

Department of Humanities, Northumbria University

Honours Dissertation

**Redefining Watergate:
Surveillance, Paranoia and Pop Culture in America's
Long 1970s**

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Glossary

Bad Jacketing	A tactic used by FBI informants to deflect suspicion and instigate internal conflict in targeted organisations, mainly by accusing activists of being informants themselves
Black Bag job	The name given to extra-legal FBI operations involving surreptitious entry
Bugging	Where microphones are placed surreptitiously in a locale to monitor a target's conversations
COINTELPROs	Counterintelligence Operations conducted by the FBI
DNC	Democratic National Committee
Mail Covers	A tactic used by CIA and FBI agents where incoming and outgoing private correspondence was monitored
SSG	Special Surveillance Group – FBI agents trained specifically to covertly monitor Bureau targets
WHT	The White House Tapes
Wiretap	Name given to tactic of 'listening in' on private phonecalls

Introduction

The Seventies – A Veritable ‘Decade of Nightmares’?

In Matt Groening’s sci-fi cartoon show *Futurama* – a show as much about the future as it is about the past – the decapitated head of Richard Nixon plays a significant part. He is, bar the headless body of Vice President Spiro Agnew, the only reminder to the 30th century of the 1970s. A decade that, so the show implies, was wholly unremarkable, save – of course – for Watergate. Indeed, Nixon’s first key appearance, in an episode dubbed ‘A head in the polls’, revolves almost entirely around the themes of what has commonly been dubbed the ‘Watergate era’. The self-admittedly ‘crazy’ Nixon, cornered by the show’s protagonists in (yes, you guessed it) the Watergate Hotel, and assured of his own success in the upcoming 3000 presidential election, vows to not only ‘sell our children’s organs to zoos for meat’, but to ‘go into people’s houses at night and wreck up the place.’¹ The crazed Nixon is then, of course, undone by an incriminating tape. Surreptitious entry and surveillance, so *Futurama* would tell us, is the one indelible mark the seventies left behind.

Nixon, although not the first president to bug, harass and covertly monitor his enemies, has come to personify the seventies’ nightmarish inflections over the years. His presidency, prone to revisionist interpretations in more recent scholarly contributions, holds an inextricable link with the tonal malaise that seemingly afflicted the American populace during that decade. But while ‘Tricky Dick’ most certainly influenced this zeitgeist, it is important to remember that he was far from the sole contributor. Indeed, the Watergate era denotes a theme of paranoia that implicates Nixon as a direct participant, but not as a founder. These themes of unease, addressed by multiple scholars of the 1970s though rarely examined in great detail, are my study’s primary concern.

Since its release in 2006, Philip Jenkins’ study of the 1970s, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*, has become an invaluable resource for scholars

¹ *Futurama*, ‘A Head in the Polls’, Season 1, Episode 16 (Fox, 1999).

looking to analyse the period. Indeed, Jenkins' approach to the decade, defined by his adoption of a 'long' sixties and a 'long' seventies respectively, places fear at the centre of his narrative of liberal decline and conservative resurgence.² Not so much a fear of surveillance or government abuse (an element of his study I will contest), but it is telling that seminal works like *Decade of Nightmares* acknowledge that anxiety (albeit in reference to an ostensible decline in law and order) was a predominant feature of seventies discourse. Who and what it affected, however, is in dispute, and while Jenkins may claim that fears surrounding covert observation and government mistrust can be dismissed as a left-wing phenomenon – a 'theme' that waned by the turn of 1976 – it has become increasingly apparent over the course of my research that this was not the case.³ On the contrary, these anxieties pervaded prior to and beyond 1976, were rationalised by pop-culture and vindicated by the malpractice of federal law-enforcement; exemplified in full by the FBI's use of electronic surveillance, the psychological impacts of COINTELPRO, and the Nixon administration's desire to replicate these tactics during the Watergate affair.

In short, this study will aim to place surveillance as a concept synonymous with the anxieties of the period, one which we will define as originating in the beginning of 1966 – as more conventional channels began to alert to these fears – and culminating at the turn of 1982. Other scholars of the seventies, like Bruce J. Schulman, contend that the themes of the decade more neatly fit in between the years of 1968 and 1981, and Jenkins, who, whilst undoubtedly having offered a convincing case in his monograph for a seventies defined primarily between the years of 1976 and 1986, omits important events in the thematic development of a distinct, 'seventies' zeitgeist.⁴ Indeed, I will argue that surveillance practices pioneered during the sixties precipitated an atmosphere of anxious malaise in the following decade; that this atmosphere proved pervasive

² Sandra Scalon, Review – 'Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*', *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2009), p. 332.

³ Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 55-56.

⁴ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture Society and Politics* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2002), p. xvi.

across social, economic and political divides; and that it was influential enough to engender a legacy of paranoia and distrust in historical reflections of the period. Redefining Watergate, in this instance, means placing the event in the context of a series of surreptitious abuses conduct by American intelligence agencies – a context that, perhaps surprisingly, Nixon himself was aware of.

In this case, I have elected to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to the study of Watergate. My research draws upon multiple sources, including FBI surveillance correspondence during COINTELPRO, New Left literature from the late 1960s, mainstream newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, along with the deliberations of the Church Committee, The White House Tapes themselves and, most importantly, films of the period that bore its unique themes – namely Alan J. Pakula’s ‘Paranoid Trilogy’.

The dissertation is structured over the course of three primary chapters, as well as a conclusion. Chapter one deals with the origins of the seventies’ paranoid reputation by examining J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI’s counterintelligence operations during the 1960s and early ‘70s, as well as the press’s role in fermenting anxiety. Chapter two explicitly examines popular culture in the Watergate milieu, analysing the films of the period to discern the full extent to which paranoia penetrated US culture at the start of the decade. The final chapter examines the Nixon administration and the ‘dirty tricks’ advanced by the president during his years in office. Particular attention is paid to the White House Transcripts, H. R. Haldeman’s diaries, and the deliberations of the Church and Pike Committees. It will show how the development of a ‘surveillance culture’ within the White House dominated the Nixon presidency, and how Americans were perturbed not so much by the downfall of another crooked politician, but because Watergate’s implications seemingly threatened their civil liberties.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to reimagine Watergate not as a singular transgression of the Nixon White House, but as an event emblematic of a long and pervasive trend in American Cold War politics. Further still, I wish to redefine the Watergate era in terms that place it in

a context prior to Watergate, and the subsequent committees that followed. This means that COINTELPRO and the FBI's anti-subversive counterintelligence operations – formerly discussed only in historiography pertaining to the Civil Rights, Black Power and New Left movements – will be placed in this Watergate era. I do so not in an attempt to invalidate the work of these scholars, but instead to offer another perspective that highlights the incriminating influences these programs had on not just the Nixon White House, but on US culture more generally.

It is clear to me that scholars understand that the 1970s – particularly its early years – existed in an atmosphere of palpable alarm. Yet we are yet to see a study examine this atmosphere in depth. While my own work only goes so far in correcting this gap in seventies literature, I believe that its contributions will go some way in addressing this historiographical imbalance. Furthermore, in consideration of the fact that Watergate and wiretaps are once again hitting the headlines in the form of Donald Trump's baseless claim that he himself was tapped in the 2016 presidential election, I hope that this study conveys the genuine concerns raised in response to actual surveillance practices, along with the history of American Civil Liberties Unions, in a climate that threatens to once again curtail freedoms of expression and privacy. If anything, however, Trump's commitment to Watergate exemplifies the event's cultural salience. Perhaps we can hope that it will spur scholars to reflect upon the period once more.

Chapter One

Surveillance in Practice: The FBI, COINTELPRO, and the Origins of Seventies Paranoia

Since its founding in 1908, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has utilised surveillance as a key pillar of its law-enforcement techniques. Under the guidance of director J. Edgar Hoover, these surveillance practices were predominantly employed against known ‘subversives’ to undermine, discredit and, most damaging of all, to induce a state of ‘paranoia among those targeted.’⁵ Not only was psychological manipulation a key goal of these counterintelligence operations (or COINTELPROs), when directed against The Black Panther Party and other leftist groups, Bureau agents actively strived for lethal results. This strategy, maintained through a network of informants, agent-provocateurs, and special surveillance groups, operated off the books and without government oversight. The Bureau violated Supreme Court rulings, congressional legislation, and went to great lengths to keep their ‘counter-subversive activities secret from Congress, the Department of Justice, and others outside of the FBI’.⁶ Indeed, these acts – perpetrated in the sixties and exposed in the following decade – precipitated and actively formed a zeitgeist riddled with anxiety that pervaded the United States throughout the seventies. Hooverian surveillance, in all its abject cruelty, typified and foreshadowed the period’s prevailing themes, an element of this study that contravenes Watergate’s status as an isolated event and instead redefines it as the tip of a long and pervasive American affair with electronic observation.

