratives as, on the one hand, an individualistic or intra-psychic phenomenon (and thus the preserve of psychologists and psychiatrists) or, on the other hand, as a societal phenomenon (and thus the preserve of cultural and social theorists or historians).

The first approach examines the intra-psychic and socio-psychological dynamics which lead to an individual developing paranoid beliefs. Examples here include the work of

Keen (1986), Robins and Post (1997), Sass (1987, 1994) and Lacan (1932 and see Žižek, 1992). Keen (1986), adopting a story metaphor, has proposed that we "think about paranoia in terms of how the paranoid person narratizes his [sic] life" (176). Some of the researchers investigating apparently bizarre phenomena like UFO abductions have treated these experiences in a similar way (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; de Rivera & Sarbin, 1998; Newman, 1997; Snyder, 1997).

The second approach has tended to emphasise the historical, social, cultural and (geo)political significance of paranoid and conspiratorial discourse (Curry & Brown, 1972; Jameson, 1992; Knight, 2000, 2002; O'Donnell, 1992; Ryan & Kellner, 1988; Waters, 1997). This approach has also fostered an interest in conspiratorial or paranoid rhetoric following the work of Hofstadter (1966). Hofstadter argued that this kind of discourse was the preferred style of minority political movements – although minority movements can often have a powerful political voice. However, Hofstadter's positioning, at times, as a conservative consensus historian may have meant that he wished to marginalise non-centrist views and we know that majority political movements also use a conspiratorial style when necessary. Thus Finn (1990, 1993) has commented on how conspiracy narratives have been used by political majorities in Northern Ireland to position minorities and that such a style not only produces particular kinds of explanation but also constrains what can be said.

This disciplinary division of labour between psychologists and psychiatrists, on the one hand, and historians and cultural and social theorists, on the other, has hampered a fully inter-disciplinary investigation of the meanings of paranoia. Some have attempted to bridge these two approaches, but this is often done by attempting to apply to the social realm, models developed from psychological research and therapy with individuals and rarely, if ever, the other way around. Thus Kramer (1994) draws on cognitive models and applies these theories to groups and organisations. Similarly, Harrison and Thomas (1997) attempt to combine cognitive and organisational variables in an analysis of how "cover-ups" come to be perceived as such. Parker (1995) uses a psychoanalytically-informed cultural analysis to examine UFO phenomena like abductions in popular cultural texts.

However, I would argue that it is possible to bridge this individual/social divide by examining conspiratorial discourses as texts within which one may position oneself and others. Billig (1991), for example, has proposed that one of the effects of conspiratorial discourses is to persuade others through a variety of rhetorical means. From this viewpoint, a conspiratorial narrative could be read as both normally suspicious and as paranoid, depending on the context. The context will shift according to how people are positioned and who is doing the positioning. Here then, I am dissolving the boundary between paranoid and conspiratorial discourses – a distinction maintained, often by cultural and social theorists deferring to the clinical knowledge of psychiatry. The question of which theoretical and methodological resources could be drawn on to investigate paranoia in this way is what I will turn to next.

Resources for investigating the paranoid position and conspiratorial discourse

This analysis will draw on concepts from discourse analysis and positioning theory. Parker has suggested one definition of discourse analysis which may be relevant here:

> Collections of texts define symbolic arrays which are the cultural niches we inhabit, and discourse analysis traces the threads which run through those niches meshing them together into "society".
>
> (Parker, 1992: 96)

Texts serve to position objects and subjects in particular ways and so we need to be attentive to the powers and rights to speak afforded by discourses (Parker, 1992). Davies and Harré (1990) offer a detailed account of positioning theory, borrowing the term from marketing and military language, using Hollway's (1989) notion of subject positions. A position's content is defined in terms of "rights, duties and obligations of speaking" (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1991: 404) whilst positioning is described as:

> the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself. However it would be a mistake to assume that, in either case, positioning is necessarily intentional
>
> (Davies & Harré, 1990: 48)

As a result "with positioning, the focus is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions" (Davies & Harré, 1990: 62). This theory has since been developed through work by Harré and his co-workers (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1991; Van Langenhove & Harré, 1994; Tan & Moghaddam, 1995). Harré & Van Langenhove (1991) acknowledge the importance of power in determining variations in positioning. In other words "people 'make' discourse, but not in discursive conditions of their own choosing" (Parker, 1992: 32). Harré and Van Langenhove note how when one positions oneself one is simultaneously implicitly positioning someone else and *vice versa*. This construction of an identity for ourselves when we position others works not only at the individual level but also with communities, organisations and so on.

Before, we move on to examine the effects of positioning ourselves and others in relation to paranoia, conspiracy and surveillance, it is necessary to set this discussion in a further layer of cultural context. Because I have argued that texts can be made to seem normally or pathologically suspicious depending on context, it is important to trace the varying ways in which paranoia is represented and delineate some of poles around which this variation is organised. I will describe how paranoia is rendered in various ways which suggest how it can be seen as structured dualistically.

Paranoia and discursive variation

> Culture is contradictory. We are often forced to acknowledge the presence
> of conflicting discourses in its texts, and it is this presence of contradiction
> which allows room for resistance, the refusal to respond within dominant
> meanings.

