

SSSP

Groh

Für Herrn Burst mit
herlichem Gruß Dieter Groh

Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy

Edited by
Carl F. Graumann and
Serge Moscovici

MONUMENTA
GERMANIAE

1987



Springer-Verlag New York Berlin Heidelberg
London Paris Tokyo

Chapter 1

The Temptation of Conspiracy Theory, or: Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

Part I: Preliminary Draft of a Theory of Conspiracy Theories*†

Dieter Groh

a 15/4/13

Human beings are continually getting into situations wherein they can no longer understand the world around them. Something happens to them that they feel they did not deserve. Their suffering is described as an injustice, a wrong, an evil, bad luck, a catastrophe. Because they themselves live correctly, act in an upright, just manner, go to the right church, belong to a superior culture, they feel that this suffering is undeserved. In the search for a reason why such evil things happen to them, they soon come upon another group, an opponent group to which they then attribute certain characteristics: This group obviously causes them to suffer by effecting dark, evil, and secretly worked out plans against them. Thus the world around them is no longer as it should be. It becomes more and more an illusion, a semblance, while at the same time the evil that has occurred, or is occurring and is becoming more and more essential, takes place *behind* reality. Their world becomes unhinged, is turned upside down, in order to prevent damage to or destruction of their own group (religion, culture, nation, race) they must drive out, render harmless, or even destroy those—called “conspirators”—carrying out their evil plans in secret. Such orgies of persecution and annihilation against imagined or imaginary enemies accompany the history of Europe from, at the latest, the era of the persecution of the Jews and the Inquisition of the High Middle Ages up through the genocides of the recent past. In comparison to the belief in conspiracies—which is called the theory of conspiracy—belief in magic and witches associated with the so-called primitive cultures and with the European folk-culture seems harmless, especially in regard to the consequences for the conspirators.

*Numerous ideas were generated by discussions with various participants at our symposium in May 1984 in Bad Homburg, especially from Erich Wulff. Without the aid of his paper on paranoid delusion of conspiracy it would not have been possible for me to work out the difference between individual and collective delusion in the area of conspiracy theories. I was also able to profit from the valuable cooperation of Ruth Groh on this particular point.

†Translated by Pauline Cumbers.

X 238-30

We as historians would be taking our task too lightly if we characterized theories of conspiracy as simply irrational or pathological, and classified the supporters of such ideas, including Hitler, as sick and abnormal. Such theories of conspiracy represent a permanent temptation for us all. At the level of everyday perception, only healthy common sense can prevent us from taking the step that leads to the belief in such explanatory models for specific phenomena—a step taken more easily than the reverse. At the scientific level, only considerations from the realm of behavior and history theory, supported by a glance at the psychodynamics of conspiracy theory, can convince us that we are dealing with systems of collective delusion. They are, at the most irrational insofar as their logic, and their coherence and their causal nexus are superior to reality.

No other area of historical study invites cooperation between the science of history and social psychology—indeed even psychopathology—more urgently than that dealing with theories of conspiracy. Bearing in mind such a cooperation, I would like to define the term conspiracy theory as broadly as possible and approach a theory of such conceptions by way of a taxonomy. At the head of these efforts toward the discovery of the motives giving rise to such models and patterns of interpretation as conspiracy theories, I would like to place two quotations as mottos. The first is from Friedrich Dürrenmatt (Henry IV): “The irrationality of hope is to succeed nevertheless by means of reason,” for it is clear that our task is one undertaken in the sense of the Enlightenment—in its most recent formulation (Habermas, 1981). It is equally clear that man’s instinctive nature has all too readily been neglected by a part of the Enlightenment, right up to the present time.

The second motto is to be found in Shakespeare: “The action is ours not the goal.” Thus was formulated an insight that in Shakespeare’s time was anything but evident, and which forms the basis of every criticism of conspiracy theory, namely the insight that the history that men “make” is in a specific sense not “their” history.

Initial Approach to a Definition of the Term

In the attempt to determine conspiracy theories or constructs of conspiracy theories, I wish to select formulas that allow treatment of both their most crude and most sublime forms. Intended is the construction of an *ideal type* in Max Weber’s sense, which—as is always the case in such a procedure—can be more appropriately applied to one real type than to another. In the case of the witch-delusion, for example, real and ideal type would have coincided were it not for the devil as an irritating, that is, metaphysical element.

Men make their history themselves, but that which results as history is not *their* history in the sense that it is what they intended. To put it another way, in the realm of history, reference subject and action subject are not identical. If this is so, then groups can only take possession of “their” history by an “act of rhetorical self-designation,” namely by usurping history (Lübbe, 1977, pp. 38–80). Histories are processes that do not conform to the active purpose of those involved; they are processes without a reference subject, which means that we are not the active subjects of that which happens to us. This is so because the historical process generates

complex systems and these are by definition not at the disposal of the active subject. Structurally speaking, history requires, therefore, not an active subject but merely a reference subject: “Histories are processes of actions in non-standardized, non-mastered situations and thus not calculable according to standardized rules, thus rules of action cannot be obtained from them” (Lübbe, 1977, p. 80). If rules of action cannot be gained from past history then future history is a *fortiori* not “makeable” in the sense of the undisturbed realization of intentions. If this is so, then history is also a *fortiori*, not plannable in the way presupposed by conspiracy theories. Such theories—this would be their first *definition in terms of a theory of action*—presuppose that the intentions of active subjects imagined as conspirators have been realized in the course of history without disruption, or will be realized if another group does not counter them by gaining information on their machinations and preventing the realization of their intentions.

Conspirators are so powerful that they master the course of history. In a sense they are *perfect*, that is to say more powerful, clever, and competent than normal mortals. They have common attributes. Among these can be counted, above all, their unusually strong sense of solidarity, which, compared to that of all other groups, constitutes a type of *countersolidarity*. However, conspirators are also weak—and herein lies a paradox of all conspiracy theories—even *incapable* of using their power to their own advantage. This, however, is only the case when one recognizes the specific weak point among the conspirators. This applies to vampires, the typical loners of folk-cultural imagination, also to the devil, the conspirator par excellence of the elite cultural religious imagination.

As for the *time perspective*, we can differentiate between conspiracy theories that refer more to the past, others that refer more to the present, and again others that refer to the future. More frequently, however, their time perspective is continuous: The conspirators planned and carried out evil in the past, they are successfully active at the present, and will triumph in the future if they are not disturbed in their plans by those with information about their sinister doings.

The *geography* of conspiracy theories can be subdivided into a universalist one—the conspirators are everywhere—and a local-regional one—the conspirators are only active in a certain place or area. In regard to their ubiquitousness, it would seem that conspirators have no problems regarding logistics. If they did exist, they would be highly sought and well-paid professors in military academies throughout the world.

The *historical context*—history is after all, a scientific discipline of the context (E.P. Thompson, 1971/72)—plays a decisive role in the genesis and elaboration of conspiracy theories in two ways. First, reality must be appropriate to them in the sense of “welcome structures” (Althusser) and “welcome orientation” (Kruglanski). They must not only suit reality, but what is more, they must at the same time be attracted to reality. Then they must be logically coherent with the prevailing interpretation pattern of a group, nation, culture, religion, that is, with their religious, political, sociocultural, and so forth, ideas. Both these points are of importance for their high historical variability.

Looked at *formally*, their spectrum ranges from interpretation patterns or everyday theories through regular paradigms to scientific constructs of great plausibility,

which betray their conspiratorial-theoretical core only to the professional eye. In the case of the witch pattern, we are dealing with elaborate "theories" in an historical-theological context; in the case of the boom in "theories" after the French Revolution we are dealing with historical-theological and historical-philosophical drafts, which attribute the revolutionary events to a conspiracy by Freemasons and Jacobins. Conspiracy theories are not only logically consistent, they can also be equipped with everything normally associated with a scientific paradigm as understood by modern history of science (i.e., Polanyi, 1958/1970)—a statement that Thomas S. Kuhn (1970) would reject but Paul Feyerabend (1975) accept.

In regard to the *content*, this can involve magic notions such as that someone has an evil eye capable of bringing disaster to others, and so this individual must belong to a group to which one can further ascribe such and other evil characteristics and of which one can believe that they had conspired to bring harm. In the case of magic notions we are dealing with "theories" that outdo reality in logical consistency and coherence and thus are compatible with our scientific thinking in as far as these notions arise from a similar conviction of the existence of causality. This applies even more in the case of explicit conspiracy theories such as the "Jew pattern," "witch pattern," and "Freemason pattern," among others.

With conspiracy theories, we are dealing with a specific kind of irrationality associated with a stubborn, highly rational, and highly operational logic. In my opinion, this logic can only be refuted in the realm of the theory of action and history, and the motives exposed from a sociopsychological point of view. If this is really so, then in the strict sense, conspiracy theories cannot be scientifically refuted—at least not as long as one maintains the scientific-historical assumption of paradigms as developed and refined by Thomas S. Kuhn (1962, 1970, 1971, 1974) and others (Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970). It remains to be seen whether the "way out of the quarrel of justification" indicated by Jürgen Mittelstraß (1984) can help us in this matter.

Perhaps the only empirical and scientific evidence for the fact that there are no conspiracies in the sense of conspiracy theories is that despite the many pernicious conspiracies that have accompanied history in the last 1,000 years we are still alive and can discuss the reasons for and form of such conspiracies in a symposium.

The way in which the fiendish or evil group actually "*conspires*" need not necessarily be very concrete in the eyes of those who feel harmed or threatened. It is unimportant whether it is a foreign group or one constituted by being isolated within their own; whether they are real persons or—at least at the beginning—only imagined ones who later by means of a social alchemy become incarnate; the core of a conspiracy theory is to be sought in the realm of the social imaginary as understood by Castoriadis (1975).

Obviously, when looked at from the point of view of theories of action and history, all conspiracy theories are constructed according to the same pattern. As for the *psychodynamics*, there exists one that applies on the one hand to all conspiracy theories as described for example by Arie Kruglanski (Chapter 13) from the point of view of the theory of attribution. On the other hand, each individual conspiracy theory presents its own specific psychodynamics as tentatively sketched by Norman Cohn

(1975, pp. 258–263) for the witch-delusion, and for some other theories by me (see Chapter 2).

Structurally, conspiracy theories can be reduced to images of a Manichaean world view of "cosmic childishness" (Erik H. Erikson). They allow clear identification of the perpetrator of events experienced as disaster, calamity, flaw, digression from the "right" path, and so on. Disciples of C.G. Jung—and I am not one—would speak of an archetype. In any case, people who have such notions of the world are not sick in the sense of having clinically pathological symptoms.

Seen functionally, the advantage of an interpretation pattern based on a conspiracy theory—for those who accept it—is that, first, it allows one, or at least makes it easier, to reduce dissonant perceptions, and second, it allows one to reduce complexity. In other words, attraction and spread of conspiracy theories can be attributed to their function of alleviating groups or individuals in "stress situations" from the pressure of reality. "When bad things happen to good people" then something is wrong in the world, and this inconsistency must be able to be explained!

By means of such theories and their associated interpretation patterns, individuals, groups, social strata, classes, peoples, nations, races, and cultures pronounce themselves to be lord of circumstances—which they simply are not. Historical-theological or historical-philosophical ideas prevailing in high cultures and having a future-oriented perspective usually require a kat-echont or delaying power in order to explain why paradise on earth or an improvement in social, economic, or political conditions has not come about—a delay in the *parusia* (the second coming of the savior) being the rule rather than the exception. This delaying instance regarding the coming of the end of the world or the Last Judgment or the hindrance of paradise on earth is imagined to be a conspirator. Conversely, theories and their authors explaining an event already over and experienced as negative require someone, that is, a group, that brought about this event through a conspiracy in order to be able to recommend themselves to the remaining intact society or to posterity as the only refuge from the evils of this world.

