

**Towards a Theory of Conspiracy:  
Analyzing Hidden Power in Globalization Processes**

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## **Introduction:**

Conspiracy Theory (CT) is a pejorative umbrella term that refers to a large body of fringe theories from across the political spectrum used to explain events by way of secret plots. The bulk of CT blatantly violates academic methodologies and is therefore dismissed, but this paper navigates through the contestable grey area where real conspiracy ends and speculation begins. The 9/11 attacks reinvigorated a wide range of conspiracist thinking, and now roughly 42 percent of Americans believe that the U.S. Government and the 9/11 Commission covered up evidence that contradicts the official explanation.<sup>1</sup> Prior to 9/11, the dominant academic view towards ‘conspiracy theory’ was dismissive, considering it a form of cognitive fundamentalism; In the 1960s, historian Richard Hofstadter defined the pathological "paranoid-style" of thinking, and a concomitant trend of anti-intellectualism, that has been a consistent feature of American politics since the birth of the nation.<sup>2</sup>

Recently, however, much theorizing has been done on CT and the consensus is being remodelled into a more pragmatic form that accommodates the subtleties and intricacies of power and secrecy. To this effect, scholars are coming to appreciate the ubiquity of scandals in American foreign policy as more than anomalous and aberrant practices, but rather as systemic problems that can go undetected. More specifically, scholars are beginning to value an ethnosociological approach over psychopathological; that is, an appreciation of “social facts” from the perspective of the believer/victim/theorizer/whistleblower of a conspiracy.<sup>3</sup> Following 9/11, the national security state came to the fore to manage the premeditated\* neoconservative “Global War on Terror,” giving birth to paranoia but also good reason to evaluate the epistemology of conspiracies (and theories), and challenge the dominant discourses of truth.

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\* ‘Premeditated’ because the think-tank Project for a New American Century (PNAC) published their military expansion agenda in a 2000 document entitled “Rebuilding America’s Defenses,” and the members of PNAC subsequently filled key positions in the Bush administration.

## **Thesis:**

In this paper I endeavour to synthesize the post-Hofstadterian views on CT and lay the groundwork for a proper *theory of conspiracy*, as it is concerned with knowledge and power. This paper is divided into three sections. The first provides analytical perspectives and tools to theorize conspiracy. Second, I outline some conceptual and structural factors that impede the discovery and disclosure of the truth of conspiracies. The third section understands conspiracy as a function of globalization, explicit in the doctrines of liberal internationalism. I hypothesize that through the institutionalized forms of secrecy and cover-up - and corruption, dirty hands, cronyism, media bias/ propaganda, corporate crime, covert operations, etc... – the effects of conspiracy become emergent properties of the complex governance arrangement between state, business, and military, whilst the aggregate of intelligence and military scandals combined with both the misapplication and miseducation of neoliberal globalization draw attention to the internal contradictions of governance.

## **Part I: Analytic Framework**

### *Theorizing Conspiracy*

International Relations scholar Daniel Hellinger theorizes real conspiracies as having three primary characteristics: secrecy, threatened by exposure, and one or a combination of illegality, deception, fraud, etc...<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Daniel Pipes distinguishes between “petty” (limited scope and ambition) and “world” (towards global hegemony) versions of both actual conspiracies (act) and conspiracy theories (perception).<sup>5</sup> A real example of the former is the Iran-Contra Affair, while the latter would be the Nazi quest for world domination.

Hellinger moves beyond this binary characterization to define his version of “operational conspiracies,” which are neither petty nor world in nature, but rather when elites seek to facilitate a political outcome by influencing a substantial shift in power among political actors.<sup>6</sup> However, I contend that because the motives and tactics of such actions are hidden (even from the government sometimes), it may be speculated that there could be macro implications (akin to *negative externalities* in economics), and therefore world significance.<sup>7</sup> Hellinger explains that the 'paranoid style' occurs by conflating operational conspiracies with world conspiracies.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, he stresses that conspiracies do occur, and *some* “rational” theories warrant attention from social scientists.<sup>9</sup> CTs, for better or worse, link “structural and historical forces to subjective political action”<sup>10</sup> by elites who favour diplomacy behind closed doors, as Nobel Peace Prize winning statesman Henry Kissinger advocates.

