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IMAGINATIONS
REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE ▪ JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES

THE MISE-EN-SCÈNE OF A DECADE:
VISUALIZING THE 70S

ISSUE 9-1, 2018

The Mise-en-scène of a Decade: Visualizing the 70s

October 29, 2018

DEEP BACKGROUNDS: LANDSCAPES OF LABOR IN ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

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Abstract | *Although commonly understood as journalistic thriller tied to the historical realities of the Watergate investigation, Alan J. Pakula's All the President's Men is deeply imbricated in contemporaneous ideas about office design and white collar labor. Drawing on the film's production history, as well as discourses around knowledge work, office furnishings, and the changing role of paper in office work, this essay places All the President's Men along a different historical trajectory, one in which Hollywood cinema elaborates, expressively re-stages, and fantasizes the white-collar workspace.*

Résumé | *Bien que communément interprété comme un polar basé sur les réalités historiques de l'enquête du Watergate, All the President's Men (Les Hommes du président) d'Alan Pakula est profondément imprégné des idées contemporaines sur l'organisation des bureaux et le travail des cols-blancs. S'inspirant de l'histoire de la production de ce film, ainsi que du discours sur le travail de connaissance, l'ameublement des bureaux et le changement dans le rôle du papier dans le bureau, cet essai replace All the President's Men dans une trajectoire historique, dans laquelle le cinéma hollywoodien développe, remet en scène et rêve le lieu de travail des cols-blancs.*

One saw them run around, shout at one another, and typewrite side by side in tremendous, noisy rooms where no one could possibly be concentrated; yet despite this chaos the newspaper never failed to appear and to prosper. The breathless confusion of the editor's offices seemed to mirror that of American business life in general.

–Siegfried Kracauer, "Why France Liked Our Films" (37)

For film audiences of the mid-1970s, the immediate force of *All the President's Men* (1976) was its naturalistic exposition of the investigative work that led to the congressional investigation of the Nixon administration. The proximity of the film's release to the events depicted ensured topicality but also presented the problem of, as director Alan J. Pakula put it, "drums rolling in the background" (774). As Pakula understood, histrionic monumentality threatened a sober recounting of the facts: "I was very concerned that the actors might hear a symphonic orchestra playing John Phillip Sousa every time they walked on set thinking: 'Here is our great contribution to American history!'"

(774) To dampen this patriotic aura, Pakula and producer Robert Redford developed the film according to a documentary aesthetic (Redford even wanted to film in black-and-white *verité* style). Together with cinematographer Gordon Willis and set designer George Jenkins, Pakula created settings that would underscore the banality of journalistic labour. Iconic D.C. locations were mixed with a preponderance of architectural sites at once modern and mundane: the back entrance of the Watergate Hotel, a concrete parking garage, the condos and suburban homes of CREEP collaborators and witnesses, a McDonald's, and, most prominently, the open-plan newsroom floor of the *Washington Post*.

All the President's Men's nose-to-the-ground procedural detail is widely appreciated, but with increasing historical distance it is the film's illumination of the everyday workplaces of journalism as much as the political moment it chronicles that shifts into the foreground. The milieu from which Woodward and Bernstein stalk the White House, dense with paper and paperwork, hums with pre-digital, eve-of-computing contemporaneity. In shying away from a history with a capital-H aesthetic, the film pulls closer to the everyday life of the newsroom, tracking away from conventional icons of American power and downward toward a microscopic view of the quotidian materials, interior surfaces, and social rhythms of a modern office. As Siegfried Kracauer observed, Hollywood used journalism as an allegorical frame to explore the more generalized space of business life. In *All the President's Men*, this allegorical frame is sustained and filtered through New Hollywood cinematography and production design in order to manifest the most up-to-date contours of office life.

The deeply encoded, office work-related appeals of *All the President's Men* become clearer when the film's setting and staging is examined in relation to the constellation of discourses, designs, and spatio-temporal experiences that gathered around contemporary forms of white-collar labour between the 1950s and 1980s. Produced during an era when the configurations of this work were being rethought by designers, management theorists, and information society thinkers in order to center "knowledge workers" within information-dense spaces, the film welds a realist adherence to the material atmosphere of office life with the fantasy of journalism as an exemplary form of white-collar labour. Through the aim of accurately depicting the contemporary workspaces of *The Washington Post* by meticulously reproducing its furnishings and layouts, the production of the film also embedded, both incidentally and unconsciously, the physical discourses and choreographies of the modern office, which it vivified through a narrative of investigative journalism. The result is the dramatic staging of a workplace characterized by flattened hierarchies, knowledge-based and purpose-driven professionalism, free communication, and an unencumbered latitude of bodily movement. While these same attributes will eventually coalesce around the rhetoric of the neoliberal workplace, in this iteration they combine to generate a sense of the way non-alienated labour might look and feel. Looking closely at the coordination of production design, cinematography, and staging in *All the President's Men* reveals a popular work that strives not just to be a realist document of journalistic procedure—a filmed report on reportage—nor simply a reflection of the shifting surfaces of business life, but an expressive elaboration of the utopian promise of the American workplace.

At stake in analyzing this staging is an understanding of how American cinema's civic engagements—its topical liberal projects, from Pakula to Spielberg—rest on attunements to the generic spatio-temporal experience and physical supports that characterize a shared world; in this case, the shared world of office life. This physical imbrication challenges the conception of white-collar labor, emergent in discourses of knowledge work, as primarily abstract, mental, or immaterial. It also broaches the problem confronted by Kracauer in his early study of white-collar workers in Germany, *Die Angestellten* (*The Salaried* Masses, 1930): the manner in which the commonplace nature of white-collar work "protects it from discovery." "[J]ust like the 'Letter to Her Majesty' in Edgar Allan Poe's tale," Kracauer writes, "nobody notices the letter because it is out on display" (29). This invisibly present existence meant that an image of class identity for the white-collar worker was impeded. Neither proletarian nor bourgeois, the emergent class of office worker lacked the cohesion that cultural imagery might provide. Yet, writing later in "Why France Loved Our Films" [1942], Kracauer found that the American journalism film helped provide a glimpse of this imagery, offering dense visual constructions of an office life-world that had been so elusive in the Weimar era. *All the President's Men* sustains this tendency, drawing on the topical urgency of a historical journalistic investigation to display white-collar labour, converting a space otherwise pervaded by the static triviality of corporate culture into an expressive landscape of action.