The power of attraction resulting from the unburdening and reducing function in a dualist view of the world seems to be so great that often enough groups could be found to assume the role ascribed to them by the conspiracy theories and to believe in all seriousness that they had intentionally brought about particular events, certain processes "into motion," or that they could achieve previously defined goals with certain strategies. Thus, in the sense of a self-fulfilling prophecy, conspiracy theories seem either to produce the necessary agents for their plausibility and empirical verification or else to refer directly in their emergence to such self-acclaimed agents of the historical process.

Are Adherents of Conspiracy Theories Paranoid?

In scientific literature, one often meets the opinion that in the case of conspiracy theories one is dealing with paranoid delusion. Such a reference to individual pathology can only help us, that is, represent useful information, if we understand the clinical

phenotype of paranoia as an *individual* sickness and on the basis of such knowledge consider closely the possibilities and limitations of analogies with collective delusion. For such a task I can profit from the work by Erich Wulff, appearing as Chapter 10 in this volume, and to which I refer in the following.

My initial question is: What structural analogies, and at the same time what differences, exist between a paranoid delusion of conspiracy expressed by an individual and collective delusions? It seems to me that various structural elements in the clinical form of paranoia offer potential explanations of collective delusion. Three such elements should be mentioned:

1. The isolation of the delusion regarding the personality of a sick person and the realms of life affected. A caring father, affable socialite, highly intelligent lawyer, and at the same time fanatic Nazi and Jew-hater—such an isolation of delusion from the normal bourgeois role is well known to us.
2. "The overdevelopment of the ability to argue logically for the delusion on the one hand and the parallel inability to logically criticize the deluded premises of such a logical construct" corresponds to the pseudoscientific constructs of conspiracy theories and their hermetic structure. Obviously, in both cases, the individual and the collective, we are dealing with a confrontation of two logics, which does not take place for the sick person or the adherent of conspiracy theories, but which can be painful and even deadly for the victims of such theories.
3. The quoted defense mechanism of "projective inversion" of which I will speak in connection with the witch-pattern (see Chapter 2) making use of Freudian terminology.

Furthermore, the clinical description of other structural elements and functions of individual delusion, such as delusion as attempt at cure, the phenomenon of concretization, and the catalogue of steps toward concretization in the genesis of delusion, for example naming the hidden, the process of transformation of the real world into pure phenomenal world—all these are valuable for the analysis of the collective phenomenon. The same can be said for the relationship between *mentalité primitive* and logical discourse in a particular culture and/or in the process of cultural evolution.

At two points Erich Wulff speaks of a difference from and a parallel to collective conspiracy theory: On the one hand, the paranoid must achieve the concretization alone at the beginning as for him or her it is not clear who the conspirators are and what they want. On the other hand, the last two of the four steps of concretization are more-or-less identical with those of collective conspiracy theory: naming of *individual* or *collective* conspirators and the *exposure* of their machinations.

At the end of Chapter 10, Erich Wulff presents a catalogue of questions and sets tasks that concern us historians. I would like to address the questions on "fixation points and weakness in disposition for later collective distortions in perception," on the "characteristic relationship between such weak points and actual historical stress situations," and on the "relationship between collective representation and individual idea."

In the following I attempt—tentatively and provisionally—to illustrate structural analogies and differences between individual delusion of conspiracy and collective delusion and its genesis, mainly by means of the example of the witch-delusion and its origins.

It is no coincidence that we speak of the witch-delusion, as it has all the features of a delusion. I would like to call it a collective metaphysical delusion.

1. *Triggering situation*: spiritual upheaval, political upheaval, economic crises, crop failures, famine, epidemics led to a
2. *crisis* of consciousness (cognitive reorientation under stress), which became manifest in the experience of threat and evoked fear. The world is no longer as it was and as it should be. It is unhinged, turned upside down.
3. *Search for explanations*, for the guilty person or parties: Who threw the world off balance? Unconscious search for relief: win room for movement, possibilities of action, first step toward collective "salvation attempt" (myth of the savior, etc.).

Prerequisites and disposition leading the collective search for explanations:

- a. animistic view of the world of the *mentalité primitive*: Chance does not exist, everything is directed by concealed forces. Animistic thinking was prevalent above all in the realms of health and sickness right up into the European modern era.
 - b. a high cultural manifestation of this anthropological universalism in the Church tradition is the two-kingdom teaching of Saint Augustine: *Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Diaboli* are believed to really exist. The salvation plan of God is opposed by the destruction plan of the Devil, who is active here below in the world.
 - c. In folk-culture, from ancient times up to today, there exist reversed-world rituals (Carneval) with their symbols and figures. I presume that before the persecution of the witches the witch was among them. This is certainly the case in the period after the persecutions. Carneval rituals have in fact a similar function as myths and dreams: They are wish-fulfillment, playful identification with what frightens us by putting on the masks of devils, witches, and so on.
4. The process of *concretization*. This begins with the emergence of a collective conspiracy theory, although in a phase of indeterminateness. As opposed to individual delusion, this indeterminateness is not the result of a changed perception of reality. Rather, with the accumulation of critical phenomena, the world is experienced as turned upside down, concretely and not apparently. What on the other hand is indeterminate is the reason for the reversal, what is behind it all. While the paranoid individual experiences the opposition as surface-apparent versus enigmatic-essential, at the beginning of a collective delusion the opposition is manifest-reversed versus concealed-reversing. The loss of touch with reality on the part of the individual, who is no longer able to endow collective cultural values with subjectively binding significance and in the structuring

phase of his or her delusion concretizes the enigmatic essentials to private fantasies—this has no equivalent in the collective sphere.

It is possible that the process of reduction of indeterminateness on the part of a group proceeds as follows: The members deny the subjectively binding character of a cultural everyday fact, for example, a red-haired woman with a hooked nose; but they do this in order instead to recognize a second widespread and competing significance of consequence, for example, the witch pattern. An animistic folk-cultural tradition, namely harmful magic, is shrouded by a high cultural traditional belief in the real existence of evil in the world, embodied in Satan and his accomplices; this amalgam then produces a collective metaphysical delusion. The nearness to reality and the power of realization of collective conspiracy theories could be based on such a process.

While the forms in which the paranoid individual, both in his thoughts and actions, deals with his delusion remain for the most part in the realm of fantasy and panic action against the common reality of the everyday is rare, collective conspiracy theories often lead to the murder and death of the "conspirators." In the realm where his delusion reigns supreme, the paranoid individual forgoes the common, cultural reality. For him or her it loses its value through the suspension of any subjective significance. With collective delusion it is exactly the opposite: Here, subjective recognition of a "delusional" cultural value can have the effect of consolidating and strengthening a community. What then emerges in their fantasy is the community of the threatened whose solidarity is endangered. In reality, however, they are the community of persecutors supposedly fighting the countersolidarity and eliminating its representatives. The delusional cultural meaning takes over the superego of the members of the collective caught up in the delusion—as in mass psychology the leader figure.

With good conscience, witches are tortured, made by force to speak and almost always confess—(*inquisitio*: ask to be told)—and are burned. Such persecution rituals, the uncovering of the hidden, could only have gained footing at a time when both lay and religious authorities functionalized prevailing predispositions (an animistic view of the world, belief in good and bad witches) to their own advantage, producing a collective delusion and thus officially legitimizing the persecutions. Just how precarious this self-made community of persecutors and assumed saviors was—founded on delusional premises—became apparent at the latest at the climax of the witch-delusion when even the persecutors became potential persecuted parties, the witch-delusion having become universal. At that point even the most "normal" face could be seen as the mask of a witch. Even though the constitution of the community of persecutors was intended to relieve fear and gain room for action, the persecution itself produced an even greater burden and restricted the room for action: Conspirators could be everywhere! Everyone could be suspected of being involved! This phenomenon is valid not only for the final phase of the witch persecutions but also for other uncovered "conspiracies," as the Stalin Trials in the 1930s demonstrate (see Koestler, 1950). That which forms the beginning for the individual paranoid person, namely the transformation of the real world into a pure

phenomenal world, constitutes the final phase for the collective delusion: The attempt to save the world by eliminating conspiratorial evil-doers leads to a truly pathological crisis of the whole community—from the medieval persecution of the Jews through the Inquisition and witch trials up to the final phase of the Third Reich and beyond.

Conspiracy Theory Constructs in the Science of History

For the science of history, the seductive power of conspiracy theory constructs lies in their radical counterthesis to the concept of "chance as a motivational relic in the writing of history" (Koselleck, 1968), that is, in their supposed explanatory power. In this realm, however, we are not dealing with conspiracy theories in the sense just defined but rather with constructs that can be justifiably dealt within this framework because certain aspects of motivation and action theory coincide to an almost astonishing extent.

The seductive power of such ideas and constructs is so strong that even some prominent contemporary historians have for a time been persuaded by them. Thus, Reinhart Koselleck, in his *Criticism and Crisis* (1959), represented a highly sublime form of conspiracy theory, based on the historicophilosophical premises of Carl Schmitt (for example, 1938, p. 92). Here he propagated in persuasive formulations the conviction that the critical ideas of the Enlightenment philosophers, the trial they instigated in the name of Reason, and furthermore in secret circles, against the absolutist Prince State and its *arcana imperii*, brought about the crisis of the Ancien Régime and finally the Revolution, with which the "pathogenesis of the bourgeois world" (thus the subtitle) really began to assume universal proportions. In light of the sociohistorical evidence, this claim must appear somewhat exaggerated.

But even structural history, conceived as social history, is per se no remedy against conspiracy theory constructs or against their slipping in unnoticed. Great statesmen, for example Bismarck, whose effective power modern social history believed it had dismantled, can, paradoxically, gain entrance to the stage of history by the backdoor of a structural history perspective and reappear as great movers (Zmarzlik, 1976): Now they appear—as, for instance, in Wehler (1969)—as almighty manipulators and policy strategists wielding the instruments of social imperialism (Eley, 1976). Their plans succeed to the same astonishing extent as those of the leading figures of monopolies in the "theory of state monopoly capitalism."

This theory itself, with its boom among Marxist-Leninists at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, is a further example of a conspiracy theory construct within the framework of a structure theory. The cooperation between state bureaucracy and capitalist monopolies—even if it were demonstrable—does not say a lot about the realization of the aims of capitalist monopolies. The anarchy of capitalist economy and the unpredictability of the market have caused all attempts made up to World War II to come to grips with the crisis mechanism to fail. The same applies to the mirror-image version of the Stamocap theory, that is, the theory of "organized capitalism" (Winkler, 1974). Even the names of the theories have conspiratorial

implications: as if capitalism were organizable in the way suggested by the word "organized," even with the intervention of state bureaucracy and its political aims and intentions (Groh, 1979, pp. 268f).

Yet another variation: Whole classes or fractions of classes have left their mark on certain periods of history by directly putting their plans and interests into action, or by betraying their "true interests," which of course only a few historians can recognize—as, for example, some of the historians of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic concerning the behavior of the German Bourgeoisie during the 1848 Revolution (Blackbourn & Eley, 1984). The results of structural pressures, economic influences, and political constellations are thus interpreted as the success of conscious political plans or as a deviation from a historical path subsequently construed as the "right path."

Even the thinking of theoreticians and philosophers of the State can sometimes fall victim to the temptation of conspiracy theory. Carl Schmitt, certainly one of the greatest legal thinkers of our century, endowed terms and formulas with almost magic quality. As if the intentions of State philosophers and political thinkers could effectively influence reality by means of the *correct* terms and formulas, so that finally they could master it: "Stat nominis umbra."

