The conspiracy of the invisible hand: anonymous market mechanisms and dark powers

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The Popularity of Conspiracies
Conspiracy theories are both simple and highly sophisticated. On the one hand, they are simple and single-minded because they are all rooted in suspicion and aim to uncover the hidden truth behind the deceitful, delusive surface. A systematic “behind-ism” in the construction of conspiratorial plots always involves the same operation of making the invisible visible. Tearing the real powers out of the dark realm in which they try to conceal their capacity to control and manipulate a group, a country, or the whole world: this is the unfailing promise. On the other hand, the unveiling of a conspiracy relies on a highly sophisticated, astonishingly complex narrative that may be unfolded even further. “Behind the scenes” we find an open, unobstructed space for fantastic plots and concoctions, for a myriad of arbitrary assumptions, emotional identifications, and an affective acting out. There are no formal restrictions or material resistances to be encountered; every sign and object may be linked with another in both a profoundly meaningful

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and an easy way. The intellectual investment in such a “forest of fictions” is rather low,\(^1\) so that everybody with some imagination can participate and propose something that may be pertinent and produce meaningful insights for others. In this sense, conspiracies are democratic. And they are efficient in recycling elements of traditional stories into new and attractive explanatory frameworks. Last but not least, conspiracies are entertaining.\(^2\)

This certainly means that the most popular conspiratorial machinations are not haphazardly construed. They meet widespread expectations; they fit in highly structured mental dispositions and may fill the gaps in the collective imagination of a society or social groups. Every complot theory evolves from a significant and formative pattern, which combines two elements: first, it introduces a dichotomy of dark powers and visible undertakings, and second, it suggests that two separated spheres are stealthily interlinked in a way that reveals the visible things and actions as epiphenomena of a hidden parallelogram of forces. Subsequently, a huge diversity of elements can be brought in, linking the plot’s main assumptions with various perceivable components, accumulating clues and hints and enriching the theory with eventually mind-blowing and breathtaking details. One good example for this detective operation is the one-dollar bill.

The upper-right corner, left of the 1, shows a twig of leaves (fig. 1). When this section is enlarged (fig. 2), the attentive observer can detect a half-hidden owl. For any believer in conspiracies, this owl conveys a message to the initiated. One could suggest that the picture in the middle of the bill, which at first sight seems to portray George Washington, in fact shows Adam Weishaupt, the legendary founder of the Illuminati.

Plots of this kind are not mere machinations. The cultural impact of meticulously elaborated conspiratorial theories and assumptions grows with the resonance they find in everyday communication and consciousness. In this way, conspiracy theories are part of the social fabric of modern societies and also part of an economy of attention. They channel emotional energies and make them productive. In this respect, dreams are not just sheer fictions but interfere in the social construction of reality and the cultural shaping of meanings and subjectivities.

The Enlightenment was a seminal period for new concepts and worldviews. One was the idea of the perfectibility of both individuals and the whole society. Through their reason, humans are able to enlarge their personal capacities and to improve their social conditions. This drive toward bettering people and sociopolitical systems was often directed against the established power elites. It is hardly surprising that forceful personalities struggled against the aspiration toward emancipation and tried to (re)gain control over social movements that menaced the legitimate power structure. At about the same time, the idea of the unintentional effects of deliberate human actions was conceived for the first time in a systematic way. It focused not on the well-known difference between the purport of agents and their hidden motives but on a more fundamental occurrence. Whenever a group of humans is taken into consideration, then the declared or observed intentions may not correspond with the aggregated outcome. Humans may be good and willing—under certain circumstances, the result is evaluated as strongly suboptimal or even bad. By the same token, an individual’s selfish motives may be transformed into overall acceptable, and even good, consequences. From an ethical standpoint, this hypothesis was difficult to grasp, and for the moral authorities of the ancien régime, it was beyond the pale to acknowledge this type of inversion.