Office Cinema & Paperwork

An ecosystem of white-collar locales—the office, the elevator, the lobby, the commuter train— has, however intermittently, been imaginatively developed across various cycles of American cinema. In pre-code films such as *Skyscraper Souls* (1932) and *Babyface* (1933), the office tower was the stage for dramas of gender politics, class mobility, and exploitation (Schleier 59-118). Later, in films such as *Desk Set* (1957) and *The Apartment* (1960), these same spaces become settings for romance and dark comedy.[1] Although the office has only occasionally figured as a centralizing narrative site during the Classical era writ large (exceptions, in addition to the above, include *Executive Suite* [1954], *Patterns* [1956], *The Best of Everything* [1959]), the open-plan offices glimpsed in *The Apartment*, *The Crowd* (1928), and the opening of Disney's Goofy short *Two Weeks Vacation* (1952), with their undifferentiated rectilinear rows of steel desks, became a recognizable shorthand for conveying middle-class alienation—a shorthand rising to delirious heights of distortion and surrealism in *The Trial* (1962), *1984* (1984), and *Brazil* (1985).

Following Kracauer's lead, we can map a more consistent cinematic genealogy of the types of office activity represented in *All the President's Men* not by way of office films but via the journalism film. From the Warner Bros. films of the 1930s and 1940s such as *Five Star Final* (1931) and *His Girl Friday* (1940, a remake of *The Front Page*), through to Henry Hathaway's *Call Northside 777* (1948), Joseph Losey's *The Lawless* (1950), Sydney Pollack's *Absence of Malice* (1982), Ron Howard's *The Paper* (1994), David Fincher's *Zodiac* (2007), Tom McCarthy's *Spotlight* (2015), and Steven Spielberg's *The Post* (2018), films based around the practices of reporting have been a reliable and enduring form in American cinema. Uniting narratives of investigation and procedure with themes of public good and the ethical boundaries between information and sensation, genres of reportage entertain under civic cover. Although the newsroom

resembles the generic open-plan office, the journalistic labour that is fictionalized into genre (oftentimes by screenwriters who began their careers as reporters, such as Ben Hecht, Samuel Fuller, and Richard Brooks) offers the possibility of plots more dynamic than the stories spun from white-collar routine. Segmented into various departments—the city desk, sports, the social column—the spatial organization of the newsroom becomes a microcosm of the city itself, from which it receives and translates various messages. Furthermore, just as the distribution and seriality of the news defines and shapes the rhythms of urban life, so too does the temporality of the newsroom alternate between periods of idle waiting and intense, deadline-focused activity.

In his brief history of the genre, journalism historian Thomas Zynda observes that whereas in the 1930s and 1940s, journalism films tended to focus on editors and journalists as individual figures—for example, as crusading investigators in Losey's *The Lawless* or sensationalist opportunists in Wilder's *Ace in the Hole* (1951)—beginning in the 1950s films such as Richard Brooks' *Deadline U.S.A.* (1952), Fritz Lang's *While the City Sleeps* (1956), or Jack Webb's *-30-* (1959) shifted focus to news organizations themselves, giving greater prominence to the techniques, materials, and coordination of newspaper production (19). As newsroom films became more embedded in a single setting, they also began to invoke the spatio-temporal experience of generic office work phenomenologically in a more sustained way. As Kracauer intuits, journalists on film *were* office workers: they inhabited open-plan workplaces, answered to managers, rode elevators, made and consumed coffee, and, in the most literal sense, pushed paper.2

In the same way that the TV series "The Office" (2001-2003, remade 2005-2013) underlines the vacuity of office work by portraying the labour of a sales team that actually sells paper, the newsroom film magnifies the experience of the office by transmuting its material contents into an objective and often transcendent common cause. All of the different genres and formats of paper that comprise office life become a single entity and democratic instrument: *the paper*. While physically similar to the office film in many respects, the newsroom film plots the means of production itself, animating rather than deadening the physical plant of the office. Instead of the stock setting of middle-class anomie, the cinematic newsroom becomes a locale associated with professionalized problem-solving and goal-oriented action. Rather than the numbing abstractions of white-collar work, news production deals in concrete knowledge for the public good. As a cinematic chronotope (time-space), the newsroom presents a utopian version of office life, a place for paper to mean something.

Office Landscapes & Knowledge Workers

The kinetic nature of the newsroom in Hollywood cinema parallels transformations in conceptions of office work and design that were percolating in the 1960s and 1970s. Through the 1950s, offices were laid out in grid-like designs with identical desks facing forward, as in a school classroom. Around the mid-century, the German management group Quickborner advanced the idea of "*bürolandschaft*" or "office landscape," which introduced organic, non-orthogonal variation into office layouts (figure 1). Featuring a mixture of plants and desk groupings, this design favored non-linear pathways and multiple meeting sites to encourage employee interaction. In the 1960s, research and development carried out by Robert Probst for

the Michigan-based furniture manufacturer Herman Miller continued in the same vein, resulting in the production of a new office system named "Action Office." Like the concept of *bürlandoschaft*, the Action Office advanced ideals of an open-plan workplace that could organically facilitate informal communication, worker autonomy, and organizational flexibility through low-partitions, cellular groupings of desks, and modular parts that could be adapted to meet worker's needs. Probst's sequel to the Action Office, Action Office 2, refined his design concepts and was accompanied by a lavishly designed book, *The Office: A Facility Based on Change* (1968), that outlined the issues surrounding the modern workplace and the concepts behind the Action Office system.
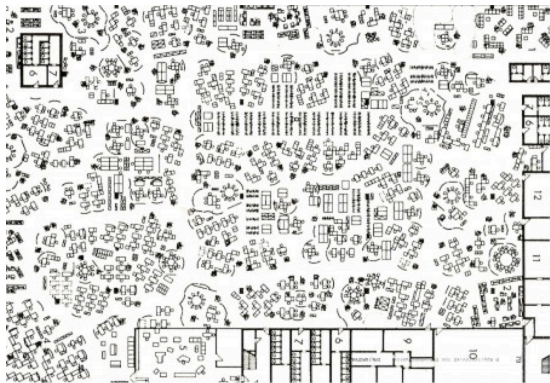