In his book *The Leviathan in Thomas Hobbes' Theory of State. Sense and Failure of a Political Symbol*, Carl Schmitt (1938) exemplified his method by means of the relationship between Hobbes and Spinoza: the "reserve of inner, private freedom of thought and belief" (p. 86) over and against the political system "became a deadly germ" for Hobbes' theory of state—with which Schmitt to a large extent identified. For, "only a few years after the appearance of the 'Leviathan' the eye of the first liberal Jew fell on the scarcely visible fracture." And later, too, Schmitt stated, it was "above all . . . the restless spirit of the Jew which knew how to decisively evaluate the situation" (p. 92). It is clear enough that here we have a mixture of conspiracy theory construct—the belief in the political power of the term—and a weakened form of conspiracy theory—the Jewish spirit.

The irony of history would have it that Carl Schmitt himself became affected after 1945, for with his belief he was a victim of a typical illusion of intellectuals, which in Schmitt's case was decisive in leading him to cooperate at the beginning of the Third Reich. At that time he greatly exaggerated his role and influence in the same way that his opponents exaggerate them today—a fact that Hannah Arendt pointed out in 1955 (p. 339). I would like to quote Hugo Ball (1923/24, p. 263) at length because his characterization of Schmitt is valid for the closeness of other political thinkers to conspiracy theory constructs:

He is an ideologist with a rare power of persuasion. He possesses a personal, almost private system which he wishes to endow with permanence. He groups all life's facts, groups his whole experience around one single basic conviction—that ideas master life, that life can never be ordered and constructed according to its own conditions, but only according to free, unconditioned, even conditioning insight, that is to say according to ideas.

The points that connect conspiracy theory in society and politics with conspiracy theory constructs in the science of history and indeed other sciences, are:

1. The underestimation of the complexity and dynamics of historical processes.
2. The belief that one can ascribe in a linear manner the results of actions to certain intentions, in other words that the active parties are more in control of their actions than they actually are.
3. The connection of two or more historical facts by a causal nexus that, in the end, is not demonstrable.

Universal-Historical Phases or a Universal-Historical Caesura in the 18th Century?

Conspiracy theories, as other interpretation patterns and explanations of the world, sometimes experience boom periods and other times obvious slump periods (see discussion in Chapter 2). With a degree of certainty such periods can be assigned to specific historical contexts and constellations. I would like to approach the historical context of conspiracy theory in a way that at first sight may seem not only to be a detour but even to be the wrong direction because I shall begin not with concrete examples but with general historical definitions.

First, it is obvious to anyone with even a superficial knowledge of the historical multiplicity of conspiracy theories, to just what extent they spread universally through time, social structures of some duration, and through classes.

Second, we are dealing with a phenomenon that in high cultures cannot be clearly assigned only to the elite culture or only to the folk-culture, that is to say, at James Scott's (1977) suggestion to the "great tradition" or to the "little tradition."

Third, we meet conspiracy theories in so-called primitive cultures as well as in high culture; only in the latter they are more elaborate and in some cases even bear features of a scientific paradigm. In Europe—to which I am restricting my examples—they can be observed since the high Middle Ages. That the present-day political period is not appropriate to conspiracy theories can only be claimed by the most incorrigible optimists. Furthermore, I believe that the thesis that conspiracy theories have to do with archaic or atavistic structures is of little value to knowledge or enlightenment; such a thesis only supports a dangerous optimism. Man's instinctive nature can be formed, but not eliminated.

Fourth, it is striking that those who believe in and/or spread conspiracy theories cannot be separated from those who do not, not even by means of political categories. One can find adherents of such theories in all "camps": right and left, reactionary and progressive, fascist and communist.

Fifth, in regard to the area to which they refer, such theories cannot be restricted to foreign policy, home policy, economics, or culture.

Sixth, the emergence and spread of conspiracy theories was obviously not greatly influenced by the universal-historical caesura whose core period extended from 1750 to 1850. Different authors have called this period by different names and accentuated different aspects: Max Weber spoke of the occidental rationalization process and of the demystification of a religious-metaphysical view of the world, Karl Polanyi (1944) spoke of the "great transformation," Reinhart Koselleck (1972)

of the "Sattelzeit" (or better: *Kammzeit*), John W. Bennett (1976) of the "ecological transition," Jürgen Habermas (1981) of the "decoupling of system and life world." That this fundamental breach in continuity, registered in almost all realms of life, does not seem to have had similar effects in our area of research is all the more astonishing as the cognitive reorientation that went hand in hand with it would lead us to expect the disappearance or at least the weakening in strength of conspiracy theories. But the opposite seems to be the case!

One could also formulate the reverse theory and claim that conspiracy theories in the exact sense have only existed since the universal-historical caesura of the 18th century, for previous to that it was necessary to resort to transcendental and theological elements in order to construct them and only later could purely immanent conspirators be identified—for example Freemasons, Jacobins, Russians, Socialists. Such a theory, however, collides with empirical fact, namely that there were immanent conspiracy theories before this, for example the widespread conviction in 18th century France that the King and his councillors had conspired to raise the price of bread. Such a thesis is difficult to explain systematically, for conspirators definitely belong to the realm of the social imaginary even if they never really existed, as with devils and witches, or did actually exist, as with Freemasons and Jacobins.

It can be stated with certainty that a transition took place from metaphysical to worldly conspiracy theories. The way for this transition was paved, on the part of the authorities, by the peasant revolts of the 17th and 18th centuries, and on the part of the lower classes by the "famine plot persuasion" in 18th century France.

In the following I would like to name some of the features of this social paradigm change. In societies of the traditional type, the social synthesis or social context is determined primarily by norms, hence such societies are also called norm-integrated. Characteristic for such societies is a norm-universalism (Grießinger, 1981). Within this norm-integrated cosmos, events—whether bound to observable actions or not—are directly attributed to individuals or groups. Thus it is believed that intentions coincide with the actions of subjects, or conversely, that one can draw conclusions from the results of actions about the intentions of their supposed perpetrators.

This belief was reflected in the relationship to history: Active subject and reference subject were identical. Because this was so, one could learn from history, whose constellations were assumed to be recurring continually if in another form. *Historia magistra vitae* (Koselleck, 1967), so the directive topos.

In the Modern Era, norm-universalism has been dismantled and replaced by norm-pluralism. The social synthesis is provided by the market, hence our modern society is also called market-integrated. With the success of this new integration modus, the ability increases to differentiate objective structures and processes, and thus structural interests, from the intentions of the active subject and their results. In the realm of history, active subject and reference subject are separate: Our history is no longer identical with our intended goals. This reorientation process runs parallel to the emergence of historicism. The insight gained is that each historical situation is unique, thus a historical truth is true only once. History does not repeat itself so that one can only learn indirectly from it.

The result of this cognitive reorientation is that the belief that through conscious action alone we could influence the historical process is replaced by the insight that our history is not that of our intentions, and that our actions are often the result of motives (structural, desymbolized, etc.) that cannot be represented in the area of the subjectivity of action. In other words, a cognitive dichotomy arises between action and behavior.

In light of such reorientations, apparently opposing the spread of conspiracy theories, there are still several possible answers to the question why they nevertheless have had such a boom since the French Revolution. One answer might be that this boom is to be attributed to a process that Adorno and Horkheimer, in 1947, called the "Dialectic of the Enlightenment," and of which much is being talked about again today in the face of the new wave of Irrationalism (Groh, 1986; Habermas, 1981). Another possible answer might be that conspiracy theories belong to the social imaginary of a society (Castoriadis, 1975) and correspond to anthropologically deep-seated needs of orientation in the world, needs that were not affected by the universal-historical epoch of the 18th and 19th centuries.

A tentative result of our considerations to date is that the explosiveness, the social and political extent, and unbroken relevance of conspiracy theories lie obviously in their being ubiquitous and timeless, in their being easily spread "from above" due to the fact that they were always believed, and passed on "below," apparently relevant in every stratum or class to action and the search for meaning. Such theories have shown themselves to be immune to cognitive reorientation. Or is this impression misleading? Is there a stronger process of change in history that is only visible to those who observe the historical context in which some of these theories arose and spread?

References

References for Chapter 1 are combined with references for Chapter 2 on pp. 34–37.

Chapter 2

The Temptation of Conspiracy Theory, or: Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

Part II: Case Studies*

Dieter Groh

The transition to this empirical section is made with the question: To which historical situation is research into conspiracy theory indebted? One would perhaps expect that due to the fact that the core or decisive moment in the national-socialist world view was of a conspiratorial-theoretical nature, namely the thesis of the Jewish world conspiracy, this would have elicited a boom in scientific research after World War II. Yet in the first decades after 1945 there was little evidence of this. After more-or-less partial preparatory works, as far as I can see, Norman Cohn was the first to publish a scientifically adequate presentation of the genesis of the myth of the Jewish world conspiracy and the fabrication of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" in his book *Warrant for Genocide* in 1967. A year later, Leon Poliakov followed suit in Volume 3 of his *History of Antisemitism* (1968, pp. 289–298) with a summary of the genesis of the modern conspiracy theory before and after the French Revolution, above all, of the thesis of the Freemason-Jewish world conspiracy. Then, in 1970, the works of Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723–1939* and of Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason. Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790–1970* appeared. In 1976, Johannes Rogalla von Bieberstein published a book in Germany with the promising title, *The Thesis of Conspiracy, 1776–1945*. However, basically he only dealt with one single conspiracy theory—that put forward by Abbé Barruel (1797/1798) and others after the French Revolution: Freemasons and Jews, Illuminati and Jacobins had conspired to bring about the revolution. I do not wish to minimize the scientific achievement of these studies when I say that their value for the understanding of history will only then be fully evident when we can clearly observe the full extent and variety of conspiracy theories since the Middle Ages.

I cannot, however, fulfill this urgent task in this brief review, which represents only a beginning and is intended to explore whether or not it would be worthwhile ordering our present information chronologically and systematically in regard to theories of conspiracy.

*Translated by Pauline Cumbers.

The "Jewish Conspiracy" in the Late Middle Ages

The close connection between crisis and conspiracy theory becomes manifest with the first large-scale plague wave in Europe in the middle of the 14th century. In their search for the "origins" of this disastrous epidemic, contemporaries considered all sorts of things as being responsible for it, including the philosophy of William of Ockham, which in the first half of the 14th century, from a skeptical point of view, separated the unity of belief and knowledge provided by Thomas Aquinas and thus fundamentally left God out of things (Leff, 1956). It was no wonder that in this search one was immediately confronted with Christianity's classical outsider group, the Jews (Poliakov, 1966, pp. 104–114). Since the middle of the 12th century, they were considered as a group that had initiated a "diabolical conspiracy" against Christianity. Among the many features of this conspiracy was the ritual murder of Christian children in order to use their blood and organs—such as heart and liver—for therapeutic and magic purposes, and the blasphemous desecration and destruction of Christian cult objects such as hosts, crucifixes, and so forth (Poliakov, 1966; Trachtenberg, 1943).

"Evidence" for the truth of such accusations as well as further "evidence" of the metaphysical harmfulness and badness of the Jews—such as their smell, appearance, and so on—confirmed and spread the belief that the Jews had conspired with the Devil to plague Christianity with harm, calamity, and sicknesses. In these centuries, a type of "Jew pattern" was developed with its origins in a more folk-cultural conception, whereas the clergy and the authorities were not always united in their attitude: Sometimes they encouraged the hatred of Jews, which exploded in pogroms; sometimes they tried—mostly in vain—to protect them from murder and persecution.