From this simultaneity of a drive toward perfection and the emergence of unintentional effects, some theoreticians—especially the exponents of “critical theory”—have concluded that the undamped effort to improve the human being and humanity as a whole may turn out as a catastrophic adventure. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno developed that hypothesis in their philosophical fragments Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944).3 Historians also pointed


The Superconstellation of 1776

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out that these contradictory insights could boost the plausibility of conspiratorial theories. In fact, as a constitutive part and a dynamic factor of the Enlightenment, secret societies and Masonic lodges mushroomed in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Along with these invisible entities that challenged the royal arcanum of the ancien régime, new perceptions emerged, fueling conspiratorial plots of hidden machinations.\textsuperscript{4} Toward the end of the eighteenth century some writers became influential by knotting together several conspiratorial narratives to unmask the millennium-old conspiracy that culminated in the French Revolution. The two most prominent of these are John Robison (1739–1805), with his \textit{Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried On in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies} (1798), and Augustin de Barruel (1741–1820), the “classical author” in the field who, in the fourth volume of his \textit{Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire du jacobinisme} (1797–98), synthesizes conservative conspiracy theories and a broad picture of the revolutionary malefactors, starting with the Persian founder of a so-called Manichaean religion and ending with the abominable French Revolution.\textsuperscript{5}

From a conspiratorial perspective, 1776 was a special year, since three significant events led to a superconstellation for the advent of new dark powers in the world. First, Adam Smith published his \textit{Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations}, in which he stated: “Every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. . . . He intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.”\textsuperscript{6} As a profoundly religious man, Smith saw the

\textsuperscript{4} Reinhart Koselleck, \textit{Kritik und Krise: Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt} (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997). This hypothesis of a new type of conspiratorial plot is criticizing the assumption that occult knowledge has been handed down from generation to generation since antiquity. Such a position is found in Michael Howard, \textit{The Occult Conspiracy: The Dark Side of Politics from Ancient Egypt until Today} (London: Rider, 1989). However, some patterns of a conspiratorial narrative can be tracked back to the Renaissance. See David S. Baker, \textit{The Occult Tradition: From the Renaissance to the Present Day} (London: Cape, 2005).

\textsuperscript{5} John Robison, \textit{Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried On in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies} (Edinburgh, 1798); Augustin de Barruel [Abbé Barruel], \textit{Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire du jacobinisme}, 4 vols. (London, 1797–98).

invisible hand not only as an unintended effect and a spontaneous order emerging through manifold market transactions but as a mechanism by which a benevolent God administered a universe in which human happiness could be maximized. He made it clear in his writings that strong “moral sentiments” and a rule of law were required in a society before the invisible hand could work efficiently. Beyond a religious meaning and a way to describe a self-regulatory, autopoietic social system, the invisible hand is also a metaphor that can be read conspiratorially. In the tradition of the gothic novel, the invisible hand means the intrusion of a supernatural power into worldly matters. In a world shaped by secular tendencies, this occurrence is transformed in the conjecture that there must be a worldly but hidden force intervening in everyday life. Whenever this type of question is raised, it is quite amusing to imagine whose mighty hand is invisibly involved in Smith’s market game. Under “the camouflage of an ‘economic law’” one might discover “a great many phenomena” and perhaps “a central financial force which is playing a vast and closely organized game”—these are quotations from a publication sponsored and distributed by Henry Ford after World War I.

The second event is the foundation of the Bund der Perfektibilisten (Union of Perfectibilists), later called the Order of Illuminati, in Ingolstadt, on May 1, 1776. As an opponent of the Jesuits, the order’s founder, the Bavarian intellectual Adam Weishaupt, became increasingly liberal in his religious and political opinions. Hence the Illuminati soon became notorious as the prototype of a Masonic conspiracy, and Weishaupt’s arcane practices seemed to corroborate these allegations. Both Robison and Barruel discussed Weishaupt’s attempt to spread the ideas of the Enlightenment through his secretive society. Before long, allegations were made that the Illuminati governed the invisible hand of the market. By systematically controlling the expanding trade and financial transactions, they virtually exercised world domination. The combination of economic power and liberal freethinking proved the basis for the execution of superpower aspirations.