(Parker, 1992: 49)

There is no singular and coherent cultural image of paranoia. Instead variation between competing discourses appears to be the norm. On the one hand there is the image of what Gleeson (1991) describes as a "destructive-obstructive" character who makes others feel uneasy and who themselves feels under threat and "got at", who does not take things at face value but is mistrustful of others and their motives and who makes wildly untrue allegations. Furthermore, we are led to believe by the media that this kind of paranoid person is likely to be dangerous and violent. Such positioning is in stark contrast to the "absent standard" (Sampson, 1993) of trust and optimism which is highly valued in Western society. Indeed, one could argue that one of the functions of positioning others as paranoid is to show how rational *we* are.

Within work by researchers into surveillance and conspiracy culture, the related notions of paranoia and delusions may be seen as the epitome of unwarranted and meaningless suspicion. Take, for example, Yar's comment that the individual who tried to conduct their everyday life whilst taking note of every object which recorded their movements "might well find himself dismissed as the unfortunate victim of delusional paranoia" (2003: 264). Similarly, Knight (2000) notes that "some conspiracy culture is hopelessly deluded and spiteful" (22).

Interestingly, recent psychological research has started to cast doubt on the view that paranoid delusions are either idiosyncratic or meaningless. Indeed, surveys of the general population reveal high rates of belief in things which might be considered delusional (Harper, 2004). Empirical studies have found a good deal of overlap in the content of the beliefs of the general population and those with a diagnosis of psychosis and the difference between people within the mental health system and those outside appears to have less to do with the content of their beliefs *per se* and more to do with the distress and preoccupation associated with them (Peters, Day, McKenna & Orbach, 1999). Those with a diagnosis of delusion often find considerable meaning in their beliefs and, I have argued elsewhere (Harper, 2004) that they may end up within the mental health system not only because of their level of distress and preoccupation with their beliefs (which may arise because they have failed to find a community which shares that belief) but also because of the reactions of others.

However, there are representations which justify and legitimize a suspicious stance toward the world. For example, we are often urged to be suspicious of the motives of others. We also know that we gossip about (Rosnow & Fine, 1976) and routinely lie and deceive others (Lewis & Saarni, 1993). An opinion poll in the UK found both that 24% of people had lied to others and that 64% thought they had been lied to at least once

during the previous day (Social Surveys/Gallup Poll Ltd, 1994). In another poll, 60% of people felt that one couldn't be too careful in dealing with people and only 37% felt most people could be trusted (Social Surveys/Gallup Poll Ltd, 1997). At times suspicion can be signified differently as a result of gender (e.g. in cases of romantic or sexual jealousy or in the societal regulation of women's freedom of movement at night) or "race" (e.g. in relation to the extent to which people perceive racism). At other times, suspicion can be influenced by economic forces (e.g. with the home security industry marketing fear of crime – see also Lopez, 1991). Police forces run projects to encourage neighbourhood surveillance like the UK's *Neighbourhood Watch*. Moreover, jokes about paranoia abound with much of the humour resting on whether a paranoid stance is legitimate or not. At the same time, conspiracies and surveillance have so permeated Western culture that they are now seen as entertainment as we have seen in the success of *The X-Files*. We have moved from the time when the Big Brother of George Orwell's *1984* has been transformed into a prime-time television show across the world where volunteers willingly submit themselves to round-the-clock surveillance and we willingly watch them being watched and, indeed, surveillance appears to be increasingly mined for its entertainment potential (Albrechtslund & Dubbeld, 2005).

In examining concepts like paranoia, it is possible to tease out some of the poles around which such variation is organised (Harper, 1996, 1999; Parker et al., 1995). In the case of paranoia, I would argue that three oppositions are significant: normal/pathological; self/other; individual/group or larger.

The first pole consists of an opposition between normal/pathological paranoia. In other words, there is normal suspicion or "healthy paranoia" (American Psychological Association, 1993) and there is the paranoia which goes "too far" and is seen as a sign of pathology. AS we have seen, many conspiracy culture researchers are happy to regard some theories as undoubtedly paranoid. One could argue that such rhetorical moves serve to inoculate some parts of conspiracy research from the accusation of paranoia, by labelling those areas with which the author disagrees as paranoid.

A second pole of opposition is self/other paranoia in that our own suspicion is likely to be seen by us as normal whereas the suspicion of others may be seen as paranoid. When someone enunciates a conspiratorial account with which we disagree, labelling them as paranoid and calling their beliefs "conspiracy *theories*" is an option. However, when "we" adopt conspiratorial accounts we, of course, see ourselves as knowing what is really going on (see, for example the focus on "truth" in the titles of the Scholars for 9/11 Truth and Scholars for 9/11 Truth and Justice groups). A recent study investigating the influence of conspiracy theories on undergraduate students' perceptions of the death of Princess Diana (Douglas & Sutton, in press) provides some empirical support for this. They found that the students accurately estimated the degree to which others were influenced by the conspiracy theories, but they underestimated the degree to which they themselves were influenced by the same material.

A third pole of opposition is between individual/social paranoia – is the paranoia that of an idiosyncratic individual or that of a group, neighbourhood, nation or transnational organisation? Generally speaking, since consensual reality is, by definition, based on consensus between people, the larger or more powerful the group, the more unlikely it is

that their beliefs will be seen as a paranoid.

In the sections that follow, I intend to draw on discourse analysis and positioning theory to examine the effects of placing, firstly, others and, secondly, the self or one's own group in a paranoid position, one characterised by conspiratorial and surveillance-aware discourse.