The reaction to the first large plague wave in Europe in 1347/48 corresponded completely with this pattern. The Jews, it was claimed, had conspired with the Devil, whose agents they were, against Christianity, in order to stamp it out by means of a poisonous plague. The fact that the Jews themselves were equally badly decimated by the plague—as Pope Clement VI argued in a Papal Bull in 1348 on their behalf—helped just as little as the efforts of German princes and town authorities to protect them. Huge persecutions and pogroms began in 1348 and the next years can be looked upon as the absolute climax of medieval persecutions of the Jews. Very often these persecutions and murders were not only tolerated by the authorities but even encouraged. The motives vary from the channeling of accumulated aggression in the face of the plague to the desire to acquire Jewish property (Graus, 1981; Haverkamp, 1981). Toward the end of the Middle Ages, Europe was almost free of Jews. The persecution of the Jews and that of witches seem in their origins to be related (see Moraw, 1985), especially in regard to the necessary prerequisite that a group of outsiders that could become scapegoats did not exist naturally. Such a group had to be created. For this reason I am of the opinion that the elimination of heretics in the 13th century and the expulsion of Jews in the 14th century were the conditions *sine qua non* for the origin of the witch pattern. This pattern had the advantage of being ubiquitous. Heretics and Jews had been eliminated or expelled, but there were witches everywhere because one could "create" them.

Witch Pattern and Witch-Hunt

At the time of the persecution of witches in the late Middle Ages and the early Modern Era, we meet for the first time in European history a conspiracy theory as the kernel of a consistent interpretation pattern (Becker, Bovenschen, & Brackert, 1977; Cohn, 1975; Delumeau, 1978; Favret, 1971; Ginzburg, 1966; Honegger, 1978; Kunze, 1982; Mandrou, 1968; Macfarlane, 1970; Meili, 1980; Midelfort, 1972; Muchembled, 1978; Russel, 1972; Thomas, 1970; Trevor-Roper, 1967). The belief in witches, that is to say in persons who by means of certain practices could achieve good and evil in other humans, in animals, in nature, is widespread in all cultures known to us. In Europe, belief in witches belonged to a folk-culture immersed in magic, at a time when patterns of perception, even in the elite culture, were marked by "analogous perception" (A. Schütz) of moral and natural objects: Human acts and natural events were perceived as analogous. In the "great tradition" (see Scott, 1977) of the clerics, however, belief in witches was considered incompatible with Christian belief, with the official doctrine of the Church and canon law, right up into the high Middle Ages. It was even considered to be a superstition, heretical relic to be combated—thus the "Canon Episcopi" at the beginning of the 10th century.

With Thomas Aquinas, Scholasticism and its demonology a complete change took place. In his commentary (1254/1256) to the "Sententiae" of Peter Lombard (1145/1147), Thomas took the first step on the path to the development of a Christian witch pattern: doubt about the reality of the maleficium, of magic, offends against true belief. The Papal Bull of John XXII, "Super illius" (1326), equated witchcraft with heresy and instructed the Inquisition to persecute same. The equation magic = devilish witchcraft = heresy suggested itself more and more to the inquisitors. From the end of the 14th century onward, the reinforcing interaction between treatises on witchcraft and the persecution of witches becomes evident. However, only isolated elements of the later witch pattern or combinations of such elements come to light. Later there followed the paradigmatic elaboration in one of the first bestsellers in the history of books—in the "Malleus Maleficarum" or "Witches' Hammer" of 1487, compiled by the Dominicans and Inquisitors Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Institoris as a commentary to the infamous Papal Witch-Bull of 1484. Innocent VIII had installed Institoris and Sprenger as Inquisitors in Germany and had listed the most important malefici in his Bull: It appeared as an introduction in all printed editions of the *Witches' Hammer* up to the end of the 17th century. What was new was the systematization of the witch image: the pact with the Devil, completed by sexual intercourse; the thus acquired destructive magic against man and beast; as well as participation in the witches' Sabbath by female witches as a rule. Also new was the systematization of the actions attributed and interpreted, with reference to a causal and universal explanation of disturbances in the order of Church and Society and Nature, an order considered to be harmonious.

The most important elements of the mid-European witch pattern—the pattern in England diverges somewhat—were "maleficium" or magic, apostasy or fall away from Christian belief, pact with the devil, Satan cult, attendance at a Sabbath. A

combination of these elements gained significance against the background of an increasingly dualistic view of the world with its origins in St. Augustin's Two-Realm Doctrine: The Devil—to be seen as the prototype of the conspirator—is trying with the help of witches to win back his lost kingdom from God. As a rule, neither the majority of the “witches” nor their persecutors doubted the existence of such a conspiracy, which was confirmed through the confessions of the accused. Despite unsatisfactory sources—the subjective and real convictions of the accused can only be deciphered with difficulty in the protocols—this opinion is still widely held in present-day research. Both judges and inquisitors felt they were in the front line of battle with this devilish conspiracy, with the forces of light and darkness. Many state administrators and judges in the 16th and 17th centuries believed they could best serve the emerging prince-state by persecuting in these “witches” insubordinate subjects and destroying them—thus keeping the other subjects in fear and obedience, the latter being an unconscious motive. Many academics devoted their whole life's work as theologians, lawyers, or doctors to the completion of that imaginary “*Summa Daemonologiae*” and its transformation into persecution practices.

The witch pattern remained unchanged during the high tide of the persecutions, that is, between about 1490 and 1640. Jean Bodin's *Demonomanie des Sorciers* of 1580 constituted a new “scientifically” revised edition of the *Witches' Hammer*. In 1630, the pinnacle of persecution was reached. Satan's agents were everywhere, how otherwise could one explain that despite increasingly horrible persecution the “witches” were increasing in number? Their protectors must be everywhere—in court, in the universities, even on the throne itself. At the time of the mass extermination more and more lawyers, judges, magistrates, and priests ended up at the stake along with “typical witches.” The witch hunt had gotten out of hand; everyone was a potential victim: “once the trials are continued enthusiastically no one—regardless of his family, wealth or poverty, social position or status—is safe today, especially if he or she has even just one defamatory enemy who casts suspicion on him and accuses him of magic practices” (Friedrich von Spee, one of the most vociferous and courageous opponents of the witch delirium, in his book *Cautio Criminalis*, which appeared anonymously in 1631, question 51, §46).

This excess, and the corresponding fear arising from it, was one of the reasons for the skepticism about the existence of a satanic conspiracy, which became more and more widespread from the middle of the 17th century—a skepticism that up until then had been a matter for courageous individuals only. Another reason may have been that the mostly unconscious intimidation motive on the part of the authorities was becoming counterproductive, given the large number of victims and their social status. This applied mainly to those lands that had lost a large section of their population during the Thirty Years War. It must be pointed out that this process of enlightenment ran from the top levels down to the lower social classes: At first it was the high courts and high clergy who expressed doubts about the procedure and content of the witch trials; frequently they met with opposition from the lower courts and lower clergy. But Satan's conspiracy and his “fifth column,” the “witches,” who for two centuries had held large parts of Europe in their terrific grip, began to lose their persuasive power. Gradually, witch trials became mere episodes. The question of

why the witch delirium subsided at this time and then quickly disappeared cannot be answered conclusively. Research is, above all, engaged in its emergence, which itself provides the students with enough unsolved problems.

Almost all the authors examining the causes and conditions of the witch hunts of the later Middle Ages and early Modern Era agree that these are to be found in cultural, religious, social, and economic processes of change, which made a cognitive reorientation necessary, because they destabilized the world view valid until then. The witch pattern had the function of replacing incomprehensible phenomena by comprehensible ones by equating their origins with the intentions of certain persons defined as “witches.” The first step toward the realization of the witch pattern was to place concrete, evil persons in the place of intangible demons and to punish them for their supposed actions.

The witch madness, and the heretic movement that preceded it, along with their persecution by the Inquisition, can be seen as answers or reactions to a crisis brought about by a phase of change with its beginnings back in the 11th century (Keller, 1986). The effects were later considerably strengthened by the crisis of Christianity at the end of the 13th century (Le Goff, 1971), by the population problem at the beginning of the 14th century (Duby, 1962), and the effects of the plagues since the middle of the 14th century, caused mainly by overpopulation, and, finally by the Reformation and its direct results—the Religious Civil Wars.

Persecution of witches grew out of the persecution of heretics, which began with the church's battle against the Cathars (Borst, 1953). Important elements, such as magic and pact with the Devil, could be taken over into the witch pattern from the accusation catalogue against the heretics, and the prosecuting institution, the Inquisition, which was established in 1231/1233 (Shannon, 1983), remained the same. Essential for the witch pattern was that dialectic of priesthood and laity, high religion and folk religion described by Max Weber (1921): The more a church seeks to impose its aspirations to power, the stricter that church must regulate the life of the laity in accordance with the divine will. It can only do this by complying in its teaching with the notions of the laity and thus systematically absorbing the most traditional, that is the magic forms, of the folk religion.

In previous attempts to explain the genesis and spread of the witch pattern too little attention has been paid to the interaction between “great tradition” and “little tradition”—thematized in another context by James Scott. Such an interaction can be well demonstrated at village level: The destruction of traditional institutions in the course of socioeconomic change created great potential for conflict inside the “solidarity and terror community” (Jeggli, 1977) of the village (see Macfarlane, 1970; Schormann, 1981, 1983; Thomas, 1970; Unverhau, 1983). A concrete example of this change is the dissolution of the traditional norm of neighborly help in the face-to-face community. In cases where a person, asked for help by a needy neighbor, an old or sick person, did not want to or could not give this help, his or her feeling of guilt at having offended against the recognized and internalized norm is altered into the notion that the person seeking help is outside the norm, this occurring through a process of projection. If in the time following such a refusal the person suffered loss or injury, this was attributed to the evil power of the person whose

request was refused. At this level—folk belief in good and bad magical powers—there was no notion of a pact with the Devil or other such elements, which became characteristics of the high-level witch pattern. It was the denouncement of a person as a witch that linked up the harm-magic pattern of the “little tradition” with the witch pattern of the “great tradition.” In almost all cases, the fate of the denounced person was clear: an inquisitorial trial, during which the accused—at first without, then with, torture—was “questioned,” “guaranteed” the conclusion of that trial, that is, burning at the stake. The interaction between folk belief and high religion first succeeded on the basis of varying interpretation patterns—harm-magic, pact with Satan. However, in the course of time, the witch pattern developed a totalizing, integrating power that absorbed all other patterns and interpretations, as Carlo Ginzburg (1966) demonstrated with the example of the Benandanti.

Geography, chronology, and high points of the witch madness are still unclear in regard to their causes, while, at least for the early phase, a typical profile of the witch type can be delineated: It was usually a woman of about 60, belonging to the lower class of a village but not to the lowest, often single and with some obvious features. In this profile we can easily detect scapegoat features. It is no wonder that the witch pattern could be functionalized by the village community, the town, and also by the emerging state out of concrete local or power interests. But to see the genesis of the witch pattern in such secondary effects falls itself into the realm of conspiratorial assumption.

Elements of conspiracy theories have also slipped into other scientific attempts at explanation of the witch madness and witch-hunts. However I do not wish to deny that such attempts also contain moments of truth. One could refer to the overemphasis on the antifemale components of the witch-hunts leaning toward an “anti-feminist” conspiracy by men (Becker, Bovenschen, & Brackert, 1977; Honegger, 1978). The thesis that the witch-hunts, above all since the second half of the 16th century—that is, their highpoint—can be attributed to the intention of eliminating knowledge of abortion among midwives and other “wise” women in order to increase the population greatly diminished by the religious wars, such a thesis, too, has conspiratorial features (Heinsohn, Knieper, & Steiger, 1979). Witch-hunting would thus be identical with midwife-hunting in the service of a pre-modern populationism, an equation for which Jean Bodin stands as chief witness, which, however, clashes with empirical fact.