As to the third incident: On July 4, 1776, the thirteen British colonies in North America formally declared their independence from Great Britain. The Second Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia in the Pennsylvania State House, approved the Declaration of Independence. Its purpose was to


set forth the principles on which the Congress had acted in order to influence public opinion and gain support both among the new states and abroad—especially in France, where the new country sought military assistance. This unanimous Declaration, by which the thirteen colonies transformed themselves into the thirteen United States of America, laid down that “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The Declaration ends with the invocation: “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.”9 These short quotations show that the text of the Declaration is a surprising mixture of human rights, manifest destiny, and transcendental protection.10

It is easy to merge the three topics—the invisible hand, the follower of Weishaupt, and the United States—into one big conspiratorial plot.11 The argument goes as follows: The Illuminati—as the embodiment of the devilish invisible hand—have created the United States as the most influential and successful power, born to govern the destiny of, and destined to govern, the whole world. George Washington was in fact Adam Weishaupt in disguise.

The Great Seal of the United States

Given a certain inclination of the observer, this sinister plot can be detected on the dollar coin and bill. As the legal tender of the United States from Independence Day onward, the dollar used motifs of the Great Seal of the United States, composed at the very beginning of the nation and adopted by Congress in 1782. Already in 1795 this national emblem was used for U.S. coinage, and the motto “E pluribus unum” (Out of many, one) appeared on dollar coins.

As part of the greenback, the Great Seal was introduced during the Great Depression. In 1934 Henry Wallace, secretary of agriculture, soon-to-be vice president of the United States (1940–44), and Freemason, submitted a proposal to President Roosevelt to mint a new coin depicting the seal’s obverse and reverse. Roosevelt liked the idea but opted instead to place it on the dollar

bill, showing the two sides in a juxtaposed position (fig. 3), bound together by the statement “In God we trust.” The enlarged reverse of the Great Seal (fig. 4) contains the motto “Annuit coeptis” (He [God] has favored our undertakings). The other motto is “Novus ordo seclorum” (New order of the ages). It is interesting to see that above the unfinished pyramid there is the eye of providence, whereas on its base the Roman numerals MDCCLXXVI (1776) are engraved. Many of the symbols are represented thirteenfold, and two of the mottoes contain exactly thirteen characters. Thousands of conspiracy home pages refer to these facts and are impressed by their compelling evidence. Partisans of a theory of complot (as the French may call it) will be affirmed in their will to unveil the hidden truth of a “new world order” (as novus ordo seclorum is often mistranslated).

In Europe, the universal mission and the insinuated one-world-state project of the United States were considered with suspicion and intense anti-American feelings. In many countries, especially of “Old Europe,” the different dimensions of the challenge of the “New World” were perceived as a conspiracy. Already in the nineteenth century, conspiratorial narrative in the wake of the French Revolution is based on an assumed secret link between opaque market mechanisms and the perfect working of schemes executed by hidden elites, who control the elected and visible governments. The ascent of the United States, which became the dominant power in the Pacific around 1900, brought about a major change in global history. At about that time, the conspiracy theories’ anti-Semitic slant grew stronger, expressed in the catchphrase “golden international.” From the very beginning, anti-Semitism was linked with a conspiratorial plot of the history of the Jewish people—otherwise, this ideology would not have worked—and as a narrative of secret dark powers, it became furthermore charged with widespread fear and jealousy, thereby transforming the ideological aspects into a mental disposition that could be exploited for a policy of stigmatization, exclusion, and persecution.
During World War I the attention shifted toward Russia, where the Bolsheviks seized power in a revolutionary overthrow of the monarchy. From this moment bizarre constructions such as the “Jewish-Marxist world conspiracy” and the “Masonic-communist conspiracy” found a broad audience and eventually (and not only in Germany) gained political credibility. In the interwar period Fascists and National Socialists fought against the League of Nations, which they perceived as a manifestation of dark internationalist powers. The United States, whose president launched this project in 1919, did not finally enter the League, a fact that historians consider an important factor in the failure of this effort to set up a collective security system, able to guarantee peace among nations. In a conspiratorial plot, the obvious absence of the Americans made absolute sense.