Figure 1

Probst's historical survey of office design and his diagnosis of its many problems is followed in the book by a series of often abstruse principles behind the user- (worker)-friendly design of the Action Office:

> [The Action Office 2] is an implementing tool-concept reconciling new software planning with the hardware of coordinated behavior. Its aim is to be responsive to the goals of the user. It aims at moderating the impact of diverse and competitive technology on the user. It provides a combination of discipline and permissiveness in appropriate measure. . .disciplined in that it limits and protects from chaotic, unregulated complexity. . .permissive in that it allows wide expression and re-expression for both the individual and the organization. (33)

As Probst suggests, a cardinal problem facing the modern workplace was an issue that would become more popularly known, following the publication of Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (1970), as "information overload." Probst's name for this phenomenon was "the big communication accident," and Action Office 2 addressed itself specifically to streamlining, bracketing, and diverting the multitudinous flows of information that modern workers were tasked to navigate (14).

Occupying these new workspaces was a new figure: the knowledge worker. Like the German salaried classes chronicled by Kracauer in the 1930s, postwar America saw the emergence of a new class of worker, one who likewise seemed caught between proletarian and bourgeois identity. One issue afflicting this new class had to do with the indeterminate nature of the skills that were required of them. Writing of the "computer programmers, accounts receivable flow analysts, the lower levels of control and stock processing in brokerage houses" that comprised the new work stratum within the white-collar sphere, Richard Sennett observed that they were "neither in control of the use of their own skills, nor performing tasks which are so routine anyone of the street could immediately do them, the members of this special category... have as yet not group identity, no class culture in which to picture themselves" (404). The invention of the

knowledge worker sought to resolve this quandary, if only on the level of self-image In his illuminating cultural history of the office, *Cubed: A Secret History of the Workplace* (2014), Nikil Saval chronicles how the management theories of Peter Drucker and Fritz Machlup constructed the knowledge worker as someone capable of applying specialized and cross-disciplinary knowledge to the complex problems of their field. The autonomy of knowledge work, they argued, had the power to flatten workplace hierarchies, shrinking the necessity for an overbearing managerial class. For his part, Probst seems to balance the tension between management and labour in his writings with a consistent appeal to both workers as self-determined individuals and the overarching necessity of discipline. As Saval points out, however, the foggy discourse of the knowledge worker that developed within management tracts was largely an anxious response to a historically overeducated and understimulated labour force. It was developed, in other words, not according to demand but supply: "The jobs had not gotten more complex," Saval points out, but "the individuals working in them had." Knowledge work "seemed to answer to a felt need, a spirit of anxiety in the workforce itself rather than a change in the kinds of work being done" (198).

The anticipatory descriptions of the knowledge worker were particularly apposite to the contours of the post-industrial information society outlined by Daniel Bell, Alan Touraine, and other social theorists in the 1970s. As post-industrial America pivoted from manufacturing towards goods and services, the knowledge worker would deal primarily in information, conducting mental rather than physical work in an economy that was now shifting toward the production of intangible or symbolic goods.

The abstraction and intellectuality imputed to knowledge work also combined with a rhetoric of dematerialization that began to occlude the physical experience of office life, particularly as networked desktop computers became the primary medium of information and calculation (a rhetoric sustained within the discourse of wireless and cloud computing). Just as the labour of knowledge work was now identified with disembodied mental operations, so too was data now invisibly flowing between the impenetrable array of beige and gray machines taking up significant office real estate.[3] Yet for all these popular forecasts, white-collar work remained tethered to generic open-plan interiors constituted by desks, typewriters, rolling chairs, water coolers, fluorescence, and an ever-diversifying multitude of paper products and technologies. The description of knowledge work by economist Fritz Machlup in fact alludes to the pervasive materiality of the office; he describes knowledge workers as "all the people whose work consists of conferring, negotiating, planning, directing, reading note-taking, writing, drawing, blue-printing, calculating, dictating, telephoning, card-punching, typing, multigraphing, recording, checking, and many others" (41). Like Probst, Machlup understood the obstinately physical universe of practices and materials that defined work within an office. The rise of computers notwithstanding, knowledge work, like the office work of most of the 20th century, still meant paper work, even if paper was now circulating and aggregating in new ways. Knowledge workers, just like all white-collar workers, existed within a contemporary object-world that was invisibly present. Lacking an image of themselves and their place in the world, the actuality of the knowledge worker, such as it was, faced a fate much like Poe's purloined letter, protected from discovery by mundaneness.

Wide-Screen Corporate Modernism

Through the 1970s, Alan Pakula's films exhibit a keen eye for the neglected recesses of the built environment. In an interview in *Film Comment* published shortly after the release of *All the President's Men*, Pakula declared that he "loved to use architecture to dramatize society" (qtd. in Thompson 16). This statement gains concreteness in the mise-en-scène of his "paranoia trilogy," which in addition to *All the President's Men* includes *Klute* (1971) and *The Parallax View* (1974) (Pakula's lesser-known financial thriller *Rollover* [1981] also fits stylistically and thematically with the series). Working with Gordon Willis on camera and George Jenkins as production designer on all three of these films, Pakula evinces a particular preoccupation with the landscapes of corporate modernism. In *Klute*, the villain (Charles Cioffi) is an executive of the blandly named Tole-American Corporation who resides in a panoptic Manhattan skyscraper suite providing eye-level views of the World Trade Center towers (still under construction at the time). Interiors and exteriors for these scenes were shot a few blocks from the WTC construction site at the black curtain-walled Marine Midland Building, a descendant of the Midtown vogue for Seagram-like skyscrapers and designed by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill. *The Parallax View* also centers on banal corporate evil, this time in the form of the Parallax Corporation, a shadowy organization that orchestrates political assassinations. Large-scale civic landmarks of the Pacific Northwest such as the Space Needle and the Gorge Dam are key settings in the film, and so too are the austere headquarters of the titular corporation, partially sited in the undulating concrete tile plaza of the Central Civil West Court House in Los Angeles. The downbeat ending for the film takes place in the cavernous, recently completed Los Angeles Convention Center, designed by West Coast modernist Charles Luckman.