The “Conspirations” of Rebellious Peasants in the 17th and 18th Centuries

Once one got used to treating conspiracy theories functionally also—as in the case of the persecution of the Jews in the 14th century and then the ensuing witch-hunts—then it seemed reasonable to apply such theories in all conflict areas. Whether this application was conscious—in the sense of a manipulation—or whether there was belief in a conspiracy, can only be decided individually. During the peasant rebellions in Germany in the 17th and 18th centuries, the princes and

their advisors constantly referred to conspiracy and ringleader plots (Elbs, 1987; Troßbach, 1986). The “plague of rebellion” could be reduced to “plots” and conspiracies. This gave the authorities a double choice—one explanation for the popularity and spread of conspiracy theories: On the one hand it was not necessary to look for deep-seated reasons, an advantage that explains the continuing popularity of ringleader theories. Deeper-seated reasons—had they been at all conceivable in the interpretation-pattern of the time—could have pointed to personal failure. As it was, one could excuse the vast majority of the subjects involved in revolt from guilt, isolate the ringleaders who had conspired, and, as a deterrent, punish them. That protected the main economic source of production, people.

The reason for the spread of the belief in a conspiracy—though at village level and not centrally directed—during the formation phase of the early modern state, especially in the 17th century, points to its critical situation. The reactions of the subjects—categorized by the authorities as “sedition,” “tumult”—to increasing burdens inside a stationary “peasant economy” could be better mastered with the conspiracy theory in the sense of an integration into the interpretation pattern of the authorities.

The Famine Plot “Persuasion” in 18th Century France

If in the European context we go one century ahead of the last boom in witch-hunting, we meet the next historical boom in conspiracy theories, that is to say, the “famine plot persuasion in 18th century France” (Kaplan, 1976, 1982). Those affected by scarcity and hunger—which were thought to be results of a conspiracy concerning food prices—reacted with “hunger riots.” Let us look at this chronologically and geographically: The belief that the scarcity of food and grains could be attributed to a conspiracy among influential people was not limited to France (see Thompson, 1971; Wong, 1983), nor to the 18th century, be that in France (see Hauser, 1920/1929; Reddy, 1977; Tilly, 1971) or anywhere else (see Brunt, 1966; Pirenne, 1926, p. 274; Scott, 1976, p. 116). However, if we examine the reasons for and conditions of this specific form of conspiracy theory then it becomes clear that its high point in the 18th century was not a matter of chance. Whether, however, its spread in France was due to a particular characteristic of this country cannot yet be explained.

Let us deal in our sketch with the results of this belief in a conspiracy. These results were strongly reflected in contemporary sources, that is, the “hunger riots.” “Bargaining by riot” between the plebeian masses and the authorities (under which term were also subsumed “setting the price riots” and the “taxation populaire,” not to mention other outbreaks of violence which, at first sight, appeared tumultuous and “spontaneous”) had—especially in England, America, and France—an almost honorable tradition. The rebellions, which to the decoding eye of the social historian obeyed quite specific rules, fall back on the tradition of a “moral economy,” particularly when such riots arose out of a scarcity or lack of food. This notion of a “moral economy” legitimized the use of violence. Within the “moral economy,” which since the 18th century had been replaced by the “market economy” and its

theory "political economy," the idea of "sufficient food" or of the "good and proper life" for all members of the community was of central importance. It was *the* regulative social idea. If such a traditional society as France in the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century is caught up more and more in the mechanisms of a developing modern market system, of an emerging market integration, and if a constantly increasing portion of its working population, by definition poor, has to supply an ever-increasing portion of its need for food on the market because it no longer produces it itself, being employed in factories or protoindustrial trades, then the problem of a just price or *prix juste* assumes a central position in the concept of a "moral economy" (see Kaplan, 1976; Thompson, 1971; Tilly, 1971). The assumption that the price for basic foodstuffs should not exceed a certain level was just as decisive for the outbreak of the "hunger riots" as the brutal experience of hunger (Williams, 1976). This was so even though in accordance with conditions recognized by the masses such as crop failure, delay in sowing, and so on, the price could have been adequate.

At this point, the belief emerged that influential people had conspired to hoard grain or export it, increasing their prices and profit and subjecting others to hunger—and that at a time of rupture in political and social development: Increasing commercialization under the banner of trade capitalism corresponded in the political sphere to the widening of the administrative apparatus. Classical absolutism had been transformed into "administrative power," called by the contemporaries "despotism" and experienced as a constantly increasing interference by the state administration into almost all realms of life. To put it more concretely, the intensive and widespread emergence of the "famine plot persuasion" in France corresponded to that period in the second half of the 18th century when within French bureaucracy free trade began to assert itself, which at that time meant physiocratic tendencies that strove to abandon the prices of food supply to the free play of the economic forces, that is, of the market in the systematic sense. This happened, furthermore, at a point when the population was clearly growing, and as already mentioned, an increasing number of the members of the lower classes had to buy their basic foodstuff, grain, at market prices. If, however, one leaves the price to the market, in the modern sense, then it can be affected by "distant circumstances," that is, the fluctuation in price is no longer perceived by the affected, as was the influence of weather, season, war, plague, and so on. This constantly receding sensual evidence of the factors determining price was then substituted for by the thesis of a conspiracy of the rich and powerful against the poor.

Such a belief gained its own evidence, apparent or real, and its strength from a number of circumstances and factors. We should mention primarily:

1. Belief in the sacral power of the King to preserve peace and secure nourishment for the subjects, a concept stemming from feudalism, still present though not as unbroken as in the Middle Ages, at the time of the *rois thaumaturges*. The remnant form of this belief was enough to make of the "famine plot persuasion" an essential element in the outbreak of the revolution of 1789. By means of the assumed participation of the King and the Court in this conspiracy the monarch offended against a consensual taboo: He desecrated the bread. Thus a bond

between him and the people was broken. Thus, subjectively regressive behavior oriented around traditional, paternalistic values characteristic of an immobile society, became transformed objectively through the conspiracy theory into a subversive, indeed revolutionary, factor.

2. Increasing expansion of the state administration and its frequent intrusions into everyday life, caused the state to appear more and more omnipotent. However, a state that allowed its subjects to starve was a contradiction. This contradiction could only be explained by the conviction that the state administration was involved in the conspiracy against the people.
3. In the Ancien Regime such a conviction could be supported by a number of actual or apparent cases or events, starting with the clientele system on which the structure of politics and administration rested, and going on to the numerous cases at local level and regional level, where in fact urgently required grain was transported out of areas suffering from scarcity and even hunger, in accordance with market mechanisms and that meant with the notion of personal gain. The highest royal officials played their part in making known examples. After each hunger crisis, supposed or actual guilty parties inside and outside state administration were actually named and more-or-less harshly punished.

In comparison with the witch hysteria, the version of the conspiracy theory dealt with previously has, from our point of view, more bearing on reality. Within folk culture it functioned as a means of dealing with the transition from a subsistence economy to a market economy that had its basis in concrete everyday experience. In a norm-integrated society it was subjectively consistent to view whatever happened to one as being the result of the deliberate actions of someone else, and thus to "explain" it. Those mainly affected by the transition regarded the state as guarantor of their subsistence, a traditional role that the state of that time was no longer in a position to fulfill. In regard to its legitimacy, the political balance of the Ancien Regime was becoming more and more negative. The demand for satisfaction was presented by the Third Estate in the revolution of 1789.

The French Revolution: A Conspiracy Against State and Religion

The French Revolution itself gave rise to the next version of the conspiracy theory, which was developed within the "great tradition" but later taken up by folk-culture. Freemasons, anarchists, and Jacobins were conspiring to destroy church and state in France, whereupon all other countries would follow suit. Numerous "revolutionary conspiracy" offshoots of this version reached their culmination in the belief in a Freemason-Jewish world conspiracy, which in our own century constituted the core of the national-socialist view of the world.

Let us consider a few historical points of departure. The epoch of religious civil wars ended in the 17th century with the separation of the moral and political realms: Religion and moral-philosophical convictions were separated from politics, declared to be private matters and banished from the public realm. However, one must differentiate between private and secret. In the period of princely absolutism, secrecy was a recognized and necessary dimension of political activity; political

council and actions were secret; the *arcana imperii*, the art of statesmanship and government were the essence of politics (Hölscher, 1979). The philosophy of the Enlightenment, which brought the political practice of the Ancien Regime and its legitimizing church before the court of reason and put it on trial in the name of morality, tended to undo again the separation of the moral and political realms (Koselleck, 1959). Under the conditions of the Ancien Regime such oppositional activity was only possible in secret, at most in the semipublic realm of the salons (Groh, 1984). Even in places where, contrary to France, enlightened princes reigned and/or the unity of throne and altar was not so strict, enlightenment nevertheless assumed an aura of secrecy—especially in the case of the Freemason lodges and associations of the 18th century (Halévi, 1984; Reinalter, 1983; Roberts, 1972; Schindler, 1982). They formed an important socialization agency of the “social century” (Im Hof, 1982) on its way to the bourgeois society of—ideally—enlightened and equal citizens.

From the middle of the 18th century, the Freemason lodges, along with the radical Illuminati founded by Adam Weishaupt in Bavaria in 1776 (van Dülmen, 1975) assumed, in the fantasy of monarchist governments and the emerging publications of counterenlightenment, indeed revolutionary color, the aura of a continually expanding and threatening conspiracy as a result of their secret organization form, which touched on a prerogative of state power: Convinced of the “philosophical conspiracy,” of the “general conspiracy against religion,” it was believed that the “philosophical sect which one had been observing for some time, was closely associated with Freemasonry” (Bieberstein, 1976, pp. 37, 80, 82). Within a few decades, Freemasonry became the “ideological, organizational and social substratum of the conspiracy thesis” (pp. 57–70).

The fear among the Catholic hierarchy and ex-Jesuits, and among many state offices and princes, of a general conspiracy against throne and altar, the source of which was localized by many Catholic authors in Protestant countries, above all England, reached its climax and first apparent confirmation with the outbreak of the French Revolution and its swift radicalization in the “reign of terror.” None of the authors of the widely read counterrevolutionary, indeed counterenlightenment tracts, be it Edmund Burke (1790), Abbé Le Franc (1791, 1792), or Joseph de Maistre (1794) lost an opportunity to refer to the conspiracies of the “philosophers,” that is, the Enlightenment, and of the Freemasons and Illuminati (for examples, see Bieberstein 1976, pp. 95–109). Such references easily caught the attention of their avid readers, as did the claim that a believer-ambassador of the Illuminati had visited Paris just before the outbreak of revolution—which was correct—in order to win over the Jacobins to the plan for world conspiracy harbored by the Illuminati—which was totally imagined—or the claim that Cagliostro, a well-known swindler and magician of the time was the “Head of the Illuminati” (pp. 89–95).

The former Jesuit Augustin Barruel, in his *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* published in exile in London in 1797/1798, lent form to the various elements of the thesis of the Freemason-Enlightenment conspiracy that had emerged in the middle of the century and, since 1789, had become known as the Illuminati-Jacobin conspiracy; a form that was to be extremely influential during the following decades.