This was an affair that started, or at least flourished, during the beginning of J. Edgar Hoover’s directorship of the Bureau. Illegally, Hoover’s G-Men took part in an ever escalating war of surveillance, utilising wiretaps to disrupt not just organised crime and the ostensible radicals of the progressive era, but also in part to assist the Roosevelt administration during the Isolationist-

⁵ Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret Wars against The Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002), p. 39.

⁶ Kristen Hoerl and Eren Ortiz, ‘Organizational Secrecy and the FBI’s COINTELPRO-Black Nationalist Hate Groups Program, 1967-1971’, *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2015), p. 594.

Interventionist debate that precluded the United States' entry into the Second World War.⁷

Unbeknownst to Americans across the country, the executive was actively using Hoover's men to outmanoeuvre political opponents, a flagrant violation of the Bureau's founding purpose. Because they acted with an air of anonymity and, most importantly, popularity, the FBI was for the vast majority of Americans viewed with an air of nobility. A reality reflected in the media's glowing coverage of the organisation.⁸

Hoover himself was adept at manipulating the narrative surrounding the Bureau during this period, laying the foundations for later campaigns against the New Left and civil rights organisations, assured of their success thanks to the strength of the FBI's intelligence apparatus (predominantly supported by electronic and traditional surveillance networks), as well as the cooperation of key figures in the press and media. Indeed, these formative years established a precedent that the FBI would follow, sometimes fatally, into the sixties, seventies and beyond. Anxieties pertaining to the organisation's use of surveillance, however, took an age to crystallise. The 'persistent fiction' of the Bureau – one that cast it as an exemplar of honesty and crime-fighting prowess – remained until the turn of the seventies.⁹

Though there have been some rigorous studies analysing the FBI and its surveillance programs (Namely Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall's *Agents of Repression*, Kenneth O'Reilly's *Racial Matters* and most recently Seth Rosenfeld's *Subversives*), almost all have examined the topic exclusively within the context of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. On the surface, at least, there is nothing inherently problematic with this approach; COINTELPRO operated on a fundamentally racist, anti-liberation agenda, and the Bureau focussed the majority of its surveillance efforts against leading figures in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. However, the consequences of the Bureau's surveillance practices very much extended beyond these activist

⁷ Douglas M. Charles, 'Informing FDR: FBI Political Surveillance and the Isolationist-Interventionist Foreign Policy Debate, 1939-1945', *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2000), p. 211.

⁸ Seth Rosenfeld, *Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals, and Reagan's Rise to Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), p. 22.

⁹ Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, p. 1.

circles. Indeed, the FBI's actions penetrated the broader zeitgeist and instead precipitated broader themes of American decline that would characterise the United States through to the beginning of the 1980s. Thus, it is vital that we examine the theme of surveillance within this wider lens; as a practice that, to a degree, engendered a collective paranoia in the American conscious, and one that ingrained the seventies as a decade synonymous with decline and tumult in most, if not all, scholarly reflections of the period.

What makes the seventies so unique in respect to surveillance is that these practices were first widely covered in the press and depicted in fiction at the start of the decade. Prior to 1970, critical discussions of covert intelligence-gathering techniques were confined largely to the counterculture press and, more obviously, the activist groups who fell victim to it. Over the course of the preceding decade, the FBI was said to have conducted over 2,370 counterintelligence operations, maintained via a network of bugs, wiretaps, and, in urban spaces, some 3,000 'ghetto' informants.¹⁰ Despite the pervasive nature of the Bureau's surveillance, anxieties regarding the practice failed to solidify in the sixties on a large scale; 'the scope and underlying purposes' of the FBI's practices were, however, fully exposed in 1971.¹¹ Indeed, the uncovering of the Bureau's surveillance operations by the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI during that year stirred a previously passive press to react, and with it, Hollywood too. The manifestation of the seventies' nascent paranoia occurred during this year, three years before Richard Nixon resigned as president and a further four before the 'Year of Intelligence' that seemingly defined the Watergate era. Surveillance, as I will argue, is central to this narrative.

For the most part, the 1960s saw FBI surveillance practices at their most fierce, with J. Edgar Hoover's men operating without oversight and, to an unnerving degree, bending the press to their own whim. Indeed, this aspect of the FBI's war on radical behaviour is of particular salience, as it

¹⁰ William Kunstler in Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, p. 38; Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), pp. 269 & 341.

¹¹ Athan G. Theoharris, 'The FBI and the Politics of Surveillance, 1908-1985', *Criminal Justice Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1990), p. 229.

managed to affect the national conversation in regards to the Bureau's practices, thereby enabling Hoover and his allies to avoid scrutiny in the most damaging of all public arenas. In one instance, Bureau agent G. C. Moore prepared a full news report to be issued to a 'cooperative news media source' to deflect criticism against state police from 'Negro leaders' for discriminating against black organisations, while totally ignoring the activities of far-right militia.¹² Here, the document intended for dissemination to sympathetic contacts was a complete script, detailing police arrests of the far-right 'Minutemen' organisation in October 1969. Of course, the bulk of the FBI's most aggressive counterintelligence operations were not conducted against far-right ideologues, but this tactic of deflection was incredibly effective nonetheless, and was indeed central to the relative success of the FBI's counter-subversive operations during this period. In manipulating the press to emulate the Bureau's narrative, a policy of containment was thus developed, whereby information discussing supposed instances of 'personal immorality' became a valuable weapon in eroding influences Hoover deemed to be subversive in nature.¹³

One such contact that cooperated with the Bureau on these matters was Army Archerd, a popular Hollywood gossip columnist and TV personality who worked with *Variety* throughout his long career. According to Churchill and Vander Wall, FBI agent Richard Wallace Held worked closely with Archerd to disseminate false information that would ultimately damage the Bureau's enemies. Jane Fonda, for instance, was explicitly targeted by the Bureau in 1970 for her support of the Black Panther Party, with Held having explicitly stated in a COINTELPRO document that measures be taken to cause the actor considerable 'embarrassment', and more generally, to erode her relationship with the American public.¹⁴ Fonda's case was by no means an isolated incident, and indeed, her treatment from the Bureau extended beyond wider campaigns to influence public opinion. Hollywood alumni were regularly monitored by Bureau agents, and it is by no means inconceivable

¹² *FBI COINTELPRO surveillance with files for December 1969-February 1970*, (Washington D.C: Freedom of Information Act Reading Room, J. Edgar Hoover Building, Federal Bureau of Investigation), pp. 17-20.

¹³ Theoharris, 'The FBI and the Politics of Surveillance', p. 226.

¹⁴ Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The Cointelpro Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Domestic Dissent* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), pp. 212-214.

that intelligence gathered from surveillance was used to Hoover's advantage. In this case, we can observe that the press was essential in aiding and abetting not only the Bureau's wider COINTELPRO strategy, but also in the delay of the Watergate milieu itself. When taken together with later, more fatal instances of FBI counterintelligence ops however, the relationship between the press and the Bureau bluntly illustrates the scale of surveillance practices at the dawn of the decade.

Indeed, those in the press that were not actively in the employ of the Bureau remained passive, or even unassumingly adopted the narrative the FBI preferred in relation to matters of political radicalism. *The New York Times*, for example, reflected upon their own apathy towards the issue of surveillance in a 1976 column penned by Anne Britton. There, she notes how the *Times* effectively dismissed her husband who, having been an FBI agent at the time, called for the paper to investigate the Bureau following a brief editorial assessing the agency's surveillance practices in 1962.¹⁵ Indeed, the *Times'* ambivalence towards the topic of FBI surveillance was anything but atypical of the sixties press, meaning that Bureau manipulation was, at that moment, totally inconceivable to the vast majority of Americans.