Positioning the other as paranoid

What is notable about the position of "paranoid" is that it is most often an identity given to position an Other rather than chosen for oneself and this is the first side of the split. There are distinctive patterns in how such a subject position is produced and press reports of the 1993 *Global Deception* conference at the Wembley arena are a good illustration in that they involve the use of a number of rhetorical strategies that act as signals to the process of what Smith (1978) has referred to as "cutting out" – this denotes a means by which talk and other behaviour are presented not simply as a deviation from social rules and norms, but as anomalous.

Although a variety of cultural texts will be drawn on, those surrounding a two day conference at the London, UK Wembley arena in January 1993 will predominate. It was heralded as "the first international conference that will unquestionably expose the greatest global deception ever" (Nightlink Communications, 1993). Organized privately, it featured presentations by eight speakers drawn from the academic, journalistic and intelligence communities and, according to Wikipedia, a performance by the band *Kula Shaker*[5]. The promotional literature for the event noted that speakers included: Dr Robert Strecker who presented evidence that "AIDS is a MAN-MADE [sic] disease"; Eustace Mullins, who exposed economic "manipulations by a powerful elite"; Jan M van Toorn who argued that the AIDS treatment AZT was dangerous and had acquired documents on "healthcare issues, secret mass hypnosis ... and manipulation of the world population"; David M Summers who had "thoroughly researched anomalous phenomena"; Vladimir Terziski who was a "qualified authority on antigravity and advanced space flight propulsion technology"; Jordan Maxwell who was an expert on "super-secret Societies and their direct links to the world's power elites"; Norio Hayakawa who had documented proof and video footage of "highly advanced disc-shaped crafts displaying unnatural technological capabilities which clearly defy accepted gravitational laws"; and William Cooper who was "the world's top expert on the inner structure of the New World Order". The leaflet noted that the organizers had no political affiliations and also contained a warning that "the evidence and information presented during this conference may be psychologically disturbing".

Smith has shown how a process of cutting out renders certain kinds of behaviour as "mentally ill type" behaviour. In both the reports by *The Guardian* on the event, the conference was immediately framed as different or anomalous (or "cut out") by being printed in bold type. This convention, particularly when combined with a location on the front or back page (and occasionally inside the paper) often marks a piece as a humorous

[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kula_Shaker#Controversy

item. The first article (Ezard, 1993) followed some comments in the diary section of the newspaper which consists largely of humorous items, and was printed in bold and located on the back page. The second piece, although located on page 7, was also printed in bold and was hence identifiably marked as different:

> To the uninitiated this may sound like a tall and confusing story. But here it is, as told by a quiet American to 300 ordinary looking people at the first international conference on global deception at the Wembley conference centre yesterday.
>
> (Pallister, 1993: 7)

At the start of this piece the story to be reported is identified as possibly "tall and confusing" and one which requires some specialist or initiate knowledge. The speaker is described as "a quiet American" and the audience as "ordinary looking". That such descriptions, not normally used in newspaper accounts, are found here implies that they are necessary since they cannot be assumed. The implication is that given the framing of this account, it could have been expected that the audience would look odd and that the speaker would be loud or agitated. In these first two sentences then, the text signals to the reader that there is something anomalous about this event: the story, audience and speaker. The second paragraph reiterates these signals in a different form by moving from the style of a news report style to one of parody:

> There is a secret world government, dedicated to Lucifer and with a lineage stretching back 5,000 years to the Canaanites and the cult of Baal, the god of fertility. It reaches into every sphere of life, if only you knew. The doctors are in it, and the judges – why else do they wear *black* robes, the symbol of Babylon? – and naturally the masons.
>
> (Pallister, 1993: 7 - emphasis in original)

In this narrative structure, the content of the conference is made to seem even more bizarre through the use of a monologue style associated with a representation of conspiracy theorists as self-obsessed. Rather than presenting any "evidence" this account makes bald statements which, because they lack any validation, once again seem bizarre. Moreover, the text is self-consciously conversational with the reader addressed by comments like "if only you knew" as if to highlight the fact that this piece of news is of a different order than the other items in the newspaper. The addition of "and naturally the masons" at the end of this excerpt is associated with a representation of conspiracy discourse as focused on a limited number of clichéd objects (e.g. Jewish people, the masons, communists and so on) for which evidence is adduced *post-hoc*. Finally, there is overt appropriation of conspiracy discursive styles. For example, these plots are "secret", and they reach into "every sphere of life". Connections are made between objects on the basis of little (or trivial and idiosyncratic) evidence, for example between judges and Babylon because of the wearing of black robes. Later in the article similar connections are made. Thus, in locating someone as paranoid, there is discursive work both in "cutting out" their behaviour and in appropriating and parodying conspiratorial styles of rhetoric.