If the genesis of this book reads like the history of a counterrevolutionary strategy emerging mainly in Germany, France, and England, and engineered with a circumspection worthy of the supposed wire-pullers of the Revolution, then the list of the persons who participated in it sounds like a *Gotha* of the international counter-revolution (Bieberstein, 1976, pp. 109–119). I have found no evidence to show that Barruel and his patrons and supporters did not actually believe in the reality of the conspiracy described and “proved” by him, including Burke. Barruel’s bible of the counterrevolution became a bestseller, was reprinted in France up to 1837, translated into nine languages and republished many times. By 1800, the sixth edition in French had appeared in Hamburg. I would like to quote Barruel’s main thesis (1797/1798, pp. XV–XVIII):

Le résultat de ces recherches et de toutes les preuves que j’ai puisées, surtout dans les archives des Jacobins et de leurs premiers maîtres, a été que leur secte et leurs conspirations ne sont en elles-mêmes que l’ensemble, la coalition d’une triple secte, d’une triple conspiration dans lesquelles, longtemps avant la révolution, se tramèrent et se tramèrent encore la ruine de l’autel, celle du trône, et enfin celle de toute la société civile.

1. Bien des années avant cette révolution française, des hommes qui se firent appeler philosophes conspirèrent contre le Dieu de l’Evangile, contre tout christianisme, sans exception, sans distinction du Protestant ou du Catholique, de l’Anglican ou du Presbytérien. Cette conspiration avait pour objet essentiel de détruire tous les autels de Jésus-Christ. Elle fut celle des Sophistes de l’incrédulité et de l’impiété.

2. A cette école des Sophistes impies se formèrent bientôt les Sophistes de la rébellion; et ceux-ci à la conspiration de l’impiété contre les autels du Christ, ajoutant la conspiration contre tous les trônes des rois, se réunirent à l’antique secte dont les complots faisaient tout le secret des arrière-loges de la Franc-Maçonnerie, mais qui depuis longtemps se jouait de l’honnêteté même de Maçons conjurés contre le Christ et contre les rois. Cette coalition des adeptes de l’impiété, des adeptes de la rébellion, des adeptes de l’anarchie, forma les clubs des Jacobins; sous ce nom commun désormais à la triple secte, les adeptes réunis continuent à tramer leur triple conspiration contre l’autel, le trône and la société.

Telle fut l’origine, et tels sont les progrès, les complots de cette secte devenue si désastreusement fameuse sous le nom de Jacobins.

L’objet de ces Mémoires sera de dévoiler séparément chacune de ces conspirations, leurs auteurs, leurs moyens, leurs progrès, leurs adeptes et leurs coalitions.

Je sais qu’il faut des preuves, quand on dénonce aux nations des complots de cette nature et de cette importance; c’est parceque je veux insister sur ces preuves et les porter à l’évidence, que je donne à cet ouvrage le titre de Mémoires. Je pouvois me contenter d’écrire l’histoire des Jacobins; je veux que l’histoire elle même puisse trouver dans ces Mémoires le recueil des preuves dont elle aura besoin, et des preuves sur tout démonstratives, des preuves multipliées, extraites plus spécialement des confidences et des archives mêmes des conjurés. Assuré de ces preuves, je ne crains pas de dire aux peuples: à quelque religion, à quelque gouvernement, à quelque rang de la société civile que vous apparteniez, si le Jacobinisme l’emporte, si les projets, les sermens de la secte s’accomplissent, c’en est fait de votre religion et de votre sacerdoce, de votre gouvernement et de vos lois, de vos propriétés et de vos magistrats. Vos richesses, vos champs, vos maisons, jusqu’à vos chaumières, jusqu’à vos enfans, tout cesse d’être à vous. Vous avez cru la révolution terminée en France, et la révolution en France même n’est qu’un premier essai des Jacobins; et les vœux, les sermens, les conspirations du

saw themselves constantly threatened by anarchy, communism, and socialism. Due to the fact that the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 also had social origins and workers were fighting everywhere on the barricades, the "Communist conspiracies of the 19th century" reached a threatening scale, thus the title of a two-volume work published by two Prussian police officers "officially commissioned for use by the police forces in all German federal states" 1853/1854. With a considerable amount of investigatory activity, which *mutatis mutandis* could be compared to that of the Federal Republic of Germany's Investigation Bureau regarding terrorists, anarchists and socialists were kept under surveillance and prosecuted, no distinction being made between the two groups as this was not in the interest of the government. From time to time, the anarchists for their part confirmed the theory of a left-wing antistate, indeed murderous, conspiracy by actually murdering kings and ministers. The assassinations were as ineffective as the motivating ideology naive. Indeed it was a match for the right-wing conspiracy theory, for had it been enough to murder a tsar or a minister in order to unhinge the monarchist-bourgeois state by means of "propaganda of action," the Abbé Barruel and his supporters would have been right in fighting the Illuminati-anarchist-Jacobin world conspiracy with such enthusiasm—from their point of view of course.

Marx satirically used the conspiracy thesis in his famous introductory sentences to the *Communist Manifesto* of February 1848, which refers to the topic of the "communist ghost" frequently mentioned in political publications: "a ghost is haunting Europe—the ghost of communism. All the powers of Europe joined together in the holy hunt for this ghost, the Pope, the Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French radicals and German policemen."

One 19th century statesman who did not believe in conspiracy and ringleader theories was Bismarck. To explain the danger emanating from the Socialists, which from 1878 on he hoped to encounter with a double strategy of suppression and social policies, he used a naturalist metaphor. This metaphor also did not help to further insight into the actual origins of the period of transformation through which Europe was going and the social problems associated with this. Indeed, it was just as suitable for reducing the dissonant perceptions as was the conspiracy theory. Bismarck spoke of the social disease that had infected the healthy body of the people (cited in Groh, 1972, p. 105): "It is not a case of keeping out foreign emissaries, for the disease is among us," when he wrote to Wilhelm I in 1872.

The "Testament" of Peter the Great: The First Fabrication of a Conspiracy Theory

In the face of the boom in conspiracy theories in the 19th century, it is no wonder that it had an influence on foreign policy. One of the best-known examples is the "Testament" of Peter the Great. The unusual effect and fascination of this supposed document lies in the fact that if one presupposed its authenticity one could then interpret the whole of Russian politics, from the year of its origin in 1709 up to the beginning of the 19th century, as being consistent with a plan and actually achieving

its goals. Due to the fact that the actual writer was able to work in the whole history of the 18th century into the text while placing its drafting at the beginning of the 18th century, the whole matter took on great historical value. It was that much easier at the beginning of the 19th century to regard this text as concrete political evidence because contemporary events were being very vaguely described and thus could, under the influence of an immediate threat by Russia, be filled out with almost any concrete content. The realization of the supposed instructions of Peter necessarily intensified the effect of the "Testament," as proceeding according to a plan that seemed already to be successful allowed the expectation of further success in the future. The "Testament" was fabricated among political anti-Russian emigrants in Paris in order to stir up French public opinion and the French government against Russia. It is the first known conspiracy theory, which is an actual forgery and a manipulation in the sense that its authors did not believe in a Russian *conspiracy* to subjugate Europe. The Polish general, Michel Sokolnicki, one of the Poles who in 1795 fled to France in the hope of winning back his fatherland from there, presented his *Aperçu sur la Russie* to the Directoire (Sokolnicki, 1927). France, it is claimed therein, is the only power that can save Europe from the Russian threat. Therefore it is important for its statesmen to know the plan Russia was following toward the enslavement of Europe. When the Poles took over the Russian archives in Warsaw in 1794 friends of his were able to get a glimpse of the "plan made by Peter I to enslave Europe." He, Michel Sokolnicki, wished to reveal this plan as far as his memory allowed him to do so on the basis of the reports of those friends.

In 1811, at the time of preparations for war against Russia, Sokolnicki was called to Paris to take part actively. There he presented Napoleon with his memorandum with the result that the content of the supposed Testament, extended by one paragraph, was launched by Napoleon's propaganda machine (Lesur, 1812). That one paragraph is §8, Lesur referring to the Russian invasion of British India, at that time a topic of anti-Russian publicity. The "Testament" was later very popular in anti-Russian publications in all countries. In 1824 it appeared in Germany, in 1836 (Gailardet) and in 1839 (Chodzko) in France again, and in 1843 in *Nile's Weekly Register* in the United States. German publications mentioned the "Testament" regularly around 1845 and on the occasion of the Russian intervention in Hungary in 1848 it appeared again. Shortly before and during the Crimean War it was printed several times in France, Germany, and England and quoted by all publications dealing with Russia, thus by Marx and Engels in the *New York Times* in 1853. Among Marx's manuscripts is a version of the "Testament" that he took to be authentic (Rubel, 1960). Napoleon III was very active in making it known. Another high point in its popularity was at the beginning of 1860, during the Russian-Turkish War of 1877/1878 it was widespread in England, and at the beginning of the Cold War it was being discussed again in the United States (Lehovitch, 1948). Doubts about its authenticity were first expressed in 1850, and in 1859 one author declared that the "Testament" was forged and that Napoleon I compiled it or at least encouraged its compilation (Breßlau, 1879).

The success, that is, the belief in the authenticity of the Testament and a Russian conspiracy to conquer Europe, can only be understood against the background of the

boom in conspiracy theories following the French Revolution. This boom was used by political emigrants to their own advantage. The astonishing rise of Russia being forecast, especially by contemporary liberal writers since the Restoration, along with the suggestion that Russia would rule the whole world along with America (Groh, 1961), could be more easily explained with the help of the "Testament." Structurally, there was no difference between the belief that Russian politics since Peter I was pursuing successfully a plan to subjugate Europe and the belief that the Illuminati and Freemasons had brought about the French Revolution and were planning world revolution. What the Freemasons and Illuminati, later the Jews and Socialists, were for counterrevolutionary public opinion on the domestic front—namely an enemy—Russia was for liberal democratic opinion on the foreign front: a power to be opposed with all available means in order to prevent the realization of a plan for world dominance.

The Secular Boom Infects a Representative of a Structural History Theory: Karl Marx and the Russian Design to Overthrow Europe

Many contemporaries believed in this plan, contemporaries whose theories or ideologies should have immunized them against such conspiracy theories as they saw the driving force of history in anonymous structures and factors, and not in persons. Yet even Marx followed in Barruel's footsteps, for not only was he convinced of the authenticity of the "Testament" but also of the fact that Palmerston, England's Prime Minister, was being bribed by the Russians. Marx intended to support this thesis, which he took over from the English Near-East specialist David Urquhart (e.g., 1853), by means of a documentation put together from the archives of the British Museum. His expedition into the world of the history of diplomacy allowed him to "discover" that cooperation between England and Russia, resp. Russian influence on English politics, dated from the time of Peter I (Marx, 1954; Rjazanov, 1909; Rubel, 1960). Thus a connection was made to his "Testament," and a new conspiracy theory born. Marx's *Revelations on the Diplomatic History of the 18th Century*, the result of his archive studies, appeared in 1856 in newspapers published by David Urquhart, in which Marx also published his articles on Palmerston in 1853 and 1854.

To understand this assumption by Marx, which at first sight seems absurd, it is necessary to sketch—albeit briefly—Russia's role in the political ideas of the West-European liberal-democratic and socialist intelligentsia of the time (Groh, 1961). Their hatred of Russia reached a high point in the revolutionary days of 1848: A war against Russia was one of the constant foreign policy demands. Russia was seen as the bulwark of reaction. The success of the liberal-democratic and forecasted socialist and communist revolutions in Europe seemed impossible as long as the Tsar reigned in Russia. The political and social advancement of Europe was intertwined—if only negatively—with the fate of Russia. During the Crimean War, Marx and Engels led a bitter literary battle, above all in the *New York Tribune*, against Russia in accordance with this conception and also against Palmerston, who they claimed

was being bribed because he was not leading the war against Russia with enough energy. Apparently Marx and Engels believed what they wrote about Palmerston and obviously Marx believed in what he thought he had discovered in the British Museum about the diplomatic conspiracy existing since the days of Peter I between Russia and England, the continuation of which he saw represented in the 19th century in Palmerston's policies toward Russia. In their correspondence we can find only evidence for the earnestness of their conviction and no counterevidence!