If mainstream America failed to alert to the prospect of an unrestrained Bureau, then countercultural spaces and Civil Liberties Unions certainly did not. The New York Civil Liberties Union in particular made frequent court appeals in matters involving surveillance, and *Ramparts* magazine consistently and unflinchingly reported on Hoover's surveillance tactics and their effects, though in a manner that, perhaps surprisingly, underestimated rather than over exaggerated their full potential.¹⁶ One such article, written from the perspective of former FBI 'burglar, wiretapper, bugger and spy' William Weyland Turner in 1966, provides invaluable insight into the development of a surveillance culture within the Bureau. 'The course in surreptitious entry had been part of a concentrated three-week course in the theory and practice of wiretapping and 'bugging'

¹⁵ Anne Britton, *New York Times*, 25 May 1976, p. 34.

¹⁶ New York Civil Liberties Union, 'Court Orders New Rochelle Police To Stop Surveillance Practices', *Civil Liberties in New York*, Vol. 19, No. 5 (1971), p. 6.

euphemistically referred to as Sound School', Turner noted of his induction.¹⁷ 'Idle chatter, teen-age talk, or intimacies between husbands and wives or lovers', were all observed during his ten year affair with the agency, but – most importantly of all – his reflections emphasised the violence that became synonymous with Bureau surveillance as Hoover ratcheted up his anti-subversive campaign.¹⁸ Wiretaps became known as 'Suicide Taps', in a grim foreshadowing of the fate that would befall actress Jean Seberg in 1979, a death that scholars and contemporary commentators – like BBC journalist Alistair Cooke – have charged the FBI with having directly caused through a COINTEL-style campaign.¹⁹ Turner's account of his years spent at the Bureau also alludes to themes that would eventually crystallise in the Watergate era, namely the resurgence of an investigative press willing to expose governmental wrong-doing, and the potential for surveillance to invoke a sense of dread – or in this case anxiety – on a collective level.²⁰ Ultimately, Turner's expose of Bureau malpractice foreshadowed surveillance's would-be role in morphing U.S. culture, and proves to be an invaluable document in discerning the origins of the themes that would typify the nation in the following decade.

Of course, the themes that I am referring to owe themselves to a great many contributing factors (several of which have been discussed by scholars of the 1970s), but the general sense of anxiety that permeated throughout the United States during the Nixon Presidency owes itself primarily to the tactics developed by the Bureau during the anti-subversive campaigns of the 1950s and '60s. These campaigns, conducted without restraint and with a multifaceted intelligence apparatus to boot – spearheaded by a network of informants and electronic surveillance equipment – constructed a distorted vision of law and order that, in turn, dominated the American political

¹⁷ William Weyland Turner, 'I was a burglar, wiretapper, bugger and spy for the F.B.I', *Ramparts*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (1966), p. 51.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54; David J. Garrow, 'FBI Political Harassment and FBI Historiography: Analyzing Informants and Measuring the Effects', *The Public Historian*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1988) p. 6; O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, p. 330; Alistair Cooke, 'Jean Seberg and the FBI', *Letter from America*, BBC, September 1979, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/GBh7Jq7F8xd8InJyH5k2hw/jean-seberg-and-the-fbi-21-september-1979> [accessed 22/01/17].

²⁰ Turner, 'I was a burglar, wiretapper, bugger and spy for the F.B.I', pp. 54-55.

landscape for decades to come. Indeed, Hoover's role in the formation of a distinctly unique – sometimes paranoid – seventies milieu, should not be underestimated. COINTELPRO, it would appear, exemplifies the Watergate era as much as Watergate did itself, and while most of Hoover's surveillance programs did take place in the 1960s, they continued into the following decade. More important, however, is that these practices were exposed in the seventies, a process that ensured the Nixon presidency would be synonymous with a tonally dystopic vision of the United States. Furthermore, legislation designed to reign in the Bureau's powers did little to alleviate fears surrounding their authority, nor did the numerous committees that spawned in the wake of Watergate and the aftermath of the COINTELPRO scandal. Indeed, there was a prevailing sense of anti-climax following these rulings, and, as Athan Theoharris has noted, subsequent court rulings in 1979 and 1982 enabled the Bureau to effectively maintain their legislative impunity whilst continuing COINTEL-esque operations.²¹

Scholars have long surmised that the legacies of Hoover's surveillance operations were far reaching, but not to the extent that they were active in precipitating the tone of what we would consider the Watergate era. Thematic comparisons have, although sparingly, been raised in discussions relating to COINTELPRO and the wider Watergate period, but historians like Churchill and Vander Wall have often stopped short of implicating surveillance in the formation of the wider and generally more potent unease that gripped the United States during the Nixon presidency.²² Likewise, scholars of the Nixon administration have often been reluctant to illustrate the influence Hoover and his G Men had on the 37th president's decision making processes, and, by extension, the wider zeitgeist as a whole.²³ Be that as it may, the cultural salience of the Nixon presidency is indelibly unique, with images of a paranoid and ultimately corrupt president dominating reflections of the

²¹ Athan G. Theoharris, 'FBI Surveillance: Past and Present', *Cornell Law Review*, Vol. 69, No. 883 (1983-84), pp. 888-893.

²² Ward and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, p. 12.

²³ Beverly Gage, 'Deep Throat, Watergate, and the Bureaucratic Politics of the FBI', *The Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2012), p. 158.

period.²⁴ Indeed, though we may associate the early seventies' anxious sensibilities with Tricky Dick and, in particular, the films that bore its imprint, it was surveillance more generally that bound these cultural products together. As an influence, COINTELPRO has been massively understated in historical accounts of the period.

Even then, COINTELPRO was but one of the many covert snooping programs initiated by American intelligence agencies during this period. Project MINARET tapped thousands of known individuals and MHCHAOS – the CIA's domestic intelligence program – also illegally monitored hundreds of US citizens in an attempt to curtail ostensibly 'subversive' organisations. Most of these programs were not, however, exposed until 1975 – four years on from the FBI's Pennsylvania office break-in – in a so-called 'Year of Intelligence', spearheaded by *New York Times* reporter Seymour Hersh. It placed surveillance right at the forefront of the national conversation, with Philip Agee – a former CIA agent turned political exile – did his best to assist. His 1975 book, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, even had surveillance on its cover, with Agee electing to use the image of the typewriter that his former employers bugged to convey the ease with which the Agency could place surveillance on a given target.²⁵

Along with Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, Hersh and Agee did much to popularise narratives surrounding surveillance and government abuse that had found a home in the New Left publications of the late 1960s. Together, with a pop culture barrage of films that centred around conspiracy, surveillance, and paranoia, the exposition of these surveillance practices gave way to genuine fears surrounding their misuse, and in turn, imprinted a definitive vision of the decade that imagined the United States as a country rife with internal suspicion, fear, and corruption.

²⁴ David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow: A History of an Image* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), pp. xv-xviii.

²⁵ Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* (Norfolk: Penguin Books Limited, 1975).

Chapter Two

‘As American as Apple Pie’: How Surveillance Pervaded American Popular Culture during the Seventies

As a decade, the seventies have long been revered for their artistic legacy. A tumultuous and discontented zeitgeist birthed a discography as diverse and irreverent as it was political and subversive. Film, too, bore a heavy imprint of the era, crystallising a ‘central theme of paranoia’ synonymous with the decade through political conspiracy thrillers and, as Stephen Paul Miller has suggested, through varying cinematographic techniques, designed to allude to the very concept of surveillance itself.²⁶ Indeed, as *The Parallax View* (1974) – the second in Alan J. Pakula’s veritable ‘paranoid trilogy’ – then suggested, conspiracy, anxiety and distrust were ‘as American as apple pie.’²⁷ The seventies, seemingly, had made it so.

Thus, this chapter will examine the extent to which themes of surveillance, paranoia, and decline – themes we have already established to be synonymous with the decade – truly permeated seventies popular culture. Indeed, the social insularity of the period engendered cinema with a bleak, utterly unnerving tone – one that resonated with Americans in a manner that came to heavily influence modern perceptions of the period. Seventies cinema, it seems, is inseparable from themes of corruption, distrust, and personal paranoia – themes that precipitated the post-Watergate milieu and crystallised in the waning years of the preceding decade.

This legacy, brought to ahead by the critical and commercial reverence of films like *Klute* (1971), *The Conversation* (1974) and *All the President’s Men* (1976), typified the ‘Me Decade’ with an

²⁶ Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); p. 55. Stephen Paul Miller, *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 71.