An example of such a discourse of connections can be found in a newspaper interview

with Mary Seal, the co-organizer of the Wembley conference. In the interview, she states that many people have noticed intrigues in history but "everyone seems to be looking at a fragmented piece of a huge puzzle, unable to see a complete picture" (Quirke, 1993). The complete picture is that:

> people have been pulling the strings behind every event that has happened – First World War, Second World War, the Bolshevik revolution, which was a complete hoax ... You just have to look at who owns the controlling interest in the major oil companies, the pharmaceuticals, the petro-chemicals, the international banks, the federal reserve system, the Bundesbank. It's the same names all the time. Hitler was financed by these people. These people financed the Allies as well. Lenin was financed, of course, by the same people, I could name three hundred of them now but to do it out of context would sound ludicrous.
>
> (Quirke, 1993)

This account is marked by a number of features: historical events are explained by those who "pull strings"; financiers of apparently opposing political groups at different times in history are described as "the same people"; her audience are positioned as people who may be stupid or who have been hoodwinked – at the least, people to whom a truth needs to be revealed. This text could be said to illustrate an epistemological and ideological desire for simplicity, a point which characterizes many conspiratorial texts. Moreover, Seal realises the way in which her message might be heard: as "ludicrous". Indeed, the process of "cutting out" is even more overt in that the journalist's questioning of Seal's mental health is undisguised:

> Perhaps this is the moment to ask about mental stability. "People who try to stop what's happening are always portrayed like that," Ms Seal said. She has no history of psychiatric problems.
>
> (Quirke, 1993)

Although the answer to the question about mental illness is reported to be negative, the very process of questioning it serves to mark out Seal's views, cutting her out in the sense of rendering her views illegitimate and not explicable according to normal social rules – similar patterns are evident in texts where writers denounce particular projects as paranoid (e.g. Bywater, 1990). Thus the conference organizer becomes positioned as paranoid both by adopting a particular stance (of suspiciousness) and by her being positioned by wider discourses (e.g. general cultural proscription of suspicion versus prescription of trust and so on). A subject position is delineated and it is in the creation of such a position that identities are created and transformed. One may accept or reject such an identity but the success of this depends on how much power you and your story have as opposed to the power of dominant discourses.

Sampson has noted "power involves the manner by which persons are given a location and a subjectivity as actors within discourse" (1993: 1223). He has described how, in constructing a negatively-valued discursive position for an other, we are in the business of constructing a "serviceable other" – one who defines our possession of desired qualities by their lack. Thus, when the then British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, described

Osama Bin Laden as "obviously psychotic and paranoid" (Watt, 2001) he was following a long tradition of viewing terrorists as mentally ill (Silke, 1998) – an ascription which is offensive to many people with mental health problems (Bentall, 2001). However, in positioning someone as paranoid we are also constructing an identity for ourselves: as trusting; rational; reasonable; optimistic; sane and so on. In casting our enemies as mentally ill, we cast ourselves as sane.

Rhetorical strategies for resisting the paranoid position

I have argued that locating someone in the discursive position of "paranoid" has a number of effects. Clearly, one of the most important of these is the regulation of suspicion. Thus, following her interview with the BBC's *Panorama* in 1995, Nicholas Soames, the then Conservative Minister for the UK Armed Forces, suggested that the Princess of Wales was in "the advanced stages of paranoia" (Webster, 1995: 1). Porter (1992) has noted how, when the ex-Prime Minister of the UK, Harold Wilson, made a number of allegations about a plot by MI5 (the British Security Service) to destabilise his Labour administration, the Conservative (and ex-MI6) MP Stephen Hastings "called him 'positively paranoic' and urged him to 'see a psychiatrist' " (210)6.

We can see the effect of this paranoid position in accounts of surveillance since, in order to resist such positioning by others, many speakers attempt to inoculate their audience by either raising the question of paranoia, or by attempting to warrant their use of a discourse of suspicion through the use of a "I don't mean to be paranoid but..." rhetorical move. A variant of this is to reclaim the term – thus Sweeney's (1998) book on counter-surveillance is called *The Professional Paranoid*.

Another way in which the paranoid position can be resisted is by noting how beliefs and behaviour which, at one time, were seen as paranoid are no longer. For example, in an interview, Bill Brown of the Surveillance Camera Players, was asked whether he was labelled as paranoid:

> Fortunately, in that way, I am one of the rare activists who can say, thanks to Sept. 11th it is now impossible to call me paranoid. It got to be a theme in media's criticisms, "ah, he's paranoid." And my delusion would be that I think I see surveillance cameras everywhere. Now, nobody makes that judgment ever again. In that way it's a typical pattern. Thirty years ago, what was a left-wing conspiracy theory about JFK being shot, is now accepted fact. That's what Sept. 11th did for my group. It has totally killed this thing that I'm paranoid and feeding off the future. I'm struggling to keep up with the present and I often used to flip it back on people and say, "no, the people who are paranoid are the ones putting up the cameras. What I'm doing is struggling to remain un-paranoid".

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6 Stella Rimmington, ex-Director-General of the British Security Service publicly denied any plot against Wilson (Rimmington, 1994, see also the Security Service's similar denial on its website, http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page245.html). Porter (1992), having reviewed the evidence, considers that there were plots afoot but that they did not actually work and that there are other more plausible reasons for the demise of Wilson. However, Dorril and Ramsay (1991), Leigh (1988) and Penrose and Courtiour (1978), disagree and offer alternative analyses of the available information.

(Scienke and Brown, 2003: 364)

Similarly, in a House of Commons debate on the Police Bill, the then Labour MP Tony Benn commented:

> In the old days, those who talked about being bugged were described as paranoid; nowadays people say, "What's new?" Both attitudes are wrong. We should not be regarded as paranoid if we know it is happening, and it should not be regarded as normal because everyone does it.
>
> *(Hansard* 12 February 1997, column 392)

Of course, alongside rhetorical strategies for resisting being positioned as paranoid, it is possible to engage in action too. Thus, surveillance can be resisted and subverted by encouraging people to access surveillance camera footage of them under the UK Data Protection Act as comedian Mark Thomas has done[7]. Similarly, people have worn their own surveillance devices and engaged in sousveillance or coveillance (Mann et al., 2003) or have revealed the operation of surveillance through "play" as in the work of the Surveillance Camera Players (Schienke & Brown, 2003).