We may assume two reasons for their stance: The first is a result of their hatred of Russia, which they shared with all the liberal-democratic publications of the time. The second reason is that they could not understand what politics in the sense of cabinet wars and politics in the sense of party interests meant, as was the case at that time in English foreign policy. Palmerston had to appear to them as a "traitor" to the cause of progress and liberation of Europe from the bulwark of reaction = Russia because he did not support a war with all means, that is, a "total war." Marx and Engels were so blinded by their Russia-phobia that they believed Palmerston's stand and that of English politics could only be explained either by personal gain (bribery) or by a conspiracy plan stretching back into the 18th century. The basis of this Russia-phobia, however, was the conviction that Russia was an obstacle to the coming European revolution, first the democratic revolution and then the socialist one that would proceed from this. Without a decisive defeat of Russia, there would be no victory for the revolution in Western Europe.

On closer observation the marginal anecdote about Marx's dabbling in the history of diplomacy makes a certain sense against the background of the boom in conspiracy theories as well as that of a revolutionary theory.

The Theory of Labor-Aristocracy: Conspiracy Theory in the Realm of Materialist Theory of History

Of more central importance for Marxist revolutionary theory, however, was another theoretical conspiracy construct first worked out by Lenin and then taken over by other Marxists, namely the theory of the workers' aristocracy. This thesis had the function of explaining the spread of reformism in the European workers' movement before World War I and the "failure" of the socialist parties and trade unions at the outbreak of war. Either the decline of socialism, whatever one understood by this, or the fact that the socialist or communist revolution was not yet successful could be explained by means of the thesis of the workers' aristocracy. It all had to do with a postponement of revolution with a *kat-echont*. This theory, however, lacks all explanatory power because up to today no one can say exactly from among which workers the aristocracy recruited its members nor which actual results its behavior had (Beier, 1976; Moorhouse, 1978; Reid, 1978). In the end it seems to be a regressive version of Lenin's avant-garde theory whose one service was to point out a gap in explanatory efforts.

In an article written in October 1916, "Imperialism and the Split in Social Democracy" (1964, pp. 102–118), Lenin referred to J. A. Hobson's *Imperialism* (1902), his main guarantor in Imperialist matters. Regarding the parasitic nature of

imperialism, Hobson wrote that the latter exploits the dependent countries on the one hand "to enrich its ruling class" and on the other "to buy the obedience of the lower classes through bribery." Lenin applied this to the contemporary situation: In 1902 Hobson perceived exactly what is now happening in another form (p. 107),

namely that the *Opportunists* (Social chauvinists) along with the imperialist Bourgeoisie are working together towards an imperialist Europe on the backs of Asia and Africa, that the *Opportunists* represent objectively that part of the petit bourgeoisie and certain strata of the working class which are being *bribed* by means of imperialist extra-profit and transformed into the *watchdogs* of capitalism, *destroyers* of the workers' movement.

Lenin called this connection mentioned here for the first time, the "economic" or "deep connection between the imperialist bourgeoisie and opportunism which now (but for how long?) has won victory over the workers' movement."

The "Dagger Legend" in Post-War Germany

My last example is a version of the conspiracy theory that entered history under the title the "dagger legend" (Hiller, 1963). One of its joint creators was Erich Ludendorff, Chief of German Staff and in the 1920s one of Barruel's followers insofar as he was a champion of the "destruction of Freemasonry through disclosure of their secrets"—the title of his most widely known book. At his demand—which almost constituted an ultimatum—and trusting in his competence, the German government in which already party representatives and social democrats took part, made a truce offer to the Allies at the beginning of October 1918. In the second half of October, however, and again at Ludendorff's initiative, the Supreme Command insisted on the continuation of military resistance, which one month before they had declared to be absolutely hopeless. The only plausible reason for this completely astonishing and unmotivated change was their intention to transfer responsibility for a sure German military defeat to the government of the time and that meant primarily the democratic to liberal-oriented parties. With the Supreme Command insisting on continuation of resistance while the government was working for a peace treaty without mention of the situation report of that same Supreme Command of September, the prerequisite was then secured for the propaganda effect of the formula "undefeated in the field"! With the beginning of the revolution, that is, the mutiny in the German fleet (Groh, 1971) on October 28, along with the behavior of the government, which could be reproached with accepting a "humiliation peace," a further situation arose which was very suitable as a building-block in the myth of the "dagger in the back of the fighting troops," a myth for which, in reality, there was not the slightest basis (Groh, 1968, 1971).

On 11 November, the day of the truce, a Prussian officer took leave of his regiment with a speech ending in the accusation: "This very moment when the enemy is directly in front of us, is being used by traitors at home, themselves incited by self-seeking seducers, to put a knife in our backs" (cited in Groh, 1968, p. 14). Even the

Württemberg General Groener, a partner in the so-called Ebert-Groener Pact in which the rest of the army pledged to support the newly formed socialist government under the social democrat Friedrich Ebert "so that the cart does not swing further left," was a propagator of this dagger legend. In November 1918 he wrote to his wife: "for 4 years the German people were unbroken in the face of a world of enemies. Now it allows itself to be thrown about like a corpse by a handful of sailors injected with the Russian poison. And who are the wire-pullers? Jews, there as here" (cited in Groh, 1968, p. 15).

In the 1920s, the dagger legend had an extraordinarily explosive effect on the domestic policy. A high point was the slogan about the "November traitors," meaning above all the social democrats and the first Reichspresident Friedrich Ebert. The theory seemed to find confirmation through self-appointed "revolutionaries" such as the metal worker and left-wing social democrat Emil Barth who in a book published in 1919 under the title *From the Workshop of the German Revolution* claimed that the "revolutionary spokesmen" in the Berlin weapons industry, led by him, had carefully prepared the November revolution and "brought it about."

The genesis and swift spread of the dagger legend demonstrated that a large number of Germans could not understand why they had lost the war. The foundation and activities of an official investigating committee with the aim of researching the reasons for the German defeat had its origins in this conspiracy theory. Clearsighted observers remarked that it was not the fact of the defeat that was worthy of investigation, but the fact that the German Empire collapsed after only four-and-a-half years of war and not earlier. Germany was neither economically nor psychologically prepared for such a war. The mood of 1914, of the *burgfrieden* and the war enthusiasm had disappeared quite quickly. Germany had no war aims as compared to some of the allied powers. The military and political leadership disseminated a totally unfounded optimism about Germany's military situation up until as late as the summer of 1918, an optimism that was difficult to reconcile with the sudden collapse. The population, unsettled and anxious as a result of events in Russia, saw in the workers' and soldiers' councils, in the constant revolutionary battles in Germany up to 1923, the forerunners of a "bolschewist" revolution. The new version of the traditional Russia-phobia penetrated far into the working class and their socialist organizations. This revolution too—with the aid of national-socialist and conservative propaganda—seemed to be a "bolschewist-Jewish world conspiracy" of which the German November Revolution could be termed an offshoot.

The very sudden transition from a political culture centered around authority to a parliamentary democracy the majority of Germans neither wanted nor could identify with (Groh, 1968) was more easily "explained" and emotionally mastered with the help of a conspiracy theory. Everything that this majority rejected, at least at the beginning of the Weimar Republic—namely a political party system, parliament, a free press, and so on, everything that constituted a material and psychological burden, the results of the war, reparation payments, territorial renouncement, inflation, the civil war manifest in street fighting—could somehow be joined up in the legend of the stab in the back, which was supposed to have brought about the German defeat. One might say all the crises of the Weimar Republic stabilized that

element of the interpretation pattern that represented belief in the Jewish-socialist conspiracy. This belief was one of the most important prerequisites for the swift spread of the belief in a Jewish world conspiracy—"Protocols of the Elders of Zion"—which formed the core of the National Socialist Weltanschauung.

References

- Arendt, H. (1955). *The origins of totalitarianism*. New York.
- Ball, H. (1923/1924). Carl Schmitts Politische Theologie, *Hochland*, 21, 263-286.
- Barruel, A. (1797/1798). *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme*, Vols. 1-4. London.
- Becker, G., Bovenschen, S., & Brackert, H. (1977). *Aus der Zeit der Verzweiflung*. Frankfurt am Main.
- Beier, G. (1976). *Das Problem der Arbeiteraristokratie im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Zur Sozialgeschichte einer umstrittenen Kategorie*. In Beier, G. (1981). *Geschichte und Gewerkschaft. Politisch-historische Beiträge zur Geschichte sozialer Bewegungen*. Köln.
- Bennett, J.W. (1976). *The ecological transition*. New York.
- Blackbourn, D., & Eley, G. (1984). *The peculiarities of German history. Bourgeois society and politics in 19th century Germany*. Oxford.
- Bodin, J. (1580). *Démonomanie des sorciers*. Paris.
- Borst, A. (1953). *Die Katharer*. Stuttgart.
- Breßlau, H. (1879). Das Testament Peter's des Großen. *Historische Zeitschrift*, No. 41, 385-409.
- Brunt, P.A. (1966). The Roman mob. *Past and Present*, No. 35, 3-27.
- Burke, E. (1790). *Reflections on the French Revolution*. London.
- Castoriadis, C. (1975). *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (2nd ed.). Paris.
- Chodzko, M. (1839). *Histoire de la Pologne*. Paris.
- Clifford, R. (1798). *Application of Barruel's memoirs of Jacobinism to the secret societies of Ireland and Great Britain*. London.
- Cohn, N. (1967). *Warrant for genocide*. London.
- Cohn, N. (1975). *Europe's inner demons. An enquiry inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt*. London.
- Delumeau, J. (1978). *La peur en occident (XIV^e-XVIII^e siècles). Une cité assiégée* (Vols. 1-2). Paris.
- de Maistre, J. (1794). *Considérations sur la France*.
- Duby, G. (1962). *L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans l'occident médiéval. France, Angleterre, Empire IX^e-XV^e siècles: Vol. 2. Essai de synthèse et perspectives de recherches*. Paris.
- van Dülmen, R. (1975). *Der Geheimbund der Illuminaten*. Stuttgart.
- Elbs, E. (1987). "Die von Seculis her angewohnte Rebellionseuche." *Bäuerlicher Widerstand in der Grafschaft Hohenzollern 1584-1740*. Weingarten.
- Eley, G. (1976). Defining social imperialism: Use and abuse of an idea. *Social History*, 1, 265-290.
- Favret, J. (1971). Sorcières et lumières, *Critique*, No. 27, 351-376.
- Feyerabend, P. (1975). *Against method*. London.
- Gaillardet, F. (1836). *Mémoires de Chevallier d'Eon*. Paris.
- Ginzburg, C. (1966). *I benandanti*. Torino.
- Graus, F. (1981). Judenpogrome im 14. Jahrhundert: Der Schwarze Tod. In Martin, B. & Schulz, E. (1981). *Die Juden als Minderheit in der Geschichte*. München.
- Grießinger, A. (1981). *Das symbolische Kapital der Ehre. Streikbewegungen und kollektives Bewußtsein deutscher Handwerksgelesen im 18. Jahrhundert*.
- Groh, D. (1961). *Rußland und das Selbstverständnis Europas*. Neuwied.
- Groh, D. (1971). The Kiel-Mutiny. In P. Young (Ed.), *History of the First World War* (Vol. 7, pp. 3113-3115).