²⁷ See appendix, item 2.

alarmist tone that smashed the illusion of privacy altogether.²⁸ The American nation, as it was then perceived, was no longer the target of Hollywood's traditional fictitious villains, nor were foreign agents the sole occupiers of antagonistic roles. Instead, unassuming nobodies became the victim, and the villain, often, resided within the United States' most established institutions. The malice in America, these films implied, was not an external projection: it was cultivated by the highest echelons of power; by big business, by the FBI and CIA and, in a way that transcended political partisanship, the presidency itself.

In that sense, the films of the period certainly typify the seventies zeitgeist. They offered constructs inalienable to the period and their historical uniqueness is vindicated by the reality that films of their type have since never been released as deliberately or indeed as frequently as they were during the Watergate era. Of course, the seventies themselves do not possess an intrinsic association with the suspense genre. They did, however, preside over its evolution from an analogue of Cold War paranoia to an overt examination of anxiety in a decade synonymous with American decline. *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), for instance, alluded towards traditional foreign threats perpetrated by the USSR and other communist governments.²⁹ Surveillance, too, was once the tool of the Hollywood hero, employed by Cary Grant in *Rear Window* (1954) to expose the identity of an urban killer, and by James Bond in *Goldfinger* (1964) to track the whereabouts of an enigmatic terrorist currently in the process of robbing Fort Knox.³⁰

In the seventies, however, technology became the weapon of corporate America and, more specifically, of corrupt law enforcement and crooked politicians.³¹ In the case of both *Klute* and *The Conversation*, surveillance was depicted as a powerful weapon designed to illuminate rather than obfuscate, but both depict a brazen synonymy between the intelligence gathering technique and moral corruption. Often, the distinction between hero and villain is intrinsically tied to the way in

²⁸ Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the rise of the Populist Right* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2011), p. x.

²⁹ John Frankenheimer (Dir.), *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962).

³⁰ Alfred Hitchcock (Dir.), *Rear Window* (1954); Guy Hamilton (Dir.), *Goldfinger* (1964).

³¹ Miller, *The Seventies Now*, p. 80.

which they utilise technology, and the villains, fitting the theme of the decade, were anything but radical or subversive; they were rich, shadowy, powerful establishment figures, sometimes completely absent from the camera itself. It is this opaqueness that typifies the atmosphere of the era, as cinema offered a muddled delineation between hero and villain in a decade marked by ambiguity, uncertainty, and contention.³²

Though other filmmakers would contribute to the genre with a plethora of iconic and skilled productions, Alan J. Pakula almost certainly defined it. Starting with *Klute* and ending with *All the President's Men*, Pakula fashioned a trilogy united by themes of surveillance, conspiracy, and paranoia and instilled a legacy of the seventies that has come to define the decade as much as it has the director himself. Richard Bergen referred to the late filmmaker as being in 'Control of the Paranoia', the implication being that Pakula had a talent for fashioning irrationality into a tangible fear.³³ Indeed, Pakula's films made a habit of channelling his audience's most primal, irrational fears, but in the context of the seventies zeitgeist they seemed – on a certain level at least – real, an element elevated by the nascent anxieties that occupied America's post-sixties milieu. Confronting this irrationality exposed how the abnormal and the once unthinkable had become sinister regularities in the American experience, perpetuated by shadowy conspiracies and exposed by the era's nascent heroes: investigative journalists.

Unlike many of the other films that went on to become emblematic of the genre, *Klute* was released three years prior to the Watergate scandal. As a result, the film almost thematically pre-empted the events of the break-in of the Democratic National Committee. Its main antagonist, Peter Cable (Charles Cioffi), is a wealthy businessman with an obsession of recording his meetings with sex workers. One tape, featuring the murder of one of Bree's (Jane Fonda) friends, is repeated sporadically throughout the film. Moreover, John Klute himself (Donald Sutherland), employs a wiretap to listen in on her conversations. The delineation between friend and foe is only made clear

³² Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2002), p. 47.

³³ Richard Bergen, 'Obituary: Alan J. Pakula: In Control of the Paranoia', *The Guardian*, 21 November 1998.

when Klute surrenders the recordings he has made of Bree's conversations to her.³⁴ In this instance, surveillance is utilised to not only invoke a sense of dread and a loss of privacy, but also to draw a stark distinction between good and evil.³⁵

This loss of privacy is the most resonant of all of Klute's many thematic elements, indebted to American politics' newfound purpose to 'protect and nourish privatism.'³⁶ This need to exercise control finds personification in Bree, who nourishes her living space as a place of privacy, despite the presence of an ominous-looking skylight overhead; a set feature that intimates bluntly the fragility of her own security and, by extension, the closeness of the threat posed by her stalker. In this sense, the film's setting, located in an apartment along a bustling New York neighbourhood, is deliberate. Bree's apartment epitomises the vulnerability of the American home to traditional and electronic forms of surveillance, succumbing to bugging and stalking as the residence fails to provide sanctuary away from Cable's advances. A self-styled *Apartment Plot*, the film reiterates 'the porousness and transparency' of the urban living space as a means of conveying the pervasive nature of the decade's burgeoning anxiety – an atmosphere that, in no small part, Pakula imposes on his audience by placing them in the role of the complicit observer.³⁷ As a precursor to the Watergate era, *Klute* exemplifies how pervasive fears surrounding surveillance were at the dawn of the decade, its primary motif a testament to the concept that 'middle America' – the viewer, specifically – was vulnerable to abuse of power. It mattered not whether you were politically active, insignificant or otherwise, the crux of the film dictated a subliminal kind of 'deliberate visual claustrophobia' – the psychological consequences of surveillance were laid bare for all to see.³⁸

The film hyperbolised palpable tensions surrounding surveillance by lifting actual surveillance techniques, both physical and otherwise, and directing them towards the stereotypical

³⁴ Jared Brown, *Alan J. Pakula: His Life & His Films* (United States: Back Stage Books, 2005), p. 104.

³⁵ Alan J. Pakula (Dir.), *Klute* (1971).

³⁶ Schulman, *The Seventies*, p. xvi.

³⁷ Pamela Robertson Wojick, *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945-1975* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 173-174.

³⁸ David Thomson in Sharon Waxman, 'Film Director Dies in Freak Accident; Alan Pakula Helmed 'President's Men'', *The Washington Post*, 20 November 1998.

image of Nixon's 'Silent Majority'. Klute and Bree are not conservative by any means, but both characters are inherently apolitical, save for the latter's sole photograph of John F. Kennedy resting by her bedside. They are not marching in the streets demanding an end to the war in Vietnam, nor are they advocating armed resistance to discriminatory patterns of law enforcement. They do, however, fall victim to a malicious interpretation of Nixon's intelligence apparatus – one comprised of 'informers, undercover agents [and] wire-taps' – contravening the narrative that if you simply minded your own business, the government would leave you be.³⁹ Indeed, the underground press latched onto the film for precisely this reason, hailing it for its ability to 'frame and support social observation' within the confines of a psychological thriller.⁴⁰ The claustrophobia Pakula imbued his films with encapsulated the antipathy of many Americans towards what they saw as the creeping normalisation of surveillance. One student, in an interview with *Ramparts* discussing the impact of surveillance on the classroom, attested to this claustrophobia: "it's like being in jail for six hours a day".⁴¹ It was a theme the genre would return to years later in films like *The Pelican Brief* (1993), also directed by Pakula, and *Enemy of the State* (1998), though not nearly in the same ferocity or frequency as it did in the seventies.⁴²

If *Klute* was the fictional microcosm of seventies paranoia, then *The Parallax View* was its thematic prequel, building upon events that precipitated the Watergate milieu and re-examining them in a seventies context. Released during Seymour Hersh's 'year of intelligence', Pakula's next film tapped into American anxieties surrounding assassination following the deaths of JFK, Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr.⁴³ Though its depiction of surveillance was certainly less overt than that of *Klute's*, Jared Brown has posited that *Parallax* 'captured a sense of vague doubt' regarding the United States that had seemingly crystallised following the tumult of 1968.⁴⁴ The film

³⁹ James M. Noughton, 'U.S. to Tighten Surveillance of Radicals', *New York Times*, 12 April 1970, p. 1.

⁴⁰ John Mahoney, see appendix, item 8.

⁴¹ Buddy Nevins, 'Hard Times: Classroom Surveillance by Kodak', *Ramparts*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1972).

⁴² Alan J. Pakula (Dir.), *The Pelican Brief* (1993); Tony Scott (Dir.), *Enemy of the State* (1998).