But also in the United States, conspiracy theories fell on fertile ground. After World War I the so-called Red scare escalated, resulting in anxieties and confusion. In this period, when the slogan “Back to normalcy” was popular, the perception of dark powers shifted from the outside to the inside. Hitherto American society was threatened from an exterior evil; now the enemy was located in the official institutions. The idea that the United States had been infiltrated gained widespread plausibility. In the eyes of a growing number of conspiracy believers, a secret elite controlled the country, able to install an occult, top-secret power structure from the Atlantic to the Pacific and to use the financial institutions, the monetary system, and the capital markets to achieve the goal of a world state. The spontaneous order of the market became an intentional master plan executed behind the scenes. These anxieties focused on the huge federal administration in Washington, DC, by which the conspiracy was materialized. Anti-American Europeans used the same plot to denounce the U.S. government as the head of an internationally potent dark power.

The Mass Production of Anti-Semitism by Henry Ford

It was Henry Ford, creator of the assembly line in automobile production and of the eight-hour, five-dollar day, who started to aggressively promote anti-Semitic stereotypes. Ford was “the most powerful personification of the next wave of American technology.”12 With the same obsessive determination and

focus that created one of the world’s most innovative modern enterprises, he fueled, after World War I, the “mass production of hate,” as Neil Baldwin states in the subtitle of his study about “Henry Ford and the Jews.”

Ford’s antipathy toward Jews became apparent during the war, when he verbally attacked Jewish financiers and industrialists. In 1919 he bought his own propaganda vehicle, the *Dearborn Independent*, a small weekly in a sleepy town outside Detroit, and converted it into a new type of mass-circulation periodical. From May 22 to October 2, 1920, the *Independent* ran an anti-Semitic campaign, purporting to reveal the role of the “international Jew” in world affairs. The long articles—each of them ten to twenty pages—were reprinted already in 1920 in a first book, which was followed by three other volumes in 1921 and 1922. These “series of articles,” published under the programmatic title *The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem*, were a tremendous success—Ford sold more than a half million copies in North America and Europe. One edition widely circulated in Europe was issued by the *Briton* in London. Although Ford did not write the articles, it was his voice that was heard through the *Dearborn Independent*. The German translation, published by Hammer-Verlag (run by the anti-Semite Theodor Fritsch), displayed Ford’s name prominently on the front page.

Ford’s view of the world was constructed basically the same way as one of his famous Model Ts: he assembled the spare parts of anti-Semitism, angst, and fear of the anonymous market into a suggestive narrative that fit the desire for an overarching explanation for all the—at first sight—incomprehensible

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phenomena in an increasingly complex world. The idea that economic strength was of the utmost importance for political power and cultural influence was constitutive for his argument. Although several articles emphasized the heterogeneity of the Jewish population in the United States, the main agent, the powerful, omnipotent subject in all the narratives, was “the Jew” (in a collective singular). In the first article, “The Jew in Character and Business,” this power center is called “the world’s enigma”: “Poor in his masses, he yet controls the world’s finances. Scattered abroad without country or government, he yet presents a unity of race continuity which no other people has achieved.” On the basis of the so-called Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which even then were regarded as forgeries authorized by the Okhrana, the Russian secret police, The International Jew pretended to explain in toto the world’s most urgent problems. Ford resorted to facts and figures: “We give the facts as we find them,” which is—so the sentence continues—“sufficient protection against prejudice or passion.” One “fact” was that “the Jew is the only and original international capitalist,” who uses “gentile banks and trust companies as his agents and instruments.” From these assumptions the following conclusion might be drawn: “There is apparently in the world today a central financial force which is playing a vast and closely organized game, with the world for its table and universal control for its stakes.” This Jewish finance—as it was labeled—worked systematically against the American genius and the creative industry. Chapter 13 of the first volume, “‘Jewish’ Plan to Split Society by ‘Ideas,’” is of special interest. In a society torn apart by antagonistic ideas, the question of who is interested in such an ideological struggle is imminent. Certainly, ideas have a genuinely dividing capacity. We know—according to Gregory Bateson—that an idea is “a difference that makes a difference.”

