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Agency Panic and the Culture of Conspiracy

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IMAGINING SOCIAL CONTROL

Conspiracy theory has animated the political culture of the United States from the early Republican period to the present, at times deeply influencing popular opinion. But its influence has never been greater than now. "This is the age of conspiracy," says a character in Don DeLillo's *Running Dog* (1978), "the age of connections, links, secret relationships."[1] By all accounts, this view has become increasingly common in the postwar period. For several decades, cultural critics have observed that "a kind of paranoia has settled over many communities" and that many social groups seem to depend on conspiracy theory for their survival. More recently, major news magazines have described the United States as a nation in the grip of "conspiracy mania" and have pronounced the arrival of a "new paranoid style in the American arts"—although such a style has clearly been flourishing for decades. "The rhythm of conspiracy," notes another, "once background noise, is now a dominant theme of everyday life."[2] Whether the postwar era is really an "age of conspiracy" seems uncertain at best; the important fact is that many people believe it is such an age. Americans now account for all sorts of events—political conflicts, police investigations, juridical proceedings, corporate maneuvers, government activities, and a wide range of other phenomena—through conspiracy theory. Conspiratorial explanations have become a central feature of American political discourse, a way of understanding power that appeals to both marginalized groups and the power elite.

Perhaps not surprisingly, conspiracy theory has also been a fundamental organizing principle in American film, television, and fiction since World War II. Numerous postwar narratives concern characters who are nervous about the ways large, and often vague, organizations might be controlling their lives, influencing their actions, or even constructing their desires. Film and television, from Cold War alien flicks to the highly popular *X-Files*, have so frequently depicted corporate, political, and otherworldly conspiracies that Richard Donner's 1997 film *Conspiracy Theory* seems at once historically emblematic and utterly redundant. Writers such as Kathy Acker, Margaret Atwood, William S. Burroughs, Don DeLillo, Philip K. Dick, Joan Didion, Ralph Ellison, William Gibson, Joseph Heller, Diane Johnson, Ken Kesey, Joseph McElroy, Norman Mailer, Thomas Pynchon, Ishmael Reed, Leslie Marmon Silko, Kurt Vonnegut, and Sol Yurick have all produced narratives in which large governmental, corporate, or social systems appear uncannily to control individual behavior, and in which characters seem paranoid, either to themselves or to other characters in the novel. As Tony Tanner remarked in 1971, "The possible nightmare of being totally controlled by unseen agencies and powers is never far away in contemporary American fiction."[3]

Of course, this nightmare was never absent in earlier moments and may be traced to colonial traditions. But the postwar years have witnessed a dramatic intensification of interest in this view of the world, and an increasing popular acceptance of its central premises. Indeed, concerns about social control have also been the subject of numerous other discourses, from social theory to self-help literature to addiction discourse. A large and influential body of popular sociological writing, for instance—from David Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* (1950) and William Whyte's *Organization Man* (1956) through the Unabomber "Manifesto" (1996)—has lamented both the "decline" of individual self-control and the increasing autonomy of large social structures, especially government and corporate bureaucracies, control technologies, and the media.[4]

One implication of this diverse body of materials is that the seemingly marginal forms of paranoia and conspiracy theory must be understood as symptoms of a larger and more mainstream set of anxieties about human agency. But why has the peculiar form of conspiracy theory become such a popular vehicle for such concerns? As others have noted, the idea of conspiracy offers an odd sort of comfort in an uncer-

tain age: it makes sense of the inexplicable, accounting for complex events in a clear, if frightening, way. By offering a highly adaptable vision of causality, conspiracy theory acts as a "master narrative," a grand scheme capable of explaining complex social events. Most conspiracy theories are virtually impossible to confirm, yet this built-in impediment to certainty is precisely why they have flourished in an age supposedly marked by the disappearance of grand explanatory schemes and master narratives. They require a form of quasi-religious conviction, a sense that the conspiracy in question is an entity with almost supernatural powers. In fact, the term "conspiracy" rarely signifies a small, secret plot any more. Instead, it frequently refers to the workings of a large *organization, technology, or system,* a powerful and obscure entity so dispersed that it is the very antithesis of the traditional conspiracy. "Conspiracy," in other words, has come to signify a broad array of social controls.