⁴³ Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Alan J. Pakula*, p. 125.

exemplifies the conspiracy genre, but approaches it with the very opaqueness and insecurity synonymous with the era; traditional cinematic notions of heroism and patriotism are flipped on their head with an oblique, almost surreal quality, and the film's protagonist, Joe Frady (Warren Beatty), does not save the day. Instead, he is framed for the assassination of a political figure, and dies trying to escape, typifying the growing sense of 'declining heroism' that would dominate two of Francis Ford Coppola's films later that same year, namely *The Godfather Part II* (1974) and, in a scathing critique of electronic surveillance, *The Conversation*.⁴⁵

The Parallax View is certainly the most unique of Pakula's trilogy. It draws close association between surveillance and violence, but, like in *Klute*, makes a point of displaying that privacy is immaterial where surveillance is concerned. The Parallax Corporation – a private entity concerned solely with assassinating political figures upon the request of big business – is depicted with an air of omniscience, remaining one step ahead of everyone in the film up until the credits roll; they systematically eliminate targets using surveillance to frame their deaths as accidents (Lee Carter, Frady's former partner living with depression, is seemingly murdered by Parallax via a drug overdose, and another witness to the film's opening assassination dies off-camera to a heart attack induced by a parallax agent), as well as monitor unstable loners to use as 'patsies' to deflect suspicion.⁴⁶

Surveillance techniques are not explicitly depicted onscreen in this instance, but Parallax's campaign of harassment and violence bears the echo of the FBI's COINTELPRO operation all too deliberately. The scene in which Frady's former partner appeals for his help is, at first, framed as a moment of complete panic, and the revelation of her death scenes later leaves the audience to draw their own conclusions of whether she was murdered by Parallax or, perhaps more realistically, that she take her own life. In either case, Carter's paranoid behaviour is onset by the machinations of the Parallax Corporation, and her death – self-inflicted or otherwise – is clearly of their design.

Considering there is evidence to suggest that the FBI's attempts to destabilise leftist groups 'reached

⁴⁵ W. Russel Gray, 'Tuning into The Conversation: Twenty-five Years Later', *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1999), p.123.

⁴⁶ Alan J. Pakula (Dir.), *The Parallax View* (1974).

the level of attempted murder' – and indeed did cause fatalities – *Parallax's* schemes are not all that outlandish.⁴⁷

The film plays out like a nightmarish distortion of the Hollywood action genre as a means of conveying that something clearly was not right; Pakula himself even remarked that *Parallax* 'attempts to view America as it is seen through a distorting glass which may point out more intensely certain realities'. These 'realities' are certainly not difficult to discern, since it was clear that *Parallax* intimated that corruption in the American political and legal system was pervasive. Its most intense moments, however, come in the film's famous – though equally disturbing – montage.

The montage, a test designed by Parallax to identify unstable loners, is played to the tune of Michael Small's anthem-like score and, over the course of five minutes, constructs an image of Americana that associates the system with violence and neglect. The intention was, according to Pakula, to illustrate that 'you can be destroyed by society.'⁴⁸ Richard Nixon himself even features in the montage's most visceral moments, representing disillusionment with country in a manner that would appeal to the type of character Parallax are looking to employ. As a symbol of dishonesty and corruption, Nixon personified the ostensibly nascent anxiety that permeated seventies popular culture. Using his image, *The Parallax View* conjures an America submerged in a quagmire of discontent, mirroring Nixon's own covert subversion of the liberal consensus that contributed towards a growing sense of an unseen threat hanging over the nation.⁴⁹

This unseen threat crystallised in 1973 with the exposure of the Watergate break-in. Two journalists, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, broke the story for *The Washington Post*, and Pakula, unsurprisingly, had a large interest in it. According to Robert Redford (who portrayed Woodward onscreen), Pakula's vision for the cinematic adaptation of the two journalists' story 'helped define a

⁴⁷ Noam Chomsky, 'Comment: Watergate and Other Crimes', *Ramparts*, Vol. 12, No. 11 (1974), p. 34.

⁴⁸ Alan J. Pakula in Brown, *His Life & His Films*, p. 132.

⁴⁹ Schulman, *The Seventies*, p. 43.

generation's understanding of the press, politics and power.'⁵⁰ Undoubtedly so, I would argue, but *All the President's Men* goes much further than merely offering definition of the varying power structures of the Nixon government. Indeed, Watergate seemingly vindicated Pakula's past productions in the sense that it typified in the extreme themes central to the director's works. Nixon had, in short, conjured an image of America depicted in both *Klute* and *Parallax – All The President's Men* only reiterated the director's previous works.

At its core, *All the President's Men* is more than a simple silver screen account of 'the most devastating detective story of this century' – it defined the Watergate milieu and set a precedent for Nixon's pop-cultural legacy for years to come.⁵¹ The most obvious distinction between it and Pakula's previous two productions is that the film's ending had already (effectively) been spoiled in 1974. Nixon had resigned and received a pardon two years earlier, and the full extent to which the executive was involved in the break-in and eventual cover-up had emerged in the public sphere for some time. Despite this, the film still imparts the same sense of dread and paranoia that both *Klute* and *The Parallax View* managed to in years prior. Mark Feeney and David Frick deem this to be the film's crowning success, as William Goldman's script intentionally represented the Nixon administration implicitly almost entirely off-camera.⁵² This, they say, imbues the film with a 'vague spookiness', a key reason why the story remains a cinematic exemplar in the conspiracy genre.⁵³

This sense of an obfuscated threat – one that was palpable yet covert – penetrated the zeitgeist. And whereas Pakula preferred to impart a sense of an indistinct threat on his audience, Coppola made sure they were aware of the danger. Indeed, both *The Godfather Part II* and *The Conversation* have been referenced as milestones in the Watergate genre, but it is the latter that

⁵⁰ Robert Redford, 'Alan J. Pakula: Seeking Truth on the Big Screen', *Newsweek*, 30 November 1998.

⁵¹ See appendix, item 10.

⁵² David Frick, *Reinventing Richard Nixon: A Cultural History of an American Obsession* (Kansas: Kansas University Press, 2008), p. 142.

⁵³ Mark Feeney, *Nixon at the Movies: A Book about Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 261.

offers the most acute reflection of the period and its relevance to surveillance practices.⁵⁴ The film, starring Gene Hackman as Harry Caul, an emotionally withdrawn freelance surveillance expert, centres around his recording of a couple having a conversation in a bustling lunchtime park space. At first, the conversation appears relatively harmless – another job for Caul to carry out before he can return to the sterile sanctuary of his apartment – but, as more is transcribed, he uncovers a life-threatening conspiracy. The couple’s life, ostensibly, and his life, are in danger.

The genius of *The Conversation* is that it lives and breathes the techno-dystopia of its subject matter. As one contemporary critic noted, ‘the entire film seems like closed-circuit television.’⁵⁵ Coppola’s piece embodies actual surveillance practices from the ground up, typifying techniques pioneered Bureau agents during the COINTELPRO years, and by various law enforcement agencies up and down the country. Like *Klute*, it repositions these practices and directs them towards white, middle class Americans to grant the impression that surveillance transcended the ‘seeming fringes on the right and the left.’⁵⁶ Even Coppola’s own anxieties surrounding surveillance manifested in *The Conversation* through the character of Caul, who, resolute that his recordings do no harm, maintains a moral apathy towards his profession throughout, despite having caused an indirect loss of life through his wiretaps in the past.

The idea of technology possessing no inherent malice is intrinsic to *The Conversation’s* criticism of modern surveillance; to Coppola, the intelligence apparatus became a weapon ‘in a war against privacy.’⁵⁷ Indeed, the director’s apparent disdain for the employ of technology speaks loudly to the legacy of the seventies as a decade, as well as the stark delineation between it and the sixties. In that decade, technology was largely seen as a force for good, including, on the fringes of representation, surveillance. It was the age of the space race, of James Bond, of technological advancement and, more generally, a growing sense of prosperity. The seventies, instead, heralded a

⁵⁴ Francis Ford Coppola (Dir.), *The Godfather Part II* (1974); Francis Ford Coppola (Dir.), *The Conversation* (1974).

⁵⁵ Lawrence Shaffer, ‘The Conversation by Francis Ford Coppola’, *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1974), p. 59.