Moreover, with the rise of the mental health service user movement, a movement critical of psychiatry, those labelled as paranoid have attempted to reclaim this term, following a strategy developed by other oppressed groups – see for example, the establishment, in 2004, of the Paranoia Network[8] (Jacobson & Zavos, 2007; James, 2003).

Knight (2000) refers to the deployment of ironic and self-reflexive paranoid narratives as working to "anticipate and disarm the authority of expert criticism" (17). That speakers wishing to be suspicious feel the need to defend against an implied accusation of paranoia suggests that it has powerful regulatory effects. Furthermore, these rhetorical strategies may be far from successful since discursive positions are organised such that the very reflection on the position threatens to relocate the speaker as paranoid. Furthermore, the response of others to movements seen as conspiratorial and paranoid can be as overwhelmingly conspiratorial as that of the groups. Thus Shaw notes how religious cults' "paranoia about the outside world feeds on the outside world's paranoia about cults' paranoia which feeds on cults' paranoia" (1994: 204).

We have discussed some of the effects of positioning others as paranoid but what are the effects of positioning oneself or one's own group in a "paranoid" location, by taking up conspiratorial narratives?

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[7] http://www.channel4.com/news/microsites/M/mark_thomas/1/downloads.html
[8] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paranoia_Network

Features and effects of adopting a conspiratorial or "paranoid" position (or as one who knows what is *really* going on)

I have suggested that the cultural significance of the construction of paranoia can be approached by examining how it can be seen as a discursive position. The argument developed so far is that positioning someone as paranoid cuts them out in the sense that their behaviour is regarded as anomalous and inexplicable according to normal social conventions. It also serves to remove legitimacy from any suspicions that the person voices. Of course this only occurs when the self is positioned by an other. When it is the self which is doing the positioning one is less likely to see oneself as adopting a paranoid position, rather it will be seen as a sensible and understandable "knowing" position (see O'Donnell, 1992). What are some of the rhetorical features and social effects of such accounts? In this section I identify four main features and effects, beginning with the way in which suspicion is mobilised in "paranoid" and conspiratorial narratives.

Plots, connections and reality-loops: Some features of adopting a discourse of suspicion
The traditional approach to examining the effects of adopting a conspiratorial position has been dualistic with effects being seen either at the individual or cultural level. Thus Baumeister and Sommer (1997) adopt an individualistic approach, arguing that people giving apparently bizarre accounts (for example of UFO abductions) do this voluntarily in order to "transcend and transform their identities and, in particular, to cultivate relationships with powerful, often desirable others" (213). Snyder (1997) and Newman (1997) offer similar functionalist interpretations. Other approaches adopt a socio-cultural level of explanation including the view, for example, that conspiratorial accounts are entirely functional within a given context. Thus Case (1987) describes the role of suspicion amongst racehorse trainers whilst Wedow (1979) discusses how the management of paranoia amongst a group of illegal drug users creates elaborate interaction rituals which serve both to protect group participants and reinforce a collective orientation.

Conspiratorial accounts have long structured explanations of current and historical events. Texts like those of Graumann and Moscovici (1987), Hofstadter (1966) and Jameson (1992) and fictional works like Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* (1990) and Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* (Brown, 2004) testify to the attraction and power of such narratives which tell intriguing stories with all the ingredients of a plot that will hold the reader or listener: the revelation of secret plans (see, for example Pipes, 1997). Groh (1987a) has argued that conspiracy discourses tend to appear in specific historical contexts. He has traced changes in the forms of such discourse, for example, from metaphysical to worldly intentionality. He has also described (1987b) how conspiracy discourses have different objects – depending, of course, on who was using the discourse, and for what purpose. Over time and across contexts objects have included: women (as witches); Jesuits; Rosicrucians; Communists; Masons; Jewish people; the Knights Templar and so on. To this list we could now, perhaps, add Muslims in the wake of 9/11.

A discourse of suspicion is not only a destructive force, undermining dominant cultural notions of trust, it is also productive, creating new forms of knowledge and new

interpretations. Such forms of discourse can create a discursive spiral of mistrust and suspicion which may lead, in a paranoic twist, to the construction of a world where no-one and nothing can be trusted. The conspiracist takes the position that, in finding out what is really going on, they must move beyond surface reality to see what is hidden beneath, to see the hand of the "Other of the Other" (Žižek, 1992).

Los (2004) describes how totalitarian state systems rely on such a disjunction between appearance and reality:

> To pursue total, monistic domination, the ruling structure cannot be itself monolithic and coherent, yet it must generate a belief in a menacing deeper unity, hidden underneath and perpetuated behind the scenes … The masses need to acquire a Kafkaesque sense that the true power structure does not lie in the visible maze of offices, but is deeply hidden and profoundly secret.
>
> (Los, 2004: 22)

Jameson (1992) notes how, in conspiracy movies, the imperative to move beyond surface reality may be represented spatially or through the use of light. Thus in *Wild Palms* (Stone, 1993) the resistance movement is literally an *underground* movement, travelling through a huge network of tunnels which the character Harry Wyckoff describes as "a subway for paranoids"9. In *President's Men* (Pakula, 1976) the bright open newsroom where the "truth" is revealed is contrasted with the dark underground car-park where secrets are discussed. However, at each turn, the "deeper" reality turns out to be yet another surface reality. In doubting reality it is easy to lose one's way and be prone to the reality-loops beloved of writers like Philip K. Dick – a good illustration here is Verhoeven's 1990 film *Total Recall* inspired by a Dick short story (Parker, 1996).