The increasing appeal of conspiracy theory is directly linked to this newly expanded definition, which accords the conspiracy broad explanatory power and enormous political utility. In its new form, "conspiracy" can be used to label political enemies who are doing nothing more devious or sinister than their accusers. In the midst of the Korean War, for instance, President Truman could declare that "[t]he Communists in the Kremlin are engaged in a monstrous conspiracy to stamp out freedom all over the world" without also observing that, by such a definition, he was also involved in a "conspiracy" to promote capitalism.[5] At virtually the same moment, the Supreme Court could dramatically toughen its three-decade-old "clear and present danger" test on the grounds that a conspiracy to teach dangerous ideas must not be permitted, even though the "conspiracy" in question was an informal gathering of socialist educators who had neither taken nor advocated any action whatsoever against the state. In its ruling, the Court rejected "the contention that a conspiracy to advocate, as distinguished from the advocacy itself, cannot be constitutionally restrained, because it comprises only the preparation. *It is the existence of the conspiracy which creates the danger.*"[6] In short, the panic-stricken rhetoric of conspiracy has often been sufficient to mobilize support for serious state action, even the significant abridgment of individual freedoms.

But the state has not had a monopoly on the rhetoric of conspiracy. In the United States, that rhetoric has been widely deployed by both disempowered and comparatively privileged groups to imagine the

controlling power of private enterprise, of regulatory discourses and systems, of the state itself, or of some complex and bewildering combination of these things. As Fredric Jameson has observed, postwar narratives deploying conspiracy theory and "high-tech paranoia" have provided important representations of global capitalist networks. Conspiracy theory, Jameson remarks, is "a degraded attempt—through the figuration of advanced technology—to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system," to map networks of power too vast to be adequately represented.[7] In this account, conspiracy theory's oversimplifications stem partly from the sublime objects it attempts to make visible. Instead of being merely a comforting form of misrepresentation, conspiracy theory is a reductive (or "degraded"), but still useful, form of political representation. Jameson's view thus allows room for a defense of some conspiracy theories. Yet it leaves open a number of crucial questions about the conspiracy form itself. Why represent a massive economic system as a conspiracy? Why conserve a sense of *intentionality* when explaining the manipulation of individuals by huge social and economic networks, labyrinthine webs of power?

Some general observations about postwar conspiracy culture point toward a fuller answer to these questions. First, in many conspiracy narratives, conspiracies are understood to be hermetically sealed, marvelously efficient, and virtually undetectable. Second, as Jameson's comments imply, conspiracies allow characters or authors to conceptualize the relation between individuals and larger social bodies. Third, and most important, the conspiracy is often understood as a structure that curtails individuality, or that is antithetical to individualism itself. As the narrator of Don DeLillo's *Running Dog* puts it, "All conspiracies begin with individual self-repression."[8] According to this view, the members of a conspiracy "repress" their own desires and aims for a set of communal goals, a small social compact.

This assumption has a vital, though often ignored, corollary: if conspiracy begins with self-repression, then conspiracy *theory*—the apprehension of conspiracy by those *not* involved in it—begins with individual self-protection, with an attempt to defend the integrity of the self against the social order. To understand one's relation to the social order through conspiracy theory, in other words, is to see oneself in opposition to "society." It is to endorse an all-or-nothing conception of agency, a view in which agency is a property, parceled out *either* to individuals like oneself *or* to "the system," a vague structure often construed to be

massive, powerful, and malevolent. This way of thinking is rooted in long-standing Western conceptions of selfhood, particularly those that emphasize the corrupting power of social relations on human uniqueness. As Ralph Waldo Emerson warned some 150 years ago in the classic American account of self *versus* society, "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members."[9] This familiar sense of individual struggle against a collectivity is essential to contemporary conspiracy theory. One of its problematic effects is to hide the specific political features of the struggle it attempts to represent. Its monolithic conception of "society" (or "system," or "organization") obviates the need to conceptualize particular interests within that collectivity, interests that might be based on class, gender, race, or other factors. Hence the political malleability of conspiracy theory, and the apparent contradictions of figures like the Unabomber, whose professed "ambition" was not only "to kill a scientist, big businessman, government official or the like" but also "to kill a Communist."[10] These facts offer a crucial lesson: by making diverse social and technological systems enemies of "the self," the conspiratorial views function less as a defense of some *clear* political position than as a defense of individualism, abstractly conceived.