⁵⁶ Miller, *The Seventies Now*, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Russel Gray, ‘Tuning into The Conversation’, p. 126.

synonymy between technology and moral decline, encapsulated in *The Conversation* by Harry Caul's 'cold professionalism,' and in the covert malpractice of the Nixon administration itself.⁵⁸ Surveillance, abject in nature both onscreen and off, exemplified this decline.

Coppola and Pakula's films had an immense impact, to say the least – an impact that Sandbrook argues made 'the small-print revelations of the newspapers seem terrifyingly real.'⁵⁹ The charged and often paranoid atmospheres that the pair managed to create in their films are, in many ways, representative of the Watergate milieu. Despite an audience being situated safe at a movie theatre or even their own home, the obscure danger that these films implied felt tangible. Certainly, if surveillance and paranoia were the themes that bound these creative projects together – and in turn engendered a paranoid atmosphere on an audience – then Richard Nixon was the real-life figure that did so as well. His presence in these films may not be explicit, but, almost subliminally, the president maintained an onscreen influence throughout his years in office.⁶⁰ Rarely was he the hero.

Nixon offered personification to the Watergate Era as the ultimate figure of authority, corruption and – to some – even evil in the country. Apart from the Nixon-like antagonists of *Kluge* and *The Conversation*, his presence also manifested on the small-screen, most famously in Dan Aykroyd's portrayal on *Saturday Night Live*. One sketch in particular, according to David Frick, left behind a punch line that seemingly implied that 'Nixon's evil transcended even supernatural remedies'.⁶¹ The president's tyrannical depictions in pop culture were not in dispute in this case, but it is important to remember that Nixon – and, by extension, Watergate – were not the sole champions of the anxious zeitgeist. While film can prove valuable in assessing the cultural legacies of surveillance, Watergate, and even in discerning the atmosphere in which they were created, the president's pervasive appearances across pop culture alludes to the more problematic aspects of

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 127.

⁵⁹ Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell*, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁰ David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York: W. W. Noughton & Company, 2003), p. 87.

⁶¹ Frick, *Reinventing Richard Nixon*, p. 143.

Watergate's scholarly discourse. Film may have had a tendency to focus – perhaps unwittingly – on Nixon, but it is important that we understand the president's conduct as an exemplification of trends that seventies fiction already lived and breathed.

Chapter Three

The COINTEL Presidency: Richard Nixon's Enemies List, The White House Tapes and the Watergate Affair

In a conversation seemingly typical of the Nixon administration, the then president, speaking with White House aides H. R. Haldeman and John W. Dean, remarked that 'everybody bugs everybody else. You know that'.⁶² These words were uttered just as the Watergate scandal was coming into full effect; those found burglarising the DNC headquarters had just been indicted, and the press – led by *Washington Post* journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein – were leading the charge in implicating Nixon in the burglary and the subsequent cover-up that followed. Far from just being the biggest political scandal of the 21st century, Watergate defined reflections of the 1970s for an entire generation. There is much, however, to be said of the scandal that extends beyond the DNC break-in. Indeed, the above conversation is more than just a simple nod from Nixon towards surveillance practices – when taken together with his actions as president, it alludes to a deeper, more underlying fascination within the Nixon administration regarding surveillance as a whole.

In the tapes submitted to the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives, surveillance is mentioned by Nixon and his staff on numerous occasions, and Watergate, despite often being framed by scholars as an isolated event that held strong implications for the United States' most prestigious office, in many ways epitomises the themes I have addressed in previous chapters. In these tapes, we can see not only the nascent paranoia of the decade – personified in full by Nixon himself – but also a clear and significant captivation with surreptitious entry, wiretaps and bugs within the White House. In short, Watergate was not so much the catalyst for the decade's paranoid tendencies, but instead its definitive event, emblematic of trends that have eluded historians but, ironically, not Nixon himself. Indeed, beneath Nixon's somewhat facile attempts to

⁶² Richard M. Nixon supposedly quoting 1964 GOP presidential candidate Barry Goldwater in Gerald Gold (ed.), *The White House Transcripts: The full text of the Recorded Presidential Conversations Submitted by Richard Nixon to the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives* (London: Macmillan London Limited, 1974), p. 59.

extricate himself from Watergate lies a somewhat inconvenient truth for those that frame his presidency as an aberration of American politics: that he was not the first – nor the last – to bug an opponent. Even Frank Church, Nixon surmised, understood that.⁶³

My intention here is not to absolve Nixon of any wrongdoing, nor is it an attempt to lessen Watergate's historic significance in morphing both the presidency and US culture during the 1970s. I do, however, wish to convey that the actions of the Nixon presidency were by no means an atypical feature of American politics prior to the 1968 election. Perhaps more importantly, I intend to argue that Watergate, while indeed a defining moment for the executive, resonated with the American public not because it tarnished the presidency, but because it held uncomfortable implications for the civil liberties of all Americans. Watergate's importance in stoking anxiety, in this regard, is unquestionable. Its anomalous reputation, however, is, though recent historiography has made attempts to address its ostensibly unique status.

Indeed, it is imperative that we understand the Nixon presidency as a product of, rather than the creator of, a surveillance culture – a culture that developed in the Cold War milieu and manifested most potently in J. Edgar Hoover's Federal Bureau of Investigation. Tellingly enough, the actions of Hoover's Bureau in the 1960s and '70s are not dissimilar from that of Nixon's during his six years in office. Both the Huston Plan and the White House 'Plumbers' advanced tactics born from the COINTEL-mould, a key reminder of the indelible impact Hoover's Bureau made on the Oval Office. Yet scholars are hesitant to implicate Hoover in the events that led to Watergate, save for Beverly Gage, who frames the scandal as an institutional conflict between the Bureau and Nixon, casting Hoover as an unlikely defender of civil liberties and the president as a successor doomed to repeat the mistakes made by the FBI during the COINTELPRO years.⁶⁴ Despite Gage's recent scholarly contribution to the study of Watergate, historiography has largely failed to adequately assess the

⁶³ Richard M. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Touchstone, 1990), p. 475.

⁶⁴ Beverly Gage, 'Deep Throat, Watergate, and the Bureaucratic Politics of the FBI', *Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2012), p. 168.

links between COINTELPRO and the Nixon administration's actions in the run up to the 1972 presidential election – an imbalance that this chapter will hope to address.

Central to Watergate's narrative is Nixon's relationship with Hoover. The pair, on the surface at least, appeared to be kindred spirits. Certainly, the frequent phone calls and meetings shared by the Director and the president would indicate that they were allies, and regarded each other as such without question.⁶⁵ It is ironic to note however that Hoover – once the champion of surveillance practices – remained oblivious to Nixon taping their telephone calls. A lesser form of surveillance perhaps, but still, Nixon's compulsion to record his staff (the majority of whom who, like Hoover, did not know they were being monitored), does more than illustrate a presidential reverence for the historical record. If that were the case, then Nixon would have almost certainly abandoned his scheming to assure a positive legacy of his presidency. At the very least, it does, however, illustrate that a degree of arrogance – or indeed, 'organizational secrecy' – pervaded the Nixon White House. Nixon, Haldeman and Dean recorded their most incriminating conversations because they held a genuine belief that they would not get caught. It was this very same mantra that saw the FBI conduct their most destructive counterintelligence operations, only in Nixon's case, the only redactions to speak of are eighteen-and-a-half minutes of missing tape.⁶⁶

The comparisons between Nixon's actions and COINTELPRO go beyond organisational systems, however. Indeed, Senator Sam J. Erwin's closing remarks to the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities implicated Nixon and his aides in a direct campaign of harassment, surveillance and media manipulation, of which Patrick Gray's FBI was complicit in facilitating.⁶⁷ 'Movie stars, newspaper columnists, television newsmen' were all selected as targets for surveillance and harassment in Nixon's infamous 'Enemies List', continuing a trend initiated by

⁶⁵ Richard Nixon and J. Edgar Hoover, *Conversation 003-145* (1971), <http://nixontapeaudio.org/jeh/003-145.mp3> [accessed 21/03/17].

⁶⁶ Kristen Hoerl and Eren Ortiz, 'Organizational Secrecy and the FBI's COINTELPRO-Black Nationalist Hate Groups Program, 1967-1971', *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2015), p. 594.

⁶⁷ Sam J. Ervin in Robert Griffith and Paula Baker (eds.), 'Senator Sam J. Ervin on Watergate, 1974', *Major Problems in American History since 1945: Second Edition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), pp. 421-425.