Such reality loops work through the use of rhetorical strategies of intention (which I discuss below) and the weaving, through narrative, of a connection between apparently unconnected events: "groups seemingly in opposition ... are all connected, all directed by the invisible centre" (J.M. Hoene-Wronski, quoted in Eco, 1990: 312). Eco has characterized such discourse:

> wanting connections, we found connections – always, everywhere, and between everything. The world exploded into a whirling network of kinships, where everything pointed to everything else, everything explained everything else …
>
> (Eco, 1990: 463-464)

The subject positioned here clearly becomes one who not only "knows" but who knows

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9 Tunnels are symbolic for those who adopt a conspiratorial position. For example, there is a whole series of magazines on urban exploration (*Infiltration – the zine about going places you're not supposed to go*) and a book (Ninjalcious, 2005) by the founder of the magazine, the late Jeff Chapman a.k.a. Ninjalicious. More generally, the underground world provides rich fare for those interested in a parallel secret world – see for example Camley (2000) and the work of Subterranea Britannica. http://www.subbrit.org.uk/

too much, who is privy to an excess or "surplus knowledge" (Žižek, 1992). The connection imperative has been seen as central to paranoid texts (O'Donnell, 1992).

Jameson (1992) has argued that it is the movement between versions of events – such that conspiracies are switched on or off and such that characters may be detectives one moment and then victim or villain the next – that defines "the ideologeme that currently bears the name paranoia in the popular mind" (1992: 34) rather than any "clinical reality" or "state of consciousness". For him such switching is an interpretation of "the deeper truth of the world system" (1992: 16).

The discourses which produce a paranoid or knowing position contain a number of threads. These may be woven together to produce quite different texts. Intentionality, suspicion, trust and interpretation are regulated within different forms of paranoid discourse.

The rhetorical use of intentionality

A common rhetorical strategy found in "paranoid" discourse is to intentionalise events through the use of the notion of conspiracy. Common-sense notions tend to assume that a conspiracy is only held to have occurred when there is evidence of an intention to conspire. This is, in fact, how criminal conspiracies are defined in English criminal law (Smith and Hogan, 1992). Anti-conspiratorial discourse, on the other hand, often aims to undermine such accounts by mobilising a discourse of intention since the imputation of intentionality breaks a social rule; this is best expressed in the tension between "conspiracy" and "cock-up" interpretations of events. To accuse someone of imputing intentionality to a wide range of apparently unconnected phenomena is to reveal that there is a paranoid state of mind at work. Since intentions are extremely difficult to prove and conspiracies are notoriously epistemologically ambiguous, such challenges to conspiratorial interpretations are often successful, particularly when linked with positioning the other as paranoid. Indeed, conspiracy theories have become unpopular amongst academic researchers though Pigden (1995) makes a spirited defence of them when used appropriately and Baker and Faulkner (1993) give a plausible account of a commercial conspiracy. However, there are more sophisticated, non-intentionalist discourses of conspiracy which compete with intentionalist accounts, proving the flexibility of conspiratorial accounts. Eco (1986), for example, in his critique of the Red Brigades' conspiracy theories, has noted how, rather than sending letters informing those in powerful positions of their "secret plans", the "multinational equilibrium" of capitalism acts more subtly, through, for example, changes in the international finance markets. As Knight (2000) puts it:

> The contemporary discourse of conspiracy gives narrative expression to the possibility of conspiracy without conspiring, with the congruence of vested interests that can only be described as conspiratorial, even when we know there has probably been no deliberate plotting.
>
> (2000: 32)

However, such accounts run contrary to the intentionalist language used in political argument and so a political account of conspiracy is often read as paranoid.

Ryan and Kellner (1988) have argued that conspiracy movies mobilize a "discourse of distrust" based on turning the "systemic concealment of real power structures into a personalized account of secret intrigue" (98). Jameson (1992) concurs, arguing that the conspiratorial narrative is a solution to a fundamental representational problem: how to picture an unimaginable and increasingly technologically sophisticated global network that is so vast that it cannot be "encompassed by the natural and historically developed categories of perception" (1992: 2). Elsewhere, he has described it as "the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age" (Jameson, 1988: 356). However, though conspiratorial narratives can be seen as a way of representing the world, they can have powerful effects on that world too.

Subverting trust and optimism as a warrant for action

What are the effects and consequences of conspiratorial accounts? Liberal discourse about apparently bizarre or unwarranted ideas might view conspiratorial texts as simply harmless and amusing. As Billig (1986) has put it "the world is a brighter place thanks to quirky eccentrics" (xxiv). However, such a view fails to acknowledge the effects of certain forms of conspiratorial discourse. Billig, for example, has noted that "there is no such enjoyment to be gained from the believers in the non-existence of the holocaust" (1986: xxiv). Indeed, a number of writers have noted how the employment of anti-semitic conspiratorial discourse has served to warrant action consistent with such views. Thus Cohn (1967) has described how such rhetoric served as a warrant for the holocaust. Racist groups have promulgated new versions of old conspiracy theories (witness the recycling of the Tsarist Secret Police's forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*[10]) to deny the fact of that genocidal episode (Billig, 1991; Seidel, 1986).