It is not surprising that extremely self-defensive postures of this sort are often understood as "paranoid." Clinically paranoid individuals, after all, frequently express a general fear and distrust of their environment. Yet the highly popular conception of self I have just outlined cannot simply be read as a sign of pathology. Indeed, conspiracy narratives would not be on the rise if that self-concept were not broadly popular. Only the continuing appeal of liberalism, and its vision of an autonomous self beleaguered by society, can explain why the controlling "agencies and powers" in postwar narratives are so often "unseen" or elusive, why they so rarely consist of specific conspirators, why they vary from text to text, and why they often look nothing like conspiracies in the traditional sense of the word. The appeal of liberalism also explains why conspiracy narratives have displayed such extraordinary political flexibility—why they have registered concern about such a diversity of social organizations and why they are as appealing to African Americans who wish to explain racial discrimination as they are to white racist groups who believe the United States is under the control of "Zionist Occupied Government" (ZOG) or some other coalition of foreigners and minorities.[11]

The recent surge in conspiracy narratives, in other words, cannot be explained as a response to some *particular* political issue, social organization, or historical event, such as Watergate, or the Kennedy assassination, or even the Cold War. It is better understood as a response to the nation, or even the Cold War. It is better understood as a response to the sense that, to quote one cultural critic, "our specialness—our humanness—has been taking it on the chin a lot lately."[12] It stems largely from a sense of *diminished human agency*, a feeling that individuals cannot effect meaningful social action and, in extreme cases, may not be able to control their own behavior. "At this moment in history," wrote R. D. Laing in 1967, "we are all caught in the hell of frenetic passivity."[13] For Charles Reich, "The American crisis . . . seems clearly to be related to an inability to act."[14] And for Donna Haraway, "Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert"—a view, she admits, that once would have seemed "paranoid" though "now we are not so sure."[15] Sentiments like these are related to a widely circulated postwar narrative, a story about how the new "postindustrial" economy has made Americans more generic and less autonomous than their rugged forebears, and how social structures—especially government and corporate bureaucracies, control technologies, and "the media"—have become autonomous agents in their own right.

Despite their widespread appearance in diverse postwar narratives, these anxieties take a remarkably consistent form, which I will refer to as *agency panic.*[16] By agency panic, I mean intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy or self-control—the conviction that one's actions are being controlled by someone else, that one has been "constructed" by powerful external agents. This anxiety is expressed most dramatically in fiction and film, though its underlying view of the world is central to many nonfiction texts as well. In most cases, agency panic has two features. The first is a nervousness or uncertainty about the causes of individual action. This fear sometimes manifests itself in a belief that the world is full of "programmed" or "brainwashed" subjects, addicts, automatons, or "mass-produced" persons, as is the case in Heller's *Catch-22*, Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, virtually all of Burroughs's work, much science fiction, and many of the nonfiction texts I have already mentioned. Just as often, the anxiety consists of a character's fear that he or she has been personally manipulated by powerful external controls. Many postwar narratives depict characters who feel they are acting out parts in a script written by someone else, or who believe that their most individuating

traits have been somehow produced from without. Margaret Atwood's characters, for example, are forever enacting classically feminine behavior, even though they know it is harmful and undesirable. Some of Pynchon's characters suspect that their sexual responses, among other things, have been determined by a massive espionage program. DeLillo's Lee Harvey Oswald feels that his participation in Kennedy's murder has been planned by powerful forces beyond his control. And in the junked-up world of Burroughs, sadistic government and corporate technologies continually regulate all kinds of human behavior.

In addition to these primary anxieties about individual autonomy, agency panic usually involves a secondary sense that controlling organizations are themselves agents—rational, motivated entities with the will and the means to carry out complex plans. These organizations are sometimes concrete agencies, like DeLillo's CIA or Heller's corporatized Army, but they are just as often more diffuse structures—Pynchon's "Them," Burroughs's "junk virus," Atwood's "men," Reed's "Atonist" culture industry, cyberpunk's autonomous corporations, or even the general "world system" invoked by Jameson and much postwar political rhetoric. In moments of agency panic, individuals tend to attribute to these systems the qualities of motive, agency, and individuality they suspect have been depleted from themselves or others around them. Thus, agency panic not only dramatizes doubt about the efficacy of individual human action; it also induces a *postmodern transference* in which social regulation seems to be the intentional product of a single consciousness or monolithic "will."

Because the convictions I have been describing usually arise without much tangible evidence, they often seem to be the product of paranoia. Yet they are difficult to dismiss as paranoid in the clinical sense of pathologically deluded. As Leo Bersani points out, the self-described "paranoids" of Thomas Pynchon's fiction are "probably justified, and therefore—at least in the traditional sense of the word—really not paranoid at all."[17] Theorists of schizophrenia working against traditional psychological models, from Laing and Gregory Bateson to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, have shown that pathologizing judgments of such abnormal modes of experience may be products of overidentification with normalizing clinical assumptions. In fact, Laing goes so far as to suggest that schizophrenia can be "a conspiracy" perpetrated *against the schizophrenic* by family and health care workers, who wish to reduce the patient's "full existential and legal status as human agent."[18]

Nonetheless, there is now a wealth of scholarship, following Richard Hofstadter's classic analysis of "the paranoid style in American politics," that continues to view "political" paranoia as an easily diagnosed ailment, something that can be readily dismissed by appeal to a universal authority.[19] What many such accounts refuse to recognize is that conspiracy theory arises out of radical doubt about how knowledge is produced and about the authority of those who produce it. Ironically, by uncritically labeling certain claims "paranoid" and therefore dangerous to society (in general), such accounts miss the most important meaning of conspiracy theory: that it develops from the refusal to accept someone else's definition of a universal social good or an officially sanctioned truth. This is not to say we must open our arms to all manner of conspiracy theories. It is merely to assert that diagnoses of political paranoia are themselves political statements reflecting particular interests. Until we discover some magically unmediated access to reality, conspiracy theory cannot simply be pathologized in one sweeping gesture. Indeed, while many conspiracy theories seem far-fetched, insane, or even dangerous, others seem to be logical responses to technological and social change, to the radical insights of poststructuralism and systems theory, and even to the breathless sociologies of "future shock," "global village," and "postindustrial society."[20]

For these reasons, my intention here is not to assess the validity of particular conspiracy theories, but rather to sketch the cultural significance of such theories and the anxieties from which they stem. Above all, those anxieties indicate a crisis in recent conceptions of personhood and human agency. The importance of agency panic lies in the way it attempts to conserve a long-standing model of personhood—a view of the individual as a rational, motivated agent with a protected interior core of beliefs, desires, and memories. This concept of the liberal individual, which C. B. Macpherson termed "possessive individualism," derives from the liberal political philosophy of Hobbes and Locke, and has long been celebrated in American political culture, particularly in the guise of "rugged individualism" and atomistic "self-reliance."[21] That these forms of individualism have masculine associations helps to explain why so many postwar texts understand social communications as a feminizing force and why narratives of dwindling human autonomy are so often connected, in our culture, to masculinist outbursts of "regeneration through violence" (from John Birch tactics to the work of the Unabomber and contemporary "patriot" groups).[22]

Indeed, the culture of paranoia and conspiracy may be understood as a result of liberal individualism's continuing popularity despite its inability to account for social regulation. Agency panic dramatizes precisely this paradox. It begins in a discovery of social controls that cannot be reconciled with the liberal view of individuals as wholly autonomous and rational entities. For one who refuses to relinquish the assumptions of liberal individualism, such newly revealed forms of regulation frequently seem so unacceptable or unbelievable that they can only be met with anxiety, melodrama, or panic. Agency panic thus reveals the way social communications affect individual identity and agency, but it also *disavows* this revelation. It begins with a radical insight, yet it is a fundamentally conservative response—"conservative" in the sense that it conserves a traditional model of the self in spite of the obvious challenges that postwar technologies of communication and social organization pose to that model. Its widespread appearance on the postwar landscape indicates a broad cultural refusal to modify a concept of self that is no longer wholly accurate or useful, but that still underpins a long-standing cultural fantasy of subjectivity.

This concept of self stands in sharp contrast to poststructural and postmodern theoretical reconceptions of subjectivity, which have exploded the assumptions of liberal individualism, arguing that identity is constructed from without, repeatedly reshaped through performance, and (in extreme accounts) best understood as a schizophrenic and anchorless array of separate components. "Instead of mourning the loss of the self," Gabriele Schwab remarks, poststructural theory "celebrates its end."[23] In the wake of such theories, many cultural critics have emphasized the relation between postmodern narrative and these newly "fragmented" or "decentered" concepts of subjectivity—frequently associating modernism with paranoia and postmodernism with schizophrenia, respectively.[24] But when understood as stark oppositions, such associations are misleading. Texts that are the very emblems of postmodernism invest heavily in paranoia, and rarely seem to *celebrate* the fragmentation of the self. Even the fluid and uncertain subjects of William Burroughs, which have been used to illustrate postmodern "schizophrenia," are products of a fraught attempt to conserve traditional liberal humanist assumptions about the self.[25] Agency panic, then, may be understood as a nervous acknowledgment, and rejection, of postmodern subjectivity. Its appearance in writing commonly considered postmodern is an index of

liberalism's continuing appeal in the face of serious theoretical challenges.

Despite the significant problems with some panic-stricken defenses of liberal individualism—which include the encouragement of individual, rather than collective, forms of resistance to social control—I want to stress that agency panic is not simply a misguided or irrational response. In fact, it bears an important likeness to sociological thinking, often