### *Ethnographical Analysis*

In the Hofstadter paradigm CT was viewed as disempowering, but Hellinger believes that CTs “serve popular resistance.”<sup>11</sup> They demand transparency and legitimacy of military and intelligence institutions whose “missions include actually undertaking conspiracies”;<sup>12</sup> that is, institutions that are prone to secrecy and covert action, and that sometimes circumvent the law. Ethnographical studies on conspiratorial worldviews suggest that fundamentally it is a deep “suspicion of power,”<sup>13</sup> which is healthy in a democratic society. Contrary to common conception that they simplify, conspiracy theories complicate the world by drawing attention to its “hidden and contradictory logics” through alternative approaches.<sup>14</sup> Through this lens, the CTs of marginalized classes or groups are validated in their scepticism of official versions of events, which are defined by hegemonic discourses. The “9/11 Truth Movement” is such an

example, however their measurable impact still may be considered negligible in the current political climate.

### *Institutional Analysis*

Institutional theory focuses on the “roles, incentives, and dynamics of underlying institutions,”<sup>15</sup> rather than personal plots or narratives. Noam Chomsky considers CT as antithetical to institutional analysis, which emphasizes institutional factors and downplays individual agency.<sup>16</sup> The institutional approach relies on scholarship and mainstream media reports to track the behaviour of publicly known institutions. This is why we might rightly consider a number of conspiratorial allegations as illogical or irrational, or quite simply, impossible. With regard to US foreign policy, the difference can be illustrated by seeing policy as being the preferences of particular groups of people versus policy as emerging from particular institutions such as the executive branch and corporations.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, institutional explanations are preferred for events that seem to be contrived and covertly executed.

However, institutional analysis need not be diametrically opposed to conspiracist discourse. Michel Foucault is a part of the so-called “French School” of institutional analysis which centres on exposing the unseen forms of power that prescribe behaviour and organizational protocols. Another potential flaw in Chomsky’s overemphasis on institutional theory is that it exonerates higher political figures from controversial (or illegal) actions. CT proponents specifically hold individuals in the Bush administration responsible for the effects of conspiracy. Ironically, Chomsky argues that 9/11 CTs divert attention from greater crimes of the U.S. (and specifically the Bush Administration),<sup>18</sup> of which he is the loudest critic. However, Chomsky still rejects that the alleged conspiracies are possible in an institutional setting, and that it is the structure that would ensure “propagandists” emerge to “conceal the actual workings of

power.”<sup>19</sup> Yet sometimes the propaganda is so subtle as to contaminate the discourse of even scholars. Despite Chomsky’s critical media expertise, he takes it for granted that everyone is aware of the intricacies of power and propaganda, and thus his argument becomes a form of institutionalized excuse.

### *Regime of Truth change*

Jack Z. Bratich observes that many scholars have recognized a “new propaganda” which no longer relies on a “Big Lie” repeated many times over but a “mind-numbing barrage of little lies; a glut of facts, revelations, and alleged discoveries whose half-life is so short that proving them false has little effect.”<sup>20</sup> The new propaganda is a fraudulent fusion between publicity and secrecy, as the state and private-sector consultants merge<sup>†</sup> and form what Guy Debord calls “networks of influence, persuasion, and control.”<sup>21</sup> Bratich says we can’t trust this publicity, because it is not an objective disclosure of the secrets we need to know.<sup>22</sup> He argues that this conjecture indicates that the relationship between truth, secrecy, and revelation need adjustment. The new propaganda is sustained by the mass cooperation and complicity of civil society, whose power and resistances are diffused across countless points of contestation, and thus have no opportunity to challenge it.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the notion that ‘everyone would have to be involved’ is a fallacious one; to an extent everyone *is* involved, but not consciously. However, most functional conspiracies minimize the number of people ‘in the know.’ An institutional factor that lends itself to this type of conspiracy is ‘compartmentalization.’ The term is used in military and intelligence fields to mean limiting the dissemination of information between individuals or groups to a ‘need to know’ basis; essentially, one hand does not know what the other is doing.<sup>24</sup> A conspiracy could

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<sup>†</sup> Bratich mentions several consulting firms such as the Rendon group, Burstson-Marsteller.

be directed upon unwitting agents by a single individual, instead of ‘everyone’ needing to be involved.