Paranoid and conspiratorial discourse works to promote suspicion and subvert implicit cultural rules of optimism and trust. Such discourse can serve to warrant both further suspicious interpretations and action consistent with such analyses. One major effect of the conspiratorial text is to unify disparate interests against an external agent (or internal forces manipulated by an external agent) upon which is projected all manner of malign intent. The subject positioned in this process inhabits a space characterized by a sense of purpose, mission and identity (perhaps at a time when identity is under threat) and also a dramatization of history (Roberts, 1972). Kovel (1986), for example, has argued that the rhetoric of the Cold War, by projecting hostile intent onto other nations, helped sustain the military-industrial complex and the nuclear state. Lopez (1991) has noted how the cultivation of fear has led to the militarization of everyday life, with increasing emphasis on personal safety, security and surveillance systems leading to political conservatism.

A popular historical theory is that conspiratorial accounts are used by politically significant, yet marginalised groups, for example, the political extremes of right and left (Inglehart, 1987). However, it is clear that those with political power will adopt conspiratorial positions when necessary. For example, during a speech to the 1922 committee of Conservative backbench MPs on 19 July 1984, in the midst of the UK miners' strike, the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said: "we had to fight the

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[10] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Protocols_of_the_Elders_of_Zion

enemy without in the Falklands. We always have to be aware of the enemy within, which is much more difficult to fight and more dangerous to liberty" Wilenius (2004).

Rhetorical moves like this, combined with a concerted political and economic campaign to marginalise the miners, worked well in helping Thatcher to take extreme measures against the unions culminating in her systematic breaking of the National Union of Mineworkers during the year-long coal strike of the early 1980s (Milne, 2004). However, this kind of rhetorical strategy can be used in commerce too – another example is from a catalogue for a security gadget firm:

> Do you really know what's going on? Disloyalty and deception are often promoted through conspiratorial conversations. In the most extreme form, conspiracy can undermine national interests and become treasonable. Commercially, it can destroy a business and domestically, can ruin a relationship.
>
> Lorraine Electronics Surveillance (1995)

Here, a paranoid narrative justifies the purchase of sophisticated surveillance equipment.

Another effect of promoting a paranoid position is to increase fears of conspiracy, subversion and terrorism and this then supports moves to reinforce the security state. For example, Porter (1992) has noted that accounts of IRA bombing campaigns seemed to "justify the role of MI5 and the Special Branch" (200). Indeed, even before 9/11, terrorism had become the officially-recognised priority of British security services as a result of the demise of the USSR as a threat to national security (Norton-Taylor, 1993b).

Post-September 11th the Security State has grown massively. For example the number of UK Special Branch officers (police officers with responsibility for security, intelligence, subversion and terrorism) rose from 1,638 in 1978 to 2,220 at the beginning of the 1990s to at least 4,247 by February 2003 (Statewatch, 2003). Kirkup (2005) reports that, in December 2004, the Chancellor of the Exchequer told MPs that the security budget had more than doubled since 11th September 2001 and that the Security Service (MI5) had seen a massive increase in its budget, which is believed to be rising towards £300 million. The Security Service website[11] notes "we plan to increase our staff numbers to around 3,200 people by 2008".

I am not trying to argue that the fear of terrorism is a fiction or that terrorist acts have been deliberately allowed to proceed or carried out by security and intelligence agencies, merely arguing that there is a necessary symbiosis between terrorist threats and the growth of these agencies. Thus Dame Eliza Manningham Buller's (2006) speech about the high level of terrorist threat is likely to reinforce calls for further increases in the Security state.

However, there is a bizarre history of the relationship between the perceived threat of subversion and State security services. For example, Enzensberger (1976) has described how the Tsarist secret police (the Ochrana) infiltrated agent provocateurs into

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[11] http://www.mi5.gov.uk/

revolutionary fighting organisations plotting to overthrow the Russian Tsarist regime. Thus, he suggests (concurring with Hannah Arendt), the Russian revolution of 1917 was, in a significant way, the product of the Tsarist secret police. This was entirely functional for the Ochrana since it "would become superfluous unless there were a conspiracy to combat" (Enzensberger, 1976: 191). Tony Benn reports how the police penetration of the National Union of Students (NUS) was so complete in 1966 that "during the strike, one of the NUS' committees consisted entirely of Special Branch!" (1990: 510). The Dutch internal security service – the BVD (now the AIVD) – went even further by setting up its own fake Maoist party (the *Marxist-Leninist Party of the Netherlands*) which was so successful it garnered honours and funds from Beijing (de Vreij, 2004). Narratives such as these serve to warrant action taken on both the "paranoid" and the "normally suspicious" sides of the split. Thus the conspiratorial accounts surrounding the 1993 Waco siege and the 1995 Oklahoma bombing in the U.S. served to warrant action taken both by the Identity Movement *and* the US Federal government. Of course, conspiratorial accounts can only have significant social effects if they are adopted by enough people with enough political power. Therefore, one of the features of many such narratives is the imperative to persuade others.