In conjoining modern architectural space to an anxious vision of contemporary society, Pakula was upholding a tradition within American filmmaking that had been most heavily pronounced within film noir. As Edward Dimendberg and Vivian Sobchack have brilliantly shown, mid-century noir was a singular venue for the popular expression of spatial estrangement in American culture. Noir had only recently entered the American vernacular in the early 1970s, but Pakula was a devotee of 1940s thrillers, and his films with Willis as cinematographer (famously nicknamed the "Prince of Darkness" for his work on *The Godfather*) graft noir sensibility onto emergent New Hollywood aesthetics. The spaces Pakula created with Willis for *Klute* and *The Parallax View* are excessively deep, and the 2.35:1 Panavision frame allows a play with architectural volumes that frequently crowd and confine actors. These graphic structural elements are flat and opaque—geometrically blocking out both long shots and close-ups. Pakula and Willis's cinematographic aesthetic is expressive, but not expressionistic in the conventional sense. As Dana Polan has remarked, "[noir's] expressionism is most often not the triumph of a subjectivity in which environment somehow reflects back to a character his/her own internal nature but quite the contrary, an expressionism that demonstrates the radical externality and alterity of environment to personality" (qtd. in Sobchack 144). Willis's images ply similar territory, presenting a modernist landscape both familiar and claustrophobic.

The D.C. setting of *All the President's Men* allows Pakula to further develop the architectural vision established by *Klute* and *The Parallax View*.

Yet while the third film in the paranoia trilogy continues to amplify the anxious nature of corporate modernism, it also departs from a pervasive sense of noir-inflected doom. Instead, he builds a space that rewires figure-ground relationships of depth, scale, and movement along the lines of both the journalism genre and discourses of office work, emphasizing the possibility of individuals gaining footholds of agency within modernist environments.

Deep Spaces, Purloined Papers

Perhaps more than any journalism or office film that preceded it, *All the President's Men* committed itself to amplifying the materiality of contemporary office life. Six months before the actual Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein began to report on Watergate, the *Washington Post* had moved into a new, fully updated newsroom (Pakula 774). With its exposed ceilings, the older *Post* newsroom was darker than the updated space, which featured fluorescent lighting suspended within drop-ceilings. The new design offered not only a brighter space, but also a series of straight lines vanishing into the distance, creating the sense of a vast interior space—perspectival grids that resonated with the modernism that Pakula had explored in his previous films. Since Robert Redford, whose Wildwood Enterprises was producing the film, was keenly interested in an exacting documentary aesthetic, this updated space would of course need to be depicted as closely as possible in his film's version of the reporter's investigation.

Redford and Pakula had originally hoped to shoot interiors on location at the *Post*, but it soon became clear this would be impractical. Instead, it was decided that a replica of the newsroom would be constructed at the Burbank Studios of Warner Brothers. The reproduction of the *Post* offices was 32,000 square feet and necessitated removing a wall in the soundstage to gain extra space. The replica of the *Post's* lighting also necessarily became a practical lighting source for the set since the ceiling construction ruled out conventional overhead lights. Around 700 fluorescent lighting units were installed—although the ballasts that powered the lights had to be wired remotely to the tubes because of the hum they emitted (Willis 520). The finished construction was furnished with custom-made desks that reproduced the new color-coded desk groupings at the *Post*, outfitted with an array of operational teletype machines and telephones and, finally, dressed with a mammoth assortment of paper clutter.

Paper of all kinds fills every frame of *All the President's Men* that is set in the newsroom (figure 2), the result of extensive creative work with paper products and office furnishings by art director George Jenkins (who had also worked on *Klute* and *The Parallax View*) and set decorator George Gaines (jointly winning the Academy Award for Art Direction that year). Just as Pakula and the film's cast spent months in the newsroom observing the daily routines of the reporters, so too was Jenkins invited to see the actual newsroom he was tasked to recreate. Having researched and put together a set depicting the interior of a small-town newspaper for *The Parallax View*, Jenkins was somewhat familiar with this routine. However, when he finally got to see the newsroom of the *Post*, he recalled that his "heart sank": "I realized that it was virtually an impossible job," Jenkins stated, "It was so enormous—I saw a thousand details in just a glance" (qtd. in Corliss and Clarens 48). Unlike *The Parallax View*, for *All the President's Men* Jenkins and Gaines were responsible for an entire acre of set. Jenkins' desk plan for the *Post* set almost

identically matches the desk groupings of the actual 7th floor newsroom. Per the plan of the *Post* floor in Jenkins' file, the plan for the set features clusters of 2-6 desks 8 rows deep and 4 rows across (George Jenkins Papers, folder 37).[4] The position of Woodward and Bernstein's desks relative to each other in the film also corresponds to the actual position of the reporter's desks in the D.C. newsroom. While some of the desks and furnishings were reproductions built for the film, other furnishings (such as automated filing systems) and machines (such as teletypes) were acquired directly through office supply companies. Jenkins' files contain brochures for products offered by Herman Miller, Bell Telephone, and Simplex Time Recorder Co., some covered with notes on prices (indicating that implements were both reconstructed and purchased directly).

One of the most oft-repeated stories about the film's production is that Jenkins went so far as to request the contents of wastebaskets at *The Post* so that the wastebaskets on set could be filled with authentic garbage. Jenkins, however, tells a slightly different story:

> Now I want to set the record straight here: I did *not* bring any garbage or contents of scrap baskets from Washington to Hollywood. What I did was go to Howard Simons, *The Post*'s managing editor, and say: "I need stuff to put on the desks, and I don't want it to be old scripts topped off with a letter from somebody who's been working in Warner Brothers for the last twenty years. I want all the reporters to have material on their desks that they would normally have. We have three months before we shoot. If you'll allow me to put a cardboard box by every desk, then your reporters will put in the boxes the letters and magazines they'd

normally throw out." Three months later, we had seventy-five boxes of flat paper and books, etc. We then photographed the top of every desk as well as made a list of what was there. Then in Hollywood, when it came to dress the *Post* set, we were able to put this material on the appropriate desks. Howard Simon said to me, "George, you know that you're going to get terrible publicity on this. People are going to say you're bringing our trash to Hollywood. And I said, "I don't care." (qtd. in Corliss and Clarens 48, original emphasis)

That this apocryphal story has managed to stay in circulation for so long perhaps has to do with its binding of realist commitment and Hollywood extravagance to undercurrents of popular cynicism that regard American mass culture as detritus—the inescapable irony that garbage is in fact the primary export of both Washington and the American film industry. Jenkins' sense is much more pragmatic, and in its own way insightful. Garbage is a matter of placement: putting paper into a wastebasket is what reclassifies that which is useful into waste. Prior to that placement, such paper comprises the ambient décor of the *Post*'s work environment.