## **Part II: Conceptual and Structural Barriers**

### *Ignorance is Bliss?*

It is often said about certain conspiracy theories, such as 9/11, that if it were true, we’d know about it. Critics claim the government is not good at keeping secrets, and the revelations of high profile scandals such as Watergate and Iran-Contra are given as examples of the expectancy of leaks; we *know* about these events. But if [a] power does not wish to be discovered then we should expect it to be difficult to gather evidence. Agnotology, a nascent field that emphasizes the cultural production of ignorance as an anti-epistemological force, provides insight into state secrecy and social epistemology.<sup>25</sup> In *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, historian Robert Proctor makes the case that ignorance is under theorized; ironically, we are ignorant of our own ignorance.<sup>26</sup> In the same volume, this observation is empirically reflected by Peter Galison’s estimate that the amount of data classified is 5-10 times greater than the open literature publicly accessible.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Proctor echoes the Socratic wisdom that knowledge of one’s own ignorance is a necessary prerequisite for intellectual enlightenment.<sup>28</sup> Considering this, Agnotology contributes substantial and needed insight to theories of knowledge. Proctor divides ignorance into three types: native state (common form; innocence; naiveté), lost realm (forgotten; selective; missed), and strategic ploy (“strategies to deceive”<sup>29</sup>).<sup>30</sup> It is primarily the last type that concerns us when dealing with conspiracy.

Examples of strategic ploy ignorance are found in trade secrets, the tobacco industry, and military secrecy.<sup>31</sup> (Trade secrecy is legitimized because it is concerned with intellectual

property as capital that drives business and economics.) The other forms are more nefarious as they obscure truths vital to the public in order to advance their own interests. The truth about the lethality of smoking was stalled for nearly half a century through the concerted “manufacture of doubt.”<sup>32</sup> Likewise, for years the scientific consensus on climate change has been marginalized by conservatives, most recently (and aggressively) by the Bush administration.<sup>33</sup>

Post 9/11, the Bush regime has also implemented an array of draconian legislative measures including the Patriot Acts resulting in scandals such as NSA wiretapping and extraordinary rendition, among others. Another potentially dangerous form of strategic ploy ignorance production is the state-secrets privilege.<sup>34</sup> The executive can annul any lawsuits or investigations in which disclosure of information pertaining to the case can potentially threaten national security. A notable case involves FBI whistleblower Sibel Edmonds, whose appeals to expose evidence of FBI internal security breaches and a cover-up were blocked by the invocation of the *state secrets privilege*.<sup>35</sup> Disclosure of ‘Top Secret’ information, such as the example of Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers is extremely dangerous and considered treasonous, but exposition of the crimes also reveals the dysfunctional governmentality of a state despite outward appearances.

### *Taboos*

Investigating conspiracies within the higher levels of the state apparatus poses a unique challenge. In *Sovereignty and the UFO*, Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall make a compelling case for the threat certain taboos pose to governmentality – UFOs in this case. Governmentality, a concept from Michel Foucault, is the organized government practices (mentalities, rationalities, and techniques) directed at the management of populations and their territories.<sup>36</sup> In the article, Wendt and Duvall argue that the investigation of UFOs threatens the



anthropomorphic sovereignty of states, and is therefore ignored. I contend that this approach can be transposed onto questions of localized conspiracies pertaining to issues of national security. An example is the activation of the aforementioned *state secrets privilege*, but this is not so much a ‘taboo’ as it is an explicit restriction by the state. An academic taboo, more specifically, is generally enforced by stigmatization and ostracism; examples of which include the study of covert operations and of state terror, both of which I discuss later.

Wendt explains that science strives for an apolitical and objective account of reality, but is self-limited by its own methodology which produces an ever evolving, contestable body of knowledge, that precludes absolute “Truth.”<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, the state seeks a regime of truth that its citizens will adhere to. In this case, Wendt argues, the state values stability and normalization as part of its standard of knowledge, over a scientific (albeit uncertain) criteria of truth.<sup>38</sup>

For the modern liberal state, power depends on legitimacy and knowledge rather than force to govern its populations, while the latter is a latent feature. However, when a regime of governmentality comes under threat, the sovereign authority reveals its truth power source: the capacity to suspend norms and laws if it sees fit - as Carl Schmitt put it, to "decide the exception."<sup>39</sup> As Wendt says with UFOs, I argue with conspiracies that the authorities are not “hiding The Truth” about them, but rather “they cannot ask the question”;<sup>40</sup> the party in power, or more generally the state, is threatened by its own investigation.<sup>‡</sup> And since we cannot know for sure, to reject the possibility is to possibly reject a true explanation; a Type II error in statistics.<sup>41</sup> Wendt insists that the metaphysics of modern rule are so resilient that we should not underrate the challenges of resistance; those who challenge the status quo in this respect face