Hoover.⁶⁸ Systematically, Nixon's team orchestrated a plan to – in a less than eloquent way – ‘use the available federal machinery to screw [their] political enemies’.⁶⁹ This involved placing wiretaps and bugs – even threatening physical force – on those who had somehow provoked the wrath of the White House (including Nixon's own brother, Donald), as well as using the IRS to audit targets on a regular basis.⁷⁰ Apart from illustrating that anyone – be they significant or otherwise – had the potential to be targeted by a malicious system in the hands of an increasingly paranoid and erratic executive, the measures taken by Nixon to ‘get back’ at his enemies also shows the extent to which COINTEL-style tactics pervaded the Watergate milieu. The Nixon presidency was, in many ways, totally enthralled by surveillance; COINTEL-style tactics intimidated as such.

H. R. Haldeman also claimed that Nixon, although an astute political operator, was totally fascinated with surreptitious entry and counterintelligence programs: ‘When Hoover started talking about planting bugs in the new Soviet Embassy, Nixon moved right to the edge of his chair. He wanted to know all about it; he wanted to do whatever he could because that was exciting.’⁷¹ Certainly, Haldeman's account would appear to confirm what the White House Tapes and, perhaps unintentionally, Nixon's own memoirs have long suggested: that Nixon found Spy Games immensely entertaining. After losing the 1960 presidential election to John F. Kennedy, Nixon continued to request intelligence briefings from the CIA, and, by his own admission, felt disturbed when his requests were rejected.⁷² Later, in a conversation with Hoover, he requested almost immediately that the FBI ‘go in’ and target the New York chapter of The Black Panther Party with ‘surveillance, electronic and everything’.⁷³ When Nixon and Haldeman were at Camp David, they even entertained

⁶⁸ Stanley I. Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. 104.

⁶⁹ John W. Dean III in Griffith and Baker (eds.), ‘White House Counsel John W. Dean III Presents the “Enemies List,” 1971, *Major Problems in American History since 1945*, p. 418.

⁷⁰ Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, pp. 104-107; Vamik D. Volkan, Norman Itzkowitz and Andrew W. Dod, *Richard Nixon: A Psychobiography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 133.

⁷¹ H. R. Haldeman with Joseph DiMona, *The Ends of Power* (New York: Times Books, 1978), in Volkan, Itzkowitz and Dod, *Richard Nixon*, p. 136.

⁷² Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 280.

⁷³ Richard M. Nixon and J. Edgar Hoover, *Conversation 003-169b* (1971) <http://nixontapeaudio.org/jeh/003-169b.mp3> [accessed: 22/03/2017].

the idea that the Army Signal Corps had been monitoring their phone calls, and Haldeman noted in his diaries how Nixon seemed to be ‘fascinated’ by Hoover.⁷⁴ Not only does this point towards a presidency enthralled by surveillance practices, it illustrates that Hoover himself left an indelible mark at the highest level of US politics. Placed in this context, Watergate appears not as an isolated infraction in US political history, but instead as a consequence of a trend first set in the McCarthyist milieu, one which escalated greatly in the anti-subversive battles of the 1960s and found a definitive conclusion in Nixon’s resignation.

There are countless instances in both the tapes submitted to the Judiciary of the House of Representatives and Haldeman’s diaries where COINTEL-style tactics rear their ugly head. By his own admission, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger confided in Haldeman that the tapping of his staff ‘disturbed him’, and Hale Boggs – the one time ferocious critic of J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI – was targeted explicitly for his condemnation of the Bureau’s ‘secret police tactics’.⁷⁵ Hoover – during a period in which Bureau/White House relations deteriorated – also claimed that he had been doing ‘some wiretapping and other high-level surveillance... at the direct order of the P’.⁷⁶ Nixon denied having made that particular request, but his desire to harass and monitor his opponents was clear to all, especially by the autumn of 1972. ‘We have not used the power in this first four years as you know’, Nixon remarked; ‘We have never used it. We have not used the Bureau and we have not used the Justice Department but things are going to change now.’⁷⁷ Indeed, it would not be disingenuous to conclude that the president felt as though the ‘dirty tricks’ of the day were the norm. Tellingly however, Nixon understood that there was a precedent. He was by no means a trend-setter.

By far the most incriminating link between COINTELPRO and the Watergate affair was, however, the creation of the ‘Plumbers’ – a unit drafted by the Nixon White House to contain leaks

⁷⁴ H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: Berkley Books, 1994), pp.104-5, 230.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 198; pp. 323-4; Noam Chomsky ‘Comment: Watergate and Other Crimes’, *Ramparts*, Vol. 12, No. 11 (1974), p. 33.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

⁷⁷ Nixon in Gerald Gold (ed.), *The White House Transcripts*, p. 63.

to the press. They were, according to Gage, set up as a direct response to the burgeoning rift between Nixon and the Bureau.⁷⁸ Consequently, the 'Plumbers' – including E. Howard Hunt, Charles Colson and G. Gordon Liddy – embarked on numerous 'Black Bag' jobs in the mould of the FBI's infamous counterintelligence operations. This, of course, famously involved the failed attempt to burglarise and bug the DNC headquarters at the Watergate hotel, but it has also become clearer in recent years that Hunt's group attempted to blackmail or discredit some of Nixon's political opponents, including Ted Kennedy, whose Chappaquiddick car crash was investigated by the unit in an attempt to bring the senator into disrepute among American Catholics.⁷⁹ Defamation and disruption – two integral elements of the FBI's counterintelligence programs – were their primary objectives.

These influences have, for the most part, been ignored by scholars of the Watergate period. Fred Emery refers to the DNC break-in as 'the tip of an iceberg of lawless abuses of office on which the Nixon presidency was to founder', yet limits his study of the event solely to the actions of the Nixon administration.⁸⁰ The 'trend' in this instance is confined completely to the figure of Nixon, a frequent cliché of Watergate scholarship that frames the scandal as an aberrant –albeit influential – event of the 1970s. Kutler, much like Emery, refers to the event as 'the last act in a decade-long political melodrama that haunted the American stage', yet, apart from fleeting allusions to burgeoning political movements that alerted to the threats that Watergate implied (in this case, the right to privacy), his analysis again perpetuates the notion that Nixon's abuses disturbed the public mainly because they brought the presidency into disrepute. The 'cherry tree myth', according to Kutler, was something Nixon simply did not get.⁸¹ Maybe so, but I very much doubt that Americans

⁷⁸ Gage, 'Deep Throat, Watergate, and the Bureaucratic Politics of the FBI', p. 161.

⁷⁹ Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate*, pp. 103-4.

⁸⁰ Fred Emery, *Watergate: The Corruption of American Politics and the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), p. x.

⁸¹ Stanley I. Kutler in Griffith and Baker (eds.), 'The Inescapability of Watergate', *Major Problems in American History since 1945*, p. 447.

were disquieted *en masse* because of one failed presidency, or worse still, that Nixon was the first politician to do so.

The most problematic aspects of Watergate scholarship are, however, exemplified in full by James A. Nuechterlein's essay, 'Escaping Watergate: A Revisionist View of the Nixon Presidency'. In it, Nuechterlein does well to identify that Nixon's acts were emblematic of past presidencies (most notably Lyndon Johnson's), but he does so only in an attempt to invalidate genuine concerns regarding the president's conduct, of which he claims leaves 'little in the way of... enduring implications.'⁸² Implicating Watergate in a trend or emphasising its historic importance are not mutually exclusive concepts, yet scholarship seems to indicate – incorrectly – that this is indeed the case. It is possible to say that Nixon's conduct, while indeed significant and influential, was emblematic of themes established long before his ascension to the Oval Office. Saying so does not remove the president's agency – it merely emphasises trends worthy of the historical record.

When Nixon dwelled upon the deliberations of the Church Committee in his memoirs, he implicated – perhaps unwittingly – his abuses in office underneath its remit. Watergate, of course, does not merely denote the event that toppled the Nixon administration – it has developed into an umbrella term of sorts, one that encompasses the multiple transgressions of the Nixon presidency. The Huston Plan, the intelligence proposal advanced by White House aide Tom Huston and Nixon himself, has also fallen underneath this umbrella, and by using Frank Church's remarks as a defence of the proposal, Nixon offered a tacit reminder that Watergate cannot be understood in a context separate to that of the other intelligence abuses of the 1960s and '70s. An explicit reference to COINTELPRO confirms this position as such.⁸³

Most important of all, however, is the fact that Watergate vindicated the palpable unease of the long 1970s. When Mark Felt, formerly Woodward and Bernstein's anonymous 'Deep Throat'

⁸² James A. Nuechterlein in Griffith and Baker (eds.), 'Escaping Watergate: A Revisionist View of the Nixon Presidency', *Major Problems in American History since 1945*, p. 429.