17. See Urs Lüthi, Der Mythos von der Weltverschwörung: Die Hetze der Schweizer Frontisten gegen Juden und Freimaurer—am Beispiel des Berner Prozesses um die “Protokolle der Weisen von Zion” (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1992); and Norman Cohn, “Die Protokolle der Weisen von Zion”: Der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschwörung (Baden-Baden: Elster, 1998). The complicity of the Russian secret police may be itself a false assumption; see the contribution of Michael Hagemeister in this issue.
those who wanted to have a modern society as a harmonic community, polarizing ideas were a deadly threat. For the *Dearborn Independent*, Jewish dark powers sought to destroy social cohesion and ideological coherence by introducing a cultural “difference engine” into society. The introduction of new differences, with their pernicious corrosive effects, the dissemination of interesting but false ideas, like “mistaken ideas of liberalism, certain flabby ideas of tolerance,” had to fulfill the destructive mission of a disintegration of the social tissue. “The whole method of the Protocols may be described in one word, Disintegration.” The situation already seemed desperate: “The confusion aimed for is here. . . . Bewilderment characterizes the whole mental climate of the people today. They do not know what to believe.”

In the logic of Ford’s propaganda, anti-Semitism was an antidote against confusion and an instrument for an ideological realignment of American politics. Even though during the 1927 *Sapiro v. Ford* lawsuit he apologized for the wrongs he had “unintentionally” done to the Jews—the apology was written by the constitutional lawyer and Jewish activist Louis Marshall—Ford continued to support distributing the “Jewish protocols” and, since the 1930s, voted for Nazi politics. In Germany *Der internationale Jude* continued to be popular, and when in July 1938 Ford received Germany’s highest award for foreigners—the Grand Service Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle, created by Adolf Hitler the year before—this was also intended to support the common conviction that Jewish-run international capital markets governed the world.

**Political Mythologies in the Past and in the Present**

The deconstruction of conspiracy theories has to cope with the problem that this effort may turn out to amplify and reify these plots. There is no factual proof that conspiratorial plots are wrong. On the contrary, the rebuttal may give them a new momentum. This turns out to be an infinite loop between affirmation and criticism. For a cultural history of the political, it is important not to take conspiratorial plots as isolated phenomena but to contextualize them in a broader framework. The French author Raoul Girardet has put forward a valid proposition. He integrates conspiracies into the mental constitution of modern,

Despite using rational strategies and enlightened policies, these societies are saturated and inextricably entangled with political mythologies of different kinds. Girardet distinguishes four basic types: the conspiracy, the golden age, the rescuer/redeemer, and the desire for completeness and unity. He stresses that this “mythical recitative” depends on a cultural code, which is beyond individual renunciation and which itself—like any strong fiction—is extremely resistant to scientific criticism and cultural change.

Girardet’s concept conveys three important insights for an appropriate interpretation of the meaning and a more complex understanding of the role of “dark powers” in history. First, conspiracy theories are part of a broader imagination of a “good world.” Their specific contribution consists in an $ex negativo$ approach. Whereas unity, redemption, and golden age denote positive agents or states, conspiracy theories describe a kind of theft of these universal belongings by a particular, hidden group, which constantly feigns both public opinion and mass consciousness and which simulates the unity of the society under false pretenses, thereby practicing a higher form of fraud. Ford’s propaganda campaign is a good example of how closely interrelated conspiratorial thinking, the longing for unity, the utopian desire for a golden age, and the search for a redeemer are. In Ford’s anti-Semitic discourse, these aspirations are interlinked. Instead of isolating perceptions of sinister machinations, it is important to integrate them into a broader explanatory framework and to connect them with other political mythologies.

Second, political mythologies are the most important media of a symbolic self-empowerment of modern governments not only in dictatorial regimes but also in democracies. They stand for the “pursuit of happiness” and the modern craving for perfection. The perfectibility of the human being is at the core of the Enlightenment’s optimistic stance. The “capacity to aspire” underlies every great political program, announced by a government to mobilize the goodwill of the citizen and to foster political consensus and social cohesion.  