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<sup>‡</sup> cf. The Pentagon Papers and Daniel Ellsberg

career hurdles and put their reputation at risk.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the sensible position to take is to be agnostic about CT because atheism and belief are not epistemically justified.<sup>43</sup>

### *Ignoble Lies*

Despite the insights from academia, CT in the public realm is still given an intellectual status akin to fundamentalist religious thinking. Ironically it has seldom been considered how or why conspiracist and religious thinking are treated so differently, given that they share pathological patterns of thought. The difference between them is the former makes no metaphysical claims, while the latter is based on them. Part of the reason for the lack of comparison may be that while CT and religion might overlap in ontological dispositions, CT makes claims with grand political implications that are often antagonistic to the state. Religion, on the other hand, enjoys a symbiotic relationship with the state; the two provide each other symbolic power and legitimacy.<sup>44</sup> Religion upholds the status-quo while CT challenges it.

Another reason for the neglect might be that religion is itself a conspiracy: social scientific epistemology explains away the mystical foundations of religions and reveals its rationalistic perfunctory sociological function. Moreover, sometimes institutionalized religions exhibit criminal tendencies such as cover-up. The recent scandal over suppression of pedophilia in the Catholic Church (which indicts as high as the Pope this time) is case in point. Also, Max Weber divides organized religion into elite and mass components. Elites often use religion to satisfy higher moral and intellectual needs, while mass religion provides “thaumaturgical” (miracle) comfort for the unprivileged.<sup>45</sup> In U.S. Presidential elections, both parties use religious appeals to reach out to the broad Christian demographic voting bases. In these terms, religion is a conspiracy perpetuated by religious elites (and their constituents) to maintain the power structure, and justified as a noble lie.

Thus, institutional arrangement exists for an exploitative relationship based on ‘myths’ often promoted as truth and wrongly believed as such. Moreover, religion depends on the sanctity of these core myths. Religious narratives, along with secular ones like nationalism, perpetuate what are called “noble lies”; myths promoted by elites to maintain social harmony. Neoconservative Irving Kristol says there are different truths appropriate for different people and that it’s a modern democratic fallacy to think one set of truths should be available for everyone.<sup>46</sup>

Acquiescence to this model of ‘truth’ means that you will always be short-changed because in a modern capitalist society truth has value like any other goods and elites will seek to control it. Concordantly, for the dispenser of truth, it is rational to reduce ‘truth’ to its most simplistic terms for mass consumption. Nevertheless, religions are validated by their adherents’ faith and following. Figuratively speaking, if CTs are permitted to point out that ‘the emperor has no clothes,’ so to speak, then institutionalized religion loses its power. In another sense, some CTs undermine both the church’s dominion over the sacred, and the state’s sovereign power over the people, while church and state healthily reinforced each other (although from a safe distance, ensured by secular principles).

### *Tangled Webb We Weave*

A noteworthy case of the media mishandling the truth involves drugs and the CIA. Daniel Hellinger explains that Gary Webb and Gerald Posner both published exposés on connections between the CIA and drug trafficking, but Webb’s version was rejected and his career was derailed for it while Posner was praised and rewarded.<sup>47</sup> The reason lies in that Posner depicted the drug trade as "aberrant practice of U.S. Foreign policy, one mistakenly implemented to foster good intentions."<sup>48</sup> Webb, on the other hand, challenged this notion, attributing more intent and agency to the CIA. This categorized Webb as a conspiracy monger and his research was

discredited by most of the mainstream press, although celebrated by some. Hellinger's comparison is useful but it glosses over the finer details, such as the distinctions between their investigations. The Posner book that Hellinger refers to mainly focuses on organized crime in China, while Webb traces the connection to the effects of crack on black populations on Los Angeles ghettos. This caused publications such as the New York Times to issue a rebuttal to a claim that Webb *did not make*: that the CIA conspired against the black population.<sup>49</sup>

It is scarcely appreciated that Webb's *Dark Alliance* prompted the CIA to conduct an internal investigation, concluding in March 1998, and the Los Angeles times conceded in 2006 that they "dropped the ball" in handling the issue.<sup>50</sup> Ironically, Webb had been an award winning journalist and "staunch defender" of the newspaper industry before his disillusionment. In *Into the Buzzsaw: Leading Journalists Expose the Myth of a Free Press*, Webb lamented that only after the media war did he realize that his success had been contingent on not writing anything "important enough to suppress."<sup>51</sup> In an interview Webb explains that his story had a "high unbelievability factor built into it"<sup>52</sup>; this makes uncovering the truth about complex political issues very elusive. Tragically, Webb committed suicide in December, 2004. There is no conspiracy theory about his death, but the circumstances no doubt fuel paranoia.