- Groh, D. (1968). Der Umsturz von 1918 im Erlebnis der Zeitgenossen. In H.J. Schoeps (Ed.), *Zeitgeist der Weimarer Republik* (pp. 7-32). Stuttgart.
- Groh, D. (1972). L'échec de la "fondation interne du Reich." *Revue d'histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 19, 269-282.
- Groh, D. (1979). Base-processes and the problem of organization: Outline of a social history research project. *Social History*, 4, 265-283.
- Groh, D. (1985). Collective behaviour from the 17th to the 20th century: Change of phenomena, change of perception or no change at all? In F.C. Graumann & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Changing Conceptions of Crowd, Mind and Behavior*. New York.
- Groh, D. (1986). "Spuren der Vernunft in der Geschichte." Der Weg von Jürgen Habermas zur "Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns" im Schatten Max Webers, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 12, 443-476.
- Groh, R. (1984). *Ironie und Moral im Werk Diderots*. München.
- Habermas, J. (1981). *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Vols. 1-2). Frankfurt.
- Halévy, R. (1984). Les loges maçonniques dans la France d'ancien régime. Aux origines de la sociabilité démocratique. Paris.
- Haller, K.L. von (1816). *Restauration der Staats-Wissenschaft oder Theorie des natürlich-geselligen Zustands der Chimäre des künstlich bürgerlichen entgegengesetzt* (Vols. 1-2). Winterthur.
- Hauser, H. (1929). Une famine il y a 400 ans. Organisation communale de la défense contre la disette. In *Travailleurs et marchands de l'ancienne France (1920)* (2nd ed., pp. 114-129). Paris.
- Haverkamp, A. (1981). *Zur Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland des Späten Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*. Stuttgart.
- Haverkamp, A. (1981). Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes im Gesellschaftsgefüge deutscher Städte. In *Idem* (Hg) (1981), 27-93.
- Heinsohn, G., Knieper, R., & Steiger, O. (1979). *Menschenproduktion. Allgemeine Bevölkerungstheorie der Neuzeit*. Frankfurt.
- Hiller von Gaertringen, F.F. (1963). "Dolchstoß" - Diskussion und "Dolchstoßlegende" im Wandel von vier Jahrzehnten. In *Geschichte und Gegenwartsbewußtsein* (pp. 122-134). Düsseldorf.
- Hobson, J.A., (1902). *Imperialism*. London.
- Hölscher, L. (1979). *Öffentlichkeit und Geheimnis. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Entstehung der Öffentlichkeit in der frühen Neuzeit*. Stuttgart.
- Honegger, C. (Ed.). (1978). *Die Hexen der Neuzeit. Studien zur Sozialgeschichte eines kulturellen Deutungsmusters* (2nd ed., pp. 21-151). Frankfurt.
- Im Hof, U. (1982). *Das gesellige Jahrhundert*. München.
- Institutoris, H., & Sprenger, J. (1596). *Malleus Maleficarum*. Lyon.
- Jeggle, U. (1977). *Kiebingen - eine Heimatgeschichte*. Tübingen.
- Kaplan, S.L. (1976). *Bread, politics and political economy in the reign of Louis XV* (Vols. 1-2). Den Haag.
- Kaplan, S.L. (1982). *The famine plot persuasion in 18th-century France* (Transaction of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 72, part 3). Philadelphia.
- Katz, J. (1970). *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723-1939*. Cambridge, MA.
- Keller, H. (1986). *Zwischen regionaler Begrenzung und universalem Horizont. Deutschland im Imperium der Salier und Staufer, 1024-1250*. Berlin.
- Kesting, H. (1959). *Geschichtsphilosophie und Weltbürgerkrieg. Deutungen der Geschichte vor der Französischen Revolution bis zum Ost-West Konflikt*. Heidelberg.
- Koestler, A. (1950). *Darkness at noon*. New York.
- Koselleck, R. (1959). Kritik und Krise. Zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt. Freiburg.
- Koselleck, R. (1967). *Historia magistra vitae. In Vergangenheit Zukunft. Zur Semantik Geschichtlicher Zeiten* (pp. 38-66). Frankfurt.
- Koselleck, R. (1972). Einleitung. In O. Brunner, W. Conze, & R. Koselleck (Eds.). *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Vols. 1-9, VIII-XXVIII). Stuttgart.

- Koselleck, R. (1979). *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*. Frankfurt.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed.). Chicago.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1971). The relations between history and history of science. *Daedalus*, No. 100, 271-304.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1974). Second thoughts on paradigms. In F. Suppe (Ed.), *The structure of scientific theories* (pp. 459-482). Urbana, IL.
- Kunze, M. (1982). *Straße ins Feuer. Vom Leben und Sterben in der Zeit des Hexenwahns*. München.
- Lakatos, I., & Musgrave, A. (Eds.). (1970). *Criticism and the growth of knowledge*. Cambridge.
- Leff, G. (1956). The 14th century and the decline of scholasticism. *Past and Present*, No. 9, 30-41.
- Le Franc, J.F. (1791). *Le voile levé pour les curieux ou le secret de la révolution relevé à l'aide de la Franc-maçonnerie*. Paris.
- Le Franc, J.F. (1792). *Conjuration contre la religion Catholique et les souverains, dont le projet, conçu en France, doit s'exécuter dans l'univers entier*. Paris.
- Le Goff, J. (1971). *Le Moyen Age (1060-1330)* (pp. 227-240). Paris.
- Lehovitch, D.V. (1948). The testament of Peter the Great. *The American Slav. and East European Review*, 7, 111-124.
- Lenin, W.I. (1964). *Werke* (Vol. 23). Berlin.
- Lesur, M. (1812). *Des progrès de la puissance russe depuis son origine jusqu'au commencement du XIX^e siècle*. Paris.
- Lipset, S.M., & Raab, E. (1970). *The politics of unreason. Right-wing extremism in America*. New York.
- Lübke, H. (1977). *Geschichtsbegriff und Geschichtsinteresse. Analytik und Pragmatik der Historie*. Basel.
- Macfarlane, A. (1970). *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*. London.
- Mandrou, R. (1968). *Magistrats et sorciers en France au 17^e siècle. Une analyse de psychologie historique*. Paris.
- Marx, K. (1954). *La Russie et l'Europe* (B. Hepner, Ed.). Paris.
- Meili, D. (1979). *Hexen in Wasterkingen: Magie und Lebensform in einem Dorf des frühen 18. Jahrhunderts*. Zürich.
- Midelfort, H.C.E. (1972). *Witch hunting in southwestern Germany 1561-1684*. Stanford.
- Mittelstraß, J. (1984). Forschung, Begründung, Rekonstruktion. Wege aus dem Begründungsstreit. In H. Schnädelbach (Ed.) *Rationalität* (pp. 117-140). Frankfurt.
- Moorhouse, H.F. (1978). The Marxist theory of labour aristocracy. *Social History*, 3, 61-82.
- Moraw, P. (1985). *Von offener Verfassung zu gestalteter Verdichtung. Das Reich im späten Mittelalter, 1250-1490*. Berlin.
- Muchembled, R. (1978). *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne (XV^e-XVII^e)*. Paris.
- Pirenne, H. (1926). *Histoire de Belgique* (Vol. 6). Brüssel.
- Polanyi, K. (1944). *The great transformation*. London.
- Polanyi, M. (1970). The stability of scientific theories against experience. In M. Marwick (Ed.), *Witchcraft and sorcery* (pp. 332-341). Harmondsworth. (Original work published 1958)
- Poljakov, L. (1966). *The history of anti-semitism* (Vol. 1). London.
- Poljakov, L. (1968). *Histoire de l'antisémitisme* (Vol. 3). Paris.
- Reddy, W. (1977). The textile trade and the language of the crowd at Rouen, 1752-1871. *Past and Present*, No. 74, 62-89.
- Reid, A. (1978). Politics and economics in the formation of the British working class: A response to H.F. Moorhouse. *Social History*, 3, 347-361.
- Reinalter, H. (Ed.). (1983). *Freimaurer und Geheimbünde im 18. Jahrhundert in Mitteleuropa*. Frankfurt.
- Rjazanov, N. (1909). *Karl Marx über die Vorherrschaft Rußlands in Europa*. Berlin.

- Roberts, J.M. (1972). *The mythology of the secret societies*. New York.
- Rubel, M. (1960). Les cahiers d'étude de Karl Marx, II: 1853-1856. *International Review of Social History*, 5, 39ff.
- Russel, J.B. (1972). *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca.
- Schindler, N. (1982). Freimaurerkultur im 18. Jahrhundert. Zur sozialen Funktion des Geheimnisses in der entstehenden bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. In R. Berdahl et al., *Klassen und Kulture. Sozialanthropologische Perspektiven in der Geschichtsschreibung* (pp. 205-262). Frankfurt.
- Schmitt, C. (1938). *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes. Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols*. Hamburg.
- Schormann, G. (1981). *Hexenprozesse in Deutschland*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck.
- Schormann, G. (1981). *Hexenprozesse in Nordwestdeutschland*. Hildesheim: Lax.
- Scott, J.C. (1976). *The Moral Economy of the Peasant. Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven.
- Scott, J.C. (1977). Protest and profanation: Agrarian revolt and the Little tradition. *Theory and Society*, 4, 1-38, 211-249.
- Shannon, A.C. (1983). *The medieval inquisition*. Washington.
- Sokolnicki, M. (1927). Le testament de Pierre Le Grand. *Revue des Sciences Politiques*, 88-99.
- Spee, F. von (1631). *Cautio Criminalis oder Rechtliches Bedenken wegen der Hexenprozesse*. Rinteln.
- Starck, J.A. (1803). *Triumph der Philosophie im 18. Jahrhundert* (Vols. 1-2). Frankfurt.
- Thomas, K. (1970). *Religion and the decline of magic*. London.
- Thompson, E.P. (1971). The "moral economy" of the English crowd in the 18th century. *Past and Present*, No. 50, 76-131.
- Thompson, E.P. (1971/72). Anthropology and the discipline of historical context. *Midland History*, 41-55.
- Tilly, L.A. (1971). The food riot as a form of political conflict in France. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2, 23-57.
- Trachtenberg, J. (1943). *The devil and the Jews. The medieval conception of the Jew and its relation to modern antisemitism*. New York.
- Trevor-Roper, H.R. (1967). *Religion, the Reformation and social change*. London.
- Großbach, W. (1986). Soziale Bewegung und politische Erfahrung. *Bäuerlicher Protest in oberhessischen Territorien, 1648-1806*. Weingarten.
- Unverhau, D. (1983). Die Hexen aus Angeln. *Jahrbuch für Geschichte*, No. 5, pp. 68-70.
- Urquhart, D. (1853). *The progress of Russia in the West, North and South*. London.
- von Bieberstein, J.R. (1976). *Die These von der Verschwörung, 1776-1945. Philosophen, Freimaurer, Juden, Liberale und Sozialisten als Verschwörer gegen die Sozialordnung*. Bern.
- Weber, M. (1956). *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (4th ed.). Tübingen.
- Wehler, H.-U. (1969). *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*. Köln.
- Williams, D.H. (1976). Were 'hunger' rioters really hungry? Some demographic evidence. *Past and Present*, No. 71, pp. 70-75.
- Winkler, H.A. (Ed.). (1974). *Organisierter Kapitalismus. Voraussetzungen und Anfänge*. Göttingen.
- Wong, R.B. (1983). Les émeutes de subsistence en Chine et en Europe occidentale. *Annales*, 38, 234-258.
- Zmarzlik, H.-G. (1976). Das Kaiserreich in neuer Sicht? *Historische Zeitschrift*, 202, 105-107.