The third point derives from the second. Contrary to the ideas of unity and the projection of a golden age, which a political program may positively

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23. Raoul Girardet, _Mythes et mythologies politiques_ (Paris: Seuil, 1986). Politically, Girardet is a historian in a nationalist tradition. This has sharpened his insight into the relevance of the mythological dimension of politics in the framework of modern democracies. The relevance of mythologies for national history is also emphasized by Gerald D. Nash, _Creating the West: Historical Interpretations, 1890–1990_ (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

refer to, conspiracies are negatively connoted. Such theories are rejected. Simultaneously, in the conceptions of political elites, they represent a temptation. It would be overwhelmingly attractive to have at one’s disposal all the means that form the core of a conspiracy plot: to control the markets worldwide, to command the bulk of economic resources, to shape the desires of the citizens, to manipulate the preferences of the consumers, to master the mass medias, to manage public opinion, to destroy the enemy, to create a safe sanctuary for the whole country. Every government that faces a crisis and a breakdown of political agency must be seduced by such a perspective.

This does not mean that politics cannot be a rational business, based on realistic assessments and robust routines of collective bargaining. But it brings the symbolic dimension back into the field of politics and demonstrates that mythologies play an important role politically; there is no other way to (re) invent a highly differentiated and complex modern society as a political community but to strive for mythological self-empowerment. Beyond that, the explicit—or the tacit—identification with the figure of a great rescuer or the reference to a golden age may generate more immaterial gratifications than the concentration on difficult and rather boring projects like the reform of the state administration or a conflictual task like the remodeling of a social policy, health insurance, or the educational system. And the illusionary fight against the unlimited acting and potency of bad dark powers, which threaten the good mission of politics, can cause considerable psychic satisfaction; even if there is no visible achievement in such a struggle, things could be much worse without such a fearless effort.

When we read the Great Seal on the one-dollar bill this way, we may observe that it contains a strong vision of America and represents a blending of the most important political mythologies coming out of the Enlightenment: unity is addressed in mottoes and symbols as well as rescue and redemption. The bald eagle’s breast is a shield and as such the national emblem of the United States. The iconography of the pyramid and the eye in a triangle surrounded with a halo introduces the idea of a great epoch, in which humanity is omniscient and not yet unhappily fragmented and disorganized by invisible hands and “splitting ideas.”

When we ask what the reason was for the emergence of the Great Seal on the world’s most famous currency (as the material monetary medium of the invisible-hand mechanism), the most convincing explanation is that this expressed the belief that America had reached a turning point in her history and that great spiritual changes were imminent. Wallace was deeply convinced that the New Deal represented a time when a great spiritual awakening would
precede the creation of the one-world state.\textsuperscript{25} He dreamed of the transformation of the almighty dark powers into a bright, visible, and efficient project that could save Americans and humanity from war, spiritual desperation, and material deprivation. He tried to mobilize phantasmatic energies to reach these goals and to deactivate the destructive potentials of an industrialist society. In accordance with Ford, he had the strong opinion that political mythologies were counteragents against the centrifugal drive and the disintegrating forces of a modern society. Contrary to Ford, who put forward a plot of dark powers, Wallace preferred to rely on the positively connotated narrative of a bright future.

Through the lenses of cultural history, the Great Seal of the United States may be interpreted as a permanent reminder of that noble fiction, that visionary and—compared with the hotchpotch of the real world—somewhat surreal aspiration. It represents the pursuit of happiness and the striving for perfection on a global scale, based on universal values and human rights, as a committing legacy of the Enlightenment. At the same time, it could be perceived as an echo of the dialectics of enlightened politics. This way, it becomes an iconographic memento of the negative structural affinities, the ideological analogies and reciprocal imaginary homologies between conspiratorial master plans and the idea of worldwide “good governance” under the aegis of a superpower, using military force to destroy conspiracies from the inside and outside. From an analytic stance, this means perhaps that the problem we are confronted with today is neither the existence of conspiracy theories nor the widespread belief in dark powers but the “mass production of hate” by exorcising the other. Intercultural exchange and migration are certainly producing different kinds of problems, which are also the result of economic disparities and social inequality worldwide. The perception and reinterpretation of these problems in terms of ethnicity and cultural irreconcilability lead the argumentation astray.\textsuperscript{26} The dangerous political mythology of the twenty-first century is the theory of an inescapable “clash of civilizations,” which can be won only with preemptive strikes and the systematic symbolic degradation of invented enemies.

\textsuperscript{25} Howard, \textit{Occult Conspiracy}, 95.