### *State Terror Neglected*

The prevalence and the nature of state terror have been largely ignored in U.S. academia.<sup>53</sup> Chomsky divides terrorism into "retail," as practiced by non-state actors, and "wholesale," as carried out by states, the latter of which being the dominant form.<sup>54</sup> In *The Ghosts of State Terror*, Richard Jackson analyzes the reasons for the silence. Jackson's first order critique of the study of terrorism is that the actor based definition of terrorism excludes state culpability, the research focus has a political bias, and the discourse rejects the weight of

empirical evidence of state terrorism.<sup>55</sup> His second critique is that ignorance of state terrorism in academic discourse serves to facilitate state hegemony, legitimize foreign and domestic policy discourse to the public, and defer awareness of the terroristic tendencies of states.<sup>56</sup> These insights seem to complement Wendt's taboo approach as well.

### *9/11*

The United States is the largest purveyor of state terror in the world,<sup>§</sup> and this fact gives rise to allegations of 9/11 as David Macgregor calls "Machiavellian state terror"; that is, terror initiated by actors other than those suspected (potentially within the state) in order to advance the ruling agenda.<sup>57</sup> Jackson's most pressing insight is how deconstructing the dominant narrative gives rise to "alternative and potentially emancipatory forms of knowledge and practice."<sup>58</sup> But as Sluka explains, it is always most dangerous for the anthropologist to study state terror in his country of origin.<sup>59</sup> Given that the United States is arguably the global leader and hegemon, this poses unprecedented challenges. "We were set up to fail," write the 9/11 Commission co-chairs Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, through inadequate funding and an unrealistic mandate.<sup>60</sup> This quote fully fuels conspiracy theories but does not seem to vindicate academic inquiries. Regardless, this type of critical discourse is about challenging the status quo which tends to foreclose awareness of certain illegal state practices. The emergence of new discourses that analyze narratives of state terror and conspiracy can help to rehabilitate the governmentality of the state.

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<sup>§</sup> Examples are ubiquitous, particularly all throughout Latin America.

### **Part III: Globalization as Conspiracy**

#### *New World Order*

At this point it is useful to examine the dominant themes of anti-globalization and anti-elitism, most manifest in the mainstream “New World Order” conspiracy. This too has numerous incarnations, but I refer to it in its most general and secular form. Although the concept traces back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first contemporary invocation of the phrase “N.W.O.” was by George H.W. Bush in 1990 and it was promptly interpreted by many in the language of conspiracy rather than transparency.<sup>61</sup> In their book *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*, Harry G. West and Todd Sanders summarize the [N.W.O.] conspiratorial perspective as seeing an “international elite” plotting to undermine American sovereignty<sup>62</sup> and establish a totalitarian collectivist one-world government.<sup>63</sup>

However, in the study of International Relations, it is well understood that the concepts of states and sovereignty are eroding and being challenged by numerous forces including global civil society. Non-state forces and actors have demonstrated their political power, whether through violence (terrorism, environmental degradation) or development (NGOs). Moreover, corporations have growing power and wealth, many eclipsing the economies of smaller states. Fifty-one of the 100 largest economies in the world are corporations.<sup>64</sup> General Motors’ annual sales are greater than Denmark’s GDP. Thus, as Daniel Hellinger explains, there is more than a degree of truth to the conspiracist view that “democratic sovereignty is being sacrificed on the altar of economic globalization.”<sup>65</sup>

### *Future World State*

West and Sanders cite the shared Cold War (neoliberal) assumption that modernity was a “teleological process” that would evolve into Marshall McLuhan’s “global village.”<sup>66</sup> United by this shared ideology, elites could unremittingly push forward globalization without concern for recourse (or ‘blowback’<sup>\*\*</sup>). The employment of the term ‘teleology’<sup>††</sup> is particularly interesting since the concept has been rejected by social scientists until only recently.<sup>67</sup> Despite this, globalization took place under the premise of ultimate modernization and unity.