⁸³ Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, p. 475.

during the Watergate affair, reigned in Bureau surveillance under Hoover's direction, Gage argues he did so in acknowledgement of 'the present atmosphere' in 'congressional and public alarm in opposition to any activity which could in any way be termed an invasion of privacy'.⁸⁴ Later, 'he ordered FBI agents to scale back dramatically on wiretaps, mail covers, "black-bag" jobs... and other traditional... covert techniques.'⁸⁵ Watergate was not so much the catalyst for this action, but rather the straw that broke the camel's back; by the Church Committee's own admission, it owed its existence to the 'continuing public concern about these matters', of which Watergate seemed to typify in the extreme.⁸⁶

The growing 'concern' that Church and his colleagues identified was apparent long before Watergate was exposed in the public arena, but these anxieties did not manifest into tangible opposition until Watergate, and even then, it was clear that the anxious atmosphere was yet to subside. The New York Civil Liberties Union, in its 1973 annual report, likened Nixon's conduct during Watergate to the conduct of 'the British King' during the War of Independence, but drew particular worry from the president's 'power to wiretap people who are not criminals'.⁸⁷ Ira Glasser's closing remarks in the report convey the severity of these concerns quite bluntly: 'for if the president's power was not limited, what would stop him from entering our homes, invading our privacy, punishing us for our beliefs and spying on our activities?'⁸⁸ Indeed, it was a question that many Americans would be asking at the turn of 1974, only the answers provided did little to alleviate their fears.

Prior to this occasion, there was a clear awareness in the White House that the public, although by no means fatigued by the successive leaks implicating the US government in numerous

⁸⁴ Gage, 'Deep Throat', p. 166; Gage's quotes are taken from the 'Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, vol. 2' (Washington, D.C.: 1976), p. 109.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 166.

⁸⁶ 'Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate: together with additional, supplemental and separate views' (Washington, D.C.: 1976), p. 607.

⁸⁷ Ira Glasser, 'NYCLU Annual Report 1973', *Civil Liberties in New York*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1974), p. 1.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

intelligence abuses, were growing restless. In 1971, Nixon authorised Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird to close down the Pentagon's 'domestic intelligence division', at which point it had gathered 'files on more than 100,000 people.'⁸⁹ Two years later, in a conversation with the president discussing potentially leaking a story to the press regarding the Johnson Administration's spying on Goldwater, John Dean acknowledged the state of public feeling regarding surveillance: 'It is what the public already believes', Dean said; 'I think the people would react (expletive deleted), more of that stuff! They are all bad down there! Because it is a one way street now.'⁹⁰ There was indeed a tangible frustration directed towards Washington, but COINTELPRO and Watergate conjured an altogether different kind of backlash than the usual animosity directed towards the nation's capital. These were genuine fears and concerns, and although the various senate and congressional committees made attempts to address these anxieties head on, their findings often only exacerbated the paranoid milieu.

In the closing moments of Alan J. Pakula's *The Parallax View*, an ominous, almost supernatural senate committee delivers their conclusion regarding the assassination of a senator and the fate of the film's crusading journalist, Joe Frady.⁹¹ The scene conveys a symbol of authority that is equal parts corrupt and terrifying, an effect that, in some ways, provides our most definitive image of Watergate's aftermath. It is not Richard Nixon with his arms hoisted high, displaying the 'v for victory' sign. Neither is it Gerald Ford being sworn into office to the general apathy of the American public. In reality, the defining image is of these committees, delivering conclusions convincing enough to stoke anxiety, yet from a position that implied corruption and abuse.⁹² Watergate, emblematic of subject matter broached by several committees prior to its conclusion, provided the perfect suffix to denote the myriad of scandals and abuses that rocked America's long

⁸⁹ Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, pp. 472-3.

⁹⁰ John W. Dean in Gold (ed.), *The White House Transcripts*, p. 101.

⁹¹ Alan J. Pakula (Dir.), *The Parallax View* (1974).

⁹² Mary McGrory, 'CIA coming back into its own', *Boston Globe*, 4 October 1975, p. 8.

1970s. The Watergate era – a term so often floated by scholars in their discussions of the Nixon presidency – infers so much more than the DNC break-in. It is vital that we understand it as such.

Conclusion

The Legacies of the Paranoid Decade

In *Nixon Reconsidered*, Joan Hoff concludes her study with a chapter titled 'Nixon is more than Watergate'.⁹³ Echoing her sentiments, I would argue that Watergate is more than Watergate. Certainly, the era from which the event derives encompasses a great many abuses of power not all that dissimilar from Nixon's own – it just so happens that his office elevated Watergate's significance greatly, to the point that these *Anxious Years* are commonly perceived to have birthed from Nixon and Nixon alone.⁹⁴ Of course, we know this not to be the case, and that Watergate – significant though it may be – rested upon a peak of other scandals that engendered the anxiety (or paranoia) with which we commonly associate the early seventies.

The surreptitious campaigns of surveillance that took place during the 1960s and '70s gave us the seventies we know today, and indeed, provide an invaluable tool in periodising a 'long' 1970s. From 1966 – where concerns regarding the FBI's escalating war against student and civilian radicals began to ferment – through to 1981 – where President Ronald Reagan reinstated the CIA's powers to analyse private communications – a clear and present concern regarding surveillance, the erosion of privacy, and governmental mistrust pervaded the United States. It grew steadily from the New Left press and found an audience in millions of *Washington Post* and *New York Times* readers, an audience that saw their anxieties vindicated on the big-screen, in the films of Alan J. Pakula and Francis Ford Coppola. Indeed, if the political consequences of the Watergate era are considered insignificant and anticlimactic to some, then its cultural legacy surely cannot be in dispute. The dark vestiges of the decade are chronicled extensively on 35mm, and indeed, most films of the era denote the pervasive nature of the anxious zeitgeist – an 'appropriate portrayal' of which there is no

⁹³ Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p. 329.

⁹⁴ Kim McQuaid, *The Anxious Years: America in the Vietnam-Watergate Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

doubt.⁹⁵ But these tensions did more than simply crystallise in pop culture – they ingrained a general malaise and distrust that gave way to anti-establishment sentiment, and indeed, initiated the definitive narrative of American decline that was embellished by the anti-climaxes offered by the Church and Pike Committees.

There is more to Watergate than the break-in, the resignation, and the pardon. And there is even more to it than the Year of Intelligence and the ostensible legislative checks placed on the FBI, CIA and NSA in the years that followed. Indeed, our understanding of the Watergate era can only benefit from a concerted effort to consider its cultural implications. Its indelible mark on America's long 1970s alone is a testament to its influence, but in discerning the origins of the decade's nascent paranoia lies an even more important legacy: a resolute commitment from a coalition of journalists, activists and private citizens to defend civil liberties from those that would seek to erode them.

⁹⁵ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush V. Gore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 13-15.

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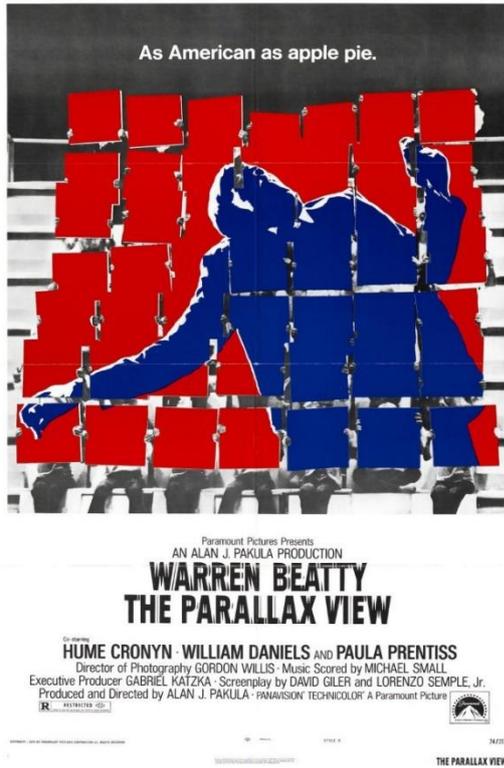
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