Conspiratorial discourse as revelatory evangelism

The account given by Mary Seal noted earlier was revelatory and was intended to convince. In conspiratorial accounts, historical causation may be seen as a relatively simple linear process. Although the objects of the conspiracy are largely national or trans-national organizations or groups, the use of rhetorical strategies like personalisation (e.g. by repeatedly noting how the people behind events are related in some way) and intentionalisation links historical events and disparate groups together in a linear narrative. Within the bounds of such texts though, there are constraints as Finn (1993) has noted. For example, it is not possible to speak of complex causation influenced by a number of competing or conflicting interest groups. Moreover, the influence of organizations in the shaping of historical events is seen as a straightforward matter of who pulls the strings and who pays. Conspiratorial interpretation serves as a unifying, simplifying and paradoxically both mystifying and de-mystifying explanation. The position set up is for a subject who "knows". It is also an argument, uttered within a context of convincing an audience – a crucial issue, as Billig (1991) has pointed out. This is a common theme in conspiratorial accounts:

> Narrator: Now David Vincent knows that the invaders are here, that they have taken human form. Somehow he must convince a disbelieving world that the nightmare has already begun.
>
> *Quinn Martin* (1967)

In this excerpt from the introduction to the US TV science-fiction serial *The Invaders*, we see the discursive intent to strive to convince others who are positioned as "disbelieving" by a subject who is privy to a secret truth. Within popular culture the representation most often encountered here is that of the "all-American ideal of the tinkering common man" (Ryan & Kellner, 1988: 100) and the "heroic quest" model of conspiracy movies (Barker, 1992). This is perhaps one feature of conspiracy discourse where there may be a difference between the person located in a paranoid narrative within the mental health

system and other forms of conspiratorial discourse. The person within the mental health system may be socially isolated, fearful (especially if they feel they feel personally targeted) and not at all evangelical (see, for example, Porteous, 1995). There may be many reasons for such a difference. However, this may be less to do with the account *per se* and more to do with the marginalised position in which the person or group are either already placed or in which they know they will be placed if they voice their account. Of course, if one belongs to a group which shares similar beliefs then one may well feel less isolated and afraid.

Conclusion

In this article I have noted the influence of narratives about paranoia and conspiracy theory in discussions of surveillance both in popular culture and in the work of police and security and intelligence agencies, bodies about which conspiracy theories thrive12. Paranoia can, then, be seen as part of a nexus with surveillance and conspiracy theory. I have argued that traditional conceptions of paranoia view it either at an individualistic level (usually as a form of individual pathology) or at a societal level but that it makes sense to see it as both a position and a narrative. I delineated three oppositions around which discussions of paranoia appeared to be organised: normal/pathological; self/other; individual/group. In order to avoid some of the methodological traps of traditional approaches, I have suggested the use of discourse analysis and positioning theory to illuminate some of the discursive aspects of narratives about paranoia. I have noted how, far from being static, multiple stories can be told about paranoia. For example, when one is positioning the other as paranoid (be it Harold Wilson, Princess Diana or Osama Bin Laden), simple rhetorical strategies can effectively mark them and their views out as illegitimate. The danger here, is that if one acknowledges this potential position in order to reflect on it one can be doubly marked out. I have also traced some of the rhetorical features and effects of these kinds of account: the adoption of a discourse of suspicion; the viewing of conspiracies as intentional or even non-intentional; where the subversion of trust is a call to some kind of action; and where one sees oneself as on a mission to convince others.

Research into the surveillance society is incomplete without a focus on the human dimension. However, in beginning to investigate that dimension, we must be careful not to simply reproduce taken-for-granted concepts like "paranoia". Instead we need to interrogate these terms and think through the implications of their use.

What are the implications of this view of paranoia for the field of surveillance studies? Firstly, we should strive to be aware of what we are doing when labelling others as paranoid or reporting that they believe in "conspiracy theories" given that one of the effects of such a move is to undermine the legitimacy of others' views and to implicitly position our own views as legitimate. Rather than viewing paranoia as a static pathological identity we can view it in more of a fluid and dynamic manner – as a position which may be adopted in a particular context and time for a variety of reasons. Secondly,

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12 It would be remiss of me, as a psychologist, to fail to note the role that my discipline has played in developing surveillance technologies (Harper, 2007).

paranoia could be recognised as one kind of response to a complex world. As the US novelist Pat Conroy has put it "I've always found paranoia to be a perfectly defensible position."[13] It may form another point of resistance to the growth of surveillance and may be understandable given one's experiences – indeed, within the arena of mental health, paranoia may be one of the effects of victimisation (Cromby and Harper, 2005, in press). However, at the same time we also need to be careful not to celebrate paranoia as a uniformly unproblematic position – it can also be frightening and distressing both to the person themselves and to others around them. Thirdly, therefore, it may be helpful to adopt a both/and approach to the paranoid position: it may result from the effects of marginalisation but can also be adopted by the powerful; it may provide a quirky view of life but can also be distressing and isolating; and it may signal a heightened awareness of what is really going on in the world but, as Noam Chomsky has argued in relation to conspiratorial accounts of the 9/11 attacks, it can also be a dangerous distraction from serious political analysis and action[14].

A more nuanced view of the paranoid position and of conspiratorial narratives could enrich surveillance studies and methods like those outlined here could bring these topics out of their respective research ghettos so that we have a fuller and richer paradigm.

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[13] http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/23582.html
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