In 2003, Alexander Wendt applied new developments in self-organization theory to hypothesize a teleological view of global dynamics that “inevitably” culminates in a world state.<sup>68</sup> This implies that all attempts to derail globalization will invariably fail in the long run; regardless of our intentions or predictions, we subconsciously conspire to bring about a world society. Most important of Wendt’s points is that agency matters; we not only have the power, but the responsibility to create a benign new world order.<sup>69</sup> The fact that neoliberal modernization has not emancipated the global masses to the extent anticipated has left many disillusioned. Nevertheless, acceptance or rejection of the world state hypothesis in the present will have a reflexive impact on how one views the processes of globalization and diplomacy. Therefore, it is useful to briefly analyze the conspiracy worldview with respect to its ontological and teleological assumptions.

For the CT subscriber, resistance to the impersonal forces of globalization is heroic. But if resisters are wrong in their ontological assessment of global dynamics, then their energies are misplaced into projects that encumber the goals they share with liberal internationalists; namely peace, prosperity, equality. On the other hand, both resistance and humanitarianism sometimes

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<sup>\*\*</sup> cf. Chalmers Johnson, “Blowback”

<sup>††</sup> A teleological school of thought is one that holds all things to be designed for or directed toward a final result, that there is an inherent purpose or final cause for all that exists.

demonstrate good intentions gone awry, which can have counterproductive effects. Within the US, an extreme incarnation of the anti-globalization ‘hero’ can be seen in ‘lone wolf’ terrorists, such as Ted Kaczynski (the Unabomber), who see globalization as a destructive process. If one accepts Wendt’s world state thesis, they will be inclined to embrace cosmopolitanism rather than work against it. The good news and the bad news are the same; geopolitical homogeneity is unavoidable (eventually).<sup>‡‡</sup> Therefore, reflexivity of this notion empowers the individual agent within the current social structure and also allows them to help redefine it.

### *Directed Evolution*

Unconsciously mirroring Wendt, Hellinger writes that globalization “seems evolutionary, beyond agency,” and therefore resistant to conspiracism.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, Hellinger argues that globalization doesn’t just happen, but rather it is a conscious process constantly advanced in the interests of the elites. This again reflects Wendt; agency matters. Globalization’s most keen proponents being “liberal internationalists in intellectual and diplomatic circles.”<sup>71</sup> One notable figure, arch-globalist David Rockefeller, proudly admits in his autobiography *Memoirs* to the charge of “conspiring” in a “secret cabal... [to] build a more integrated global political and economic structure” towards a one world order.<sup>72</sup> Many conspiracy theorists include this in their list of citations as proof of greater crimes of the new world order. One might argue that the CIA ostensibly was pursuing similar goals through illegal means. But Rockefeller is not confessing to any crimes; rather he is acknowledging his part in the “Open Conspiracy” of liberal internationalism.<sup>73</sup>

It is not that elites plan to dominate the masses, but rather they see their pursuance of rational self-interest as serving the ultimate liberation of the masses. The hazard of such progressive principles is the tendency for concentration and monopolization of power, which

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<sup>‡‡</sup> Wendt’s thesis is cogent but also highly theoretical; thus, he safely estimates a world state 100-200 years away.



leads to its own internal corruption, decay, and abuse. And power, even benevolent well intentioned power, seeks to protect itself. The reason that this is a ‘conspiracy theory’ and not a theory of conspiracy is because the truth of globalization contradicts historical narrative myths such as nationalism, religion, patriotism and identity that populations are indoctrinated with from birth. The illusion of sinister conspiracy arises to alleviate the cognitive dissonance resulting from the clash of political reality and political myth. Meanwhile, the odd elite operational conspiracy will slip by under the radar. Postmodern scholar Fredric Jameson notes that CT is a “degraded attempt to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system.”<sup>74</sup> At least Jameson recognizes that total comprehension of the world system is indeed “impossible.”