Indeed it is the material that Jenkins collected, combined with Pakula's penchant for deep space composition, that supports the highly resonant phenomenological experience of the newsroom on screen. Unlike *Klute* and *The Parallax View*, Pakula opted to shoot *All the President's Men* in the more condensed format of 1:85:1, a gesture toward the *verité* feel to which Redford aspired. The reduction in the breadth of the frame was compensated by the depth of the set. Long-shots of the newsroom floor are recurring images, with both the receding ceiling lights and cylindrical columns providing perspectival cues

Figure 2

drawing our gaze across a variegated landscape of desks overflowing with folders, binders, files, reference books, loose leaf sheets of various colors, and all the different apparatuses designed to hold and organize paper clutter. The space is further extended by evenly sharp, no-contrast fluorescent lighting. When Pakula visited the *Post* he became entranced by the "ruthless" lighting of the space, which he felt created a "world without shadows." The director has made his approach to light and dark clear in a number of interviews, commenting about the newsroom: "This room with its glaring light was the hub of the film and from there we could go out to the dark places with their dark secrets" (Pakula 775).

As Willis relates, the application of depth was what made the film both cinematographically difficult and interesting: "There were times when the backgrounds were just as important as the foregrounds. That is to say, the environment could not be lost behind the actors but had to be an integral part of the scene" (Willis 521). Long

shots repeatedly place Woodward and Bernstein at their desks so deep within the background that their presence is barely perceptible. This persistent motif is reflexively underscored late in the film in a scene where Ben Bradlee (Jason Robards) angrily calls the reporters into his office. A close-up of Bradlee shouting "Woodstein!" is followed by a reverse angle view of the newsroom floor. After a beat, Woodward and Bernstein become visible in the right corner of the frame moving toward the camera. The camera holds its position as the men make an anxious trek from background to foreground, re-emerging, as it were, into the story itself. In this scene and others, staging and set design threaten to subsume narrative, eclipsing narrative movement with the undifferentiated display of office activity.

In his comments on the visual style of the film, Pakula refers to this alternating current as "counterpoint." The effect is at its most visually emphatic in shots that exploit deep-set space through the use of split-field diopter lenses. Increasingly popular within New Hollywood filmmaking but now only rarely used, the diopter is a supplemental lens that is placed over a camera lens to create two separate focal planes, one near and one far away. The signature trace of the device within the image is a blurred line where the two focal planes meet, usually concealed by positioning the camera so that the distracting blur is hidden by the edges of an object or

a neutral color. As applied in *All the President's Men*, the diopter is primarily used to introduce two distinct visual fields within the newsroom, one focused on Woodward's desk-bound activity (the device is primarily associated with Woodward rather than Bernstein) and the other encompassing the indifferent bustle of the office. In his analysis of the diopter aesthetic in New Hollywood filmmaking, Paul Ramaeker remarks on the ironic effect produced by these divergent planes of action, noting that the facility with which the telltale trace of the diopter is obscured in the film makes it "easier to read these images as documentaristic depictions of the process of reporting, moments captured from the constant flux of the newsroom (which itself becomes a character)" (Ramaeker 188). For Ramaeker, the use of the diopter in *All the President's Men* is significant because it "goes well beyond the largely straightforward functionalism typically imputed to Hollywood narration, and stands as indexical of far reaching tendencies in 1970s American cinema, its ambitions to documentary realism, art film expressivity, and authorial commentary" (188).

Woodward and Bernstein's thoroughly embedded journalism, however, does have a thematic function that is narratively relevant. Like all detective stories, *All the President's Men* is about the storytelling process: the raw information thrown up by a crime scene is organized into a meaningful sequence that identifies, after the fact, a series of causes and effects and the agency behind them. For most of the film, Woodward and Bernstein struggle to understand the *syuzhet*—the frame that will organize the information they have gathered. As Woodward complains to Deep Throat (Hal Halbrook): "All that we've got are pieces, we can't seem to figure out what the puzzle is supposed to look like." Yet it is precisely because the 1976 audience knows

the finished puzzle so well that Pakula is able to dwell within the details—the story of the film is not Watergate itself, but rather how the story of Watergate came to be told. The overstuffed, engulfing space of the newsroom photographically literalizes the overwhelming *fabula* confronted by the reporters as they labour to acquire and identify the correct pieces to the puzzle in order to find the story. What Pakula calls the "needle in the haystack" theme is most often conveyed in terms of scale, with individual pieces of paper comprising the story's molecular level (821). Panoramic views of the office are matched by close-ups of the various notebooks, slips, and printouts through which Woodward and Bernstein construct their story, an oscillation that is mirrored in the dual-focal planes of the diopter. At a crucial moment when the story's veracity is questioned, Bradlee's decision to back Woodward and Bernstein rather than remove them from the story is conveyed in a note that he passes to the *Post* editors that reads: "We stand by our boys." The priority given to this written statement extra-diegetically underscores the broader logic of note-taking and documentation in the filmed newsroom—the only way to move a story about paper forward is more paper.

It should be apparent at this point that the media-historical dimensions of *All the President's Men* lie as much in the film's detailing of journalistic process as in its documentation of the zenith of paper's domination of the workplace. As much as we are watching a movie about journalism, we are also following the paper trail of American business life. Technologies of paper reproduction were also politically topical: just a few years earlier, the *New York Times* had published the classified documents that came to be known as the Pentagon Papers, which had been covertly Xeroxed by Daniel Ellsberg (also a victim of harassment by Nixon's plumbers).[5] Over

Figure 3

the course of the following decades the desktop computer and the ascendance of electronically transmitted information would gradually reduce the need for paper-based messaging and data storage, laying the basis for the vision, if not the actuality, of the paperless office. Around the time that *All the President's Men* was being made, in fact, the concept of an office without paper had its first stirrings. In 1975, George Pake, head of Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center, spoke to *Business Week* about the rise of the paperless office:

> Pake says that in 1995 his office will be completely different; there will be a TV-display terminal with a keyboard sitting on his desk. "I'll be able to call up documents from my files on the screen, or by pressing a button," he says. "I can get my mail or any messages. I don't know how much hard copy [printed paper] I'll want in this world." ("Office of the Future" 48)

However, this transition occurred in a much slower and more uneven fashion than Pake and others predicted; the entrance of computers did not immediately result in paper's downsizing (see Sellen and Harper). Fittingly, films of the 1980s, particularly those set within the burgeoning world of finance such as *Wall Street* (1987), *The Secret of My Success* (1987), *Working Girl* (1988), and *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990), would portray desktop computers as partners in open-plan clutter. I would argue, however, that what *All the President's Men* offers is less the before picture against which to contrast the paperless office of the future than a proleptic view of the hidden electronic conduits that would come to define office life. That is, what the film makes visible are not only the paper data that would become stored in computer memory, but also the communication flows between people now hidden in cables and wireless transmissions.

The depth of the film's office set not only engulfs its protagonists in visual detail, but also creates a stage for specularity and movement. In addition to its verisimilitude, the office set defines both visual and physical possibilities, as can be seen in what we might call Woodward and Bernstein's "meet cute." In a series of point-of-view shots, Woodward observes Bernstein nonchalantly absconding with his recently submitted paper drafts back to his own desk. Woodward must alternately lean forward and backward in his chair to see around the large column that stands between his desk and Bernstein's. Eventually, Woodward rises and walks over to confront him. After a testy exchange Woodward returns and drops further draft pages on Bernstein's desk—he agrees that Bernstein's revisions are an improvement but questions his tendency to "hype the facts." As Woodward returns to his desk once again, City Editor Harry Rosenfeld (Jack Warden) passes on a bisecting path between the reporters, barking without stopping "Woodward, Bernstein, you're both on the story,

now don't fuck it up." Enveloped within a visual and sonic landscape of telephones and typewriters, Woodward and Bernstein's short back-and-forth, up-and-down ambulation establishes the emergent relation between the two reporters, one that transitions from an adversarial shot-re-verse-shot into a two-shot framing (this framing to become sustained as the trademark image of the film).[6]

Indeed, the unfolding of the reporter's investigation is filmically conceived in terms of an increasing latitude of movement, with the sed-

become more urgent and extensive: "As they [Woodward and Bernstein] get more manic," Pakula recounted, "the camera gets more manic, so that near the end of the film there is a shot of Dustin when he thinks he's gotten confirmation of Haldeman being named as one of the heads of the secret fund. We started at one end of the newsroom and we flew (figure 3). One of the best Disneyland rides we've ever had was on that dolly" (Pakula 822). In this shot (figure 4), the speed of the dollying camera blurs the landscape of paper clutter, expressing the possibility of transcending the material weight of accumu-

Figure 4

entary labour of phone calls and typing in stationary shots giving way to a more and more exuberant mobile camera. As the scope of the story grows, so too do the reporter's movements

lated information and uniting the fantasy of the knowledge worker with the incipient dreams of digital transmission and data storage.

The multiple ways in which Woodward and Bernstein inhabit and physically negotiate the newsroom in order to build their investigation resonates with the aspirations of mid-century office design. The layouts of *bürolandschaft* and Robert Probst's Action Office system were devised to encourage informational exchange and collaboration. These flows, visualized in the conceptual drawings, were partially conceived anthropomorphically, in the pathways between desks and workstations. According to Probst, the problem with the modern workplace had to do with managing "the big communication accident", the symptoms of which included too much information, redundant information. out-of-date information. overspecialized information, and low-grade information (14). Paper was a significant part of this problem: "A hard look at communication patterns tells us that we need restraint, discipline and limitation in the rate in which we are 'papering' each other. We already have paper pyramiding at a crisis level in many organizations" (28). Probst declared that the office was "an essential part of a new élan required in information use" (16). One way of addressing this problem was through improvement to corridors of movement within the open plan. "Recognizing traffic action as a communication event gives the facility manager opportunities for planning its occurrence to achieve desired effects," Probst writes, "Since motion between areas provides a highly random but interactive communication circumstance, its design should be carefully worked out" (16). For Probst, as for Pakula, informational traffic is anthropomorphic and social.

All the President's Men's dramaturgy of bodies and paper illuminates not just the role of human conveyance, but also the numerous machines of paper circulation, including the various teletype machines that bring important updates into the office environment. One week into the film's production, producer Walter Coblenz sent out a message to Jenkins, Gaines, and production manager Darrell Hallenbeck suggesting that the production design and set departments begin to exercise restraint in their efforts at verisimilitude: "I urge you and all the departments to carefully review the monies we are spending both on research and the recreation of what happened three years ago. Even though our attempt is to be as authentic as possible, make certain that the monies we are spending show up on the screen" (George Jenkins Papers, folder 4). Since the set itself had already been built, Coblenz was likely referring to the furnishings and practical objects to which Jenkins and Gaines were devoting tireless and exacting energy. Several scenes, for example, feature dramatic business using elevator doors. Either laboriously engineered or purchased (elevator-company brochures and drawings can be found in the production files), the *Post* elevator in the film smoothly opens and closes in the manner of an actual elevator, rather than the clunkily affected manner of a mock-elevator—a detail that would have been distractingly noticeable only in its absence. Another significantly large machine purchased for the production—perhaps even the target of Coblenz's caution—was a 44-foot Orda-Flow Document Conveyor from Acme Visible Records (a company the production also contracted for a number of its filing systems), a multi-track conveyor that wends its way through a workplace carrying upright documents (a descendant, perhaps, of the pneumatic tube). Though it cost Wildwood Enterprises $1,831.23, the machine does not appear in the finished film, nor is it visible in any of Jenkins drawings. It remains unclear how or if the Orda-Flow was used,[7] but given Pakula's choreography of paper and people it is not difficult to imagine how the machine would have meshed with his staging (much as a cluster of

pneumatic tubes was central to the depiction of the *New York Sentinel* in Lang's *While the City Sleeps*). Within Pakula's aesthetic of counterpoint, furnishings such as the Orda-Flow are never solely background reality effects—they determine and heighten the scope of action and demand engagement by human agents to make the office move.

The Dark Office

The sequence that introduces Deep Throat in *All the President's Men* begins with Woodward exiting a taxi in an extreme

low angle might for a moment compare the vertical scales of individual to building. It is difficult then, at first, to discern just where Woodward is, and what kind of building he's entering. Cutting to the interior, Woodward emerges out of darkness and walks into the foreground, the sounds of the soles of his shoes echoing loudly against concrete walls and floors as he comes into view and scans his surroundings. A cut to a reverse angle shows even more of the space, capturing the pattern of concrete columns, smattering of monochrome cars, and fluorescent lights that recede, blacken, and disappear in the distance (figure 5). Thus we are introduced to the parking

Figure 5

long shot, in front of a dark and inscrutable structure, and then descending an exterior stairway. The composition of the image inverts conventional approaches to signifying architectural locations, wherein a vehicle is typically exited at the front of a building at its base, and where a

garage, the newsroom's haunting double. Both settings are identical in basic shape, deep and recessive. Yet the garage is filled in by inky darkness rather than paper and office furnishings—a noirish blot at the center of Redford's wished-for *verité* rendering. Here Pakula lays out a space

not of excessive clarity, but one organized according to the forward-leaning anxiousness of the thriller. Yet, even within these singular and iconic scenes, the underlying appeal is a combination of historical authenticity and white-collar familiarity.

Figure 6

The notoriety of the parking garage within the canonical Watergate narrative—the culmination of which has been the placement of an historical plaque outside the garage in Rosslyn, VA—is owed largely to the scenes in the film version of *All the President's Men*. In Woodward and Bernstein's book, the garage is one of a number of sites that Woodward meets Deep Throat, and it barely receives any description. The idea of building a visual inventory of Watergate sites— the DNC headquarters, the parking garage— likely first occurs in the pages of *New York* magazine. Throughout June of 1974 the magazine ran a "Secret Illustrated History of Watergate" series, which, with design director Milton Glaser at the helm, began to supply visual aids to a narrative that had been mostly comprised of names, titles, and institutional affiliations. Julian Allen's two-page painted illustration of Woodward waiting for Deep Throat in a parking garage (figure 6) is included in Pakula's "Visual

Research Materials" for *All the President's Men* (Pakula Papers, folder 47). As in the film, Allen emphasizes the garage's recessive concrete features, creating a noir mise-en-scène with a worried Woodward at the center.

While building on Allen's aesthetic, the film's parking garage scenes are keyed to white collar experience, particularly in the way they build a distinct sense of temporality. Woodward's initial journey to his destination is captured in an elliptical montage of discrete scenes—leaving the house, the opera crowd at the Kennedy Center where he changes taxis—that fragment the duration of his journey. Once inside the parking garage, time begins to be expressed in more durational consecutive moments, each successive moment felt one after the other in longer takes. In essence, Woodward *commutes* to his meetings with Deep Throat. The anxiousness of the noir-thriller aesthetic here magnifies that common stretch of time within the white-collar workday: the passage from a parking spot to the office. An experience of not quite work and not quite free time, sensed within the inhospitably transitional architecture of a parking structure.

Like the life of the white-collar worker more generally, the parking garage has been a consistently suppressed feature of postwar urban life, usually placed underground, on rooftops, or disguised with facades. A 1965 study reported 73.2 percent of downtown parking in the United States as being used by office buildings, indicating the influence of automobile commuters on the downtown landscape (Sanders McDonald 61). As Mike Davis and others have shown, reinvestment in downtown cores frequently involved designs that aggressively divided spaces of consumption and white-collar labour from city streets. John Portman's buildings are emblematic of this moment, with their hidden street-level

entrances and flyover walkways between build-ings, as is the 1980s vogue for skywalks, which allowed commuters to pass between parking ar-eas and office towers without touching the street or moving outdoors. Although many cities fea-ture aesthetically appealing garages designed by top-flight architects (Bertrand Goldberg's Mari-na City complex in Chicago, for example), the generically designed parking garage is typical-ly a form of vernacular Brutalism. Concrete and seemingly anti-human—or at least anti-social—in the most literal sense, the alienating effect of the interior space of parking structures is ampli-fied by the fact that they are environments that feature few concessions to the pedestrian traffic they functionally produced.

Even though the geographical distance of the parking garage from the offices of the *Post* is carefully established, the similarity in the shape of the spaces points to their much closer con-nection within the life of the worker., For the white collar worker, the parking garage rep-resents an ambiguous liminal space—a place of contact with the strange urban outside that urban design strove to mitigate but in fact dou-bled. Although it is never as fully described as in the film, the parking garage as the uncanny lo-cale of both petty crime and monumental crim-inal disclosure is ironically hinted at in Bern-stein's narration in the book version of *All the President's Men*:

> Bernstein knew something about bike thieves: the night of the Watergate indict-ments somebody had stolen his 10-speed Raleigh from a parking garage. That was the difference between him and Wood-ward. Woodward went into a parking ga-rage to find a source who could tell him what Nixon's men were up to, Bernstein walked in to find an eight pound chain cut

neatly in two and his bike gone (Woodward and Bernstein 76).

Just as Jenkins understood that paper clutter was key to establishing the overwhelming visu-al presence of the newsroom, Pakula and Willis recognized that it was the generic nature of the parking garage that held the key to the unset-tling aspects of Deep Throat's role. In the tran-sient spaces of classical noir there were always at least benches, stools, a bare mattress, and a surface from which to pour liquor. The lingering spaces of the hypermodern neo-noir, however, provide no such amenities, a premonition of the neoliberal austerity that would redefine the spaces of employment in the coming decades.

Conclusion

The spheres of white-collar labour that *All the President's Men* describes and explores contin-ue to be sites of utopian investment circum-scribed by countervailing economic forces. Without ever seeking to change the relations of production, the dream of tailoring the office to the needs of knowledge workers quickly met dead ends, the ping-pong tables and climbing walls of Google and the verdant campuses of an ascendant technology sector notwithstand-ing. The modular flexibility of the office sys-tems designed by Robert Probst in fact meshed perfectly with the mutability of post-Fordist la-bour. The many knock-offs of Robert Probst's designs emphasized fungibility rather than in-formational flow. Homogeneity instead of varia-tion became the rule of what has become known as the "cubicle farm." Furthermore, because the types of office furniture Probst pioneered were detachable from the structure of the building it-self, they could easily be moved when a compa-ny needed to downsize its operations or move overseas. Today, cubicle systems are typically

leased rather than purchased, enabling companies the ease of installing or striking white-collar shops overnight. In this way, the precarious temporality of modern labour is expressed in the very material surfaces in and through which this labour is performed.

Like many of the designers who first attempted to build dedicated spaces for knowledge work, however, Pakula's engagement with the workplace was imaginative and phenomenological, a labour of representation intended to give visual presence to a work experience that remained unseen. In the gleaming offices of the *Post*, Pakula saw a form of white-collar work that both embedded itself within and transformed its materials. To render and contain this energy on film Pakula assembled a team of office designers (Willis, Jenkins, Gaines) and office workers (Hoffman, Robards, Warden) to build a space to express the production of knowledge: a romance of crusading journalism to be sure, but also, more globally, a romance of paper work and office life.

It is perhaps not difficult to trace the fate of the knowledge worker in the years that followed. As the liberal compact between capital and labour unraveled through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, so too did employment become more precarious. In turn, the places that labour is conducted shifted. From the modern company to the gig economy, an office today may mean an airport lounge, a Starbucks, a leased car, or one's bedroom. Between outsourced labour contracts and shared co-working spaces such as WeWork, even traditional office environments no longer sustain the relative constancy on which embodied attachments might form. In this sense, the office has become as transitional-seeming as the parking garage. Conversely, in the sleepless 24/7 economy of the tech and startup sector,

surplus labour is extended by filling the office with social events and amenities geared to ensuring that workers never leave (see Crary). The office in this sense fulfills not just a substitute for home, but the distractive role once played by spaces of urban entertainment—spaces, ironically, that in *The Salaried Masses* Kracauer determined as conjoined to the emergence of white-collar work. However, as the offices of the present become more dispersed, so too does a delimited terrain on which a particular form of labour was both interpellated and contested recede from perception and representation.[8]

Excavating the exuberant representation of office space in *All the President's Men* may appear to be a lapsarian exercise rooted in nostalgia for the reassuring solidity of a middle-class workweek—but not if one considers the fact that the film's appeal was, from the start, based in a realistically detailed utopian description of what office life could be, not what it was. Describing his research for the film, Pakula recalled, "I went to the *Washington Post* and spent months at Bob Woodward's desk. He was upstairs doing *The Final Days* with Carl Bernstein. I had Bob Woodward's desk in the newsroom and I had my own Walter Mitty fantasy. I was a reporter for the *Washington Post*. I would attend all the meetings. It was marvelous" (Pakula 774). Ironically, the space of adventure that Pakula envisioned from Woodward's desk is in its basic shape and material form not much different from the mundane middle-class setting from which Mitty seeks escape. Pakula and his technicians understood that using film to recount Woodward and Bernstein's efforts meant animating bodies within the space of the office without ever losing it as a determining environment. Folding fantasy into the workplace instead of negating it as a space of the imagination, *All the President's Men*

brings into visibility the office that those who work still wait for daily.

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Image Notes

Figure 1. *Bürolandschaft* floor plan for GEG-Verstand, design by Quickborner

Figure 2. The *Post* newsroom set for *All the President's Men*.

Figure 3. A tracking shot follows Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) across the newsroom floor.

Figure 4. Dolly track on the newsroom set (from *American Cinematographer*).

Figure 5. The meeting place of Deep Throat (Halbrook) and Woodward (Redford), filmed near Century City, California

Figure 6. Julien Allen painting for *New York* magazine's "Illustrated Secret History of Watergate," June 24, 1974.

Notes

1   Despite a proclivity for locating alienation within the everyday spaces of modernity, mid-century film noir rarely visited contemporary workplaces for very long (a signal exception being *The Big Clock* [1948]), focusing instead on bars and nightclubs where leisure is, as Vivian Sobchack writes, "temporalized negatively as idle restlessness, as a lack of occupation, as a disturbing, ambiguous, and public display of unemployment" (158).

2   Kracauer, of course, had already elaborated his ideas on the culture and experience of white-collar middle classes in pre-war Berlin in *The Salaried Masses*, first published in 1930.

3   The interior scale of mid-century business computing systems is depicted in *Desk Set*, as well as in more recent popular culture such as the *Mad Men* episode "The Monolith" (2014).

4   Jenkins' papers contain a layout of the *Post* newsroom with names and phone extensions for 161 desks as well as a desk plan for the *Post* set that contains 162 desks.

5   For a media history of the photocopy, including a discussion of Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers, see Gitelman, particularly Chapter 3: "Xerographers of the Mind," 83-110.

6   The film largely ignores the office-based gender politics of the era. Woodward and Bernstein's request that a fellow reporter, Kay Eddy (Lindsay Crouse), reacquaint herself with a former lover within the Republican party to procure information for them isn't acknowledged as sexist in nature (save Eddy's disbelief at even being asked). The mere possibility that such a request could be made, however, accurately reflects the workplace as a fraught sexual field. Katharine Graham, the owner of *The Post*, requested not to be depicted as an onscreen character in the film. As shown in Spielberg's *The Post*, Graham was an instrumental figure in the unfolding investigation (as she had been with the release of The Pentagon Papers) and her presence within the film may have at least undercut the pervasive maleness of the newsroom.

7   Jenkins acquired layouts for the *Post* Communications Center, a room separate from the newsroom floor where many of the teletype machines were housed. This is perhaps where this machine would have been featured at the *Post* itself (letter from Michael F. Parks, folder 38).

8   This is not to say that opportunities for organization and class struggle also recede. A recent report on tech-industry labour organizing details coalitions between white-collar engineers and coders and blue-collar custodial and security staff, and the ways that labour organizers have mobilized coding knowledge and electronic platforms (see Press).