### **Concluding Notes:**

#### *Connecting the Dots*

CT is often accused of seeing patterns everywhere, but seeking patterns is also the object of science. The difference is conspiracy thinking may be making tenuous connections in random or meaningless data, while science seeks to establish accuracy and consistency in pattern recognition, and thus deduce coherent meaning. If we move towards the formation of an academic subfield to study the processes of conspiracy, I contend it can draw from diverse and established fields, including: the Frankfurt School (Marxism, postmodernism), historical revisionism (history), elite theory (sociology), institutional analysis of power-knowledge (French School), world-systems theory (IR), popular geopolitics (geography), social epistemology (philosophy/ psychology), white-collar crime (criminology), and media studies. There has not been room for such an exhaustive study here, but hopefully a prelude to such.

Due to the various impediments to discovering conspiracies discussed here, such as institutional bias, Agnotology, media bias, taboos, and noble lies, academics may be deterred or precluded from making the rational links between the military-industrial-complex, the nature of state terror, corporate crime, covert foreign policy, government secrecy, etc., for fear of being ridiculed or stigmatized as a conspiracy theorist. Conspiracies *do* take place, but pinning down the degree of agency of actors involved is difficult because the power does not what to be exposed to the light of day. It is important to understand conspiracies as emergent phenomena from the aggregate relationship of secrecy, corruption, cronyism, white-collar crime, cover-ups, covert ops, collusion, and twisted ideology. In this sense, we fail to comprehend the far-reaching consequences of our actions.

### *Conclusion*

In terms of evolutionary globalization (cf. Wendt), the imperatives of elites manifest in ways that seem like a conspiracy plotted *them*, rather than the elites plotting the conspiracy. Forces are mysteriously catalyzed and galvanized into action to protect power/ to suppress truth that threatens the status-quo, meanwhile advancing neoliberal integration and political pluralisation. There need not be a concerted effort; the conspiracy simply ‘takes place’ without any conspirators. The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard highlights this theme in the context of 9/11: “The symbolic collapse of a whole system is due to an unforeseen complicity, as if, by collapsing (themselves), by suiciding, the towers had entered the game to complete the event.”<sup>75</sup> There *should*, however, be a concerted effort towards openness and progress.

Conspiracy theories are a demand for enlightenment as well as disclosure. The ignorant masses subconsciously want the truth<sup>§§</sup> more than they subconsciously block it, but they need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to handle it first. The truth threatens nationalism, religion, and other ontological myths that keep the masses unified and content. It is not that opaque global networks of finance and politics don't exist; it is that the reality of these institutions and processes conflict with the myths the masses are inculcated with, and that these pathways of modernization produce harmful side-effects. Reflexive understanding of a proper theory of conspiracy draws attention to the negative externalities, if not direct effects, caused by ideological and unilateral governmentality, and allows us to take corrective measures more effectively. The masses must be ever vigilant in the battle for the status of truth. If dissident investigation is cast off as conspiracy theory, then the truth is sacrificed in vain. I'll give the last word to rogue journalist Gary Webb: "authentic journalism is telling people something the government doesn't want them to know."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>§§</sup> Scientific truth, social scientific knowledge, stripping away of illusions, etc...

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- <sup>1</sup> Zogby International. "Zogby Special Feature - A WORD ABOUT OUR POLL OF AMERICAN THINKING TOWARD THE 9/11 TERRORIST ATTACKS." *Zogby International - Polling, Market Research, First Globals*. N.p., 26 May 2006. Web. 23 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.zogby.com/features/features.cfm?ID=231>>.
- <sup>2</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (Vintage). (New York: Vintage, 2008.) [http://www.kenrahn.com/jfk/conspiracy\\_theory/the\\_paranoid\\_mentality/the\\_paranoid\\_style.html](http://www.kenrahn.com/jfk/conspiracy_theory/the_paranoid_mentality/the_paranoid_style.html)
- <sup>3</sup> Daniel Hellinger, "Paranoia, Conspiracy, Hegemony in American Politics." In *Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, eds. Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 208
- <sup>4</sup> Hellinger, 209
- <sup>5</sup> Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From*. (New York: Touchstone, 1999)
- <sup>6</sup> Hellinger, 210
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, 210
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, 227
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, 205
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, 205
- <sup>13</sup> Todd Sanders and Harry G. West, "Power Revealed and Concealed in the New World Order." In *Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, eds. Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 7
- <sup>14</sup> Sanders, 17
- <sup>15</sup> Michael Albert, "Conspiracy Theory." Z Communications. <http://www.zcommunications.org/conspiracy-theory-by-michael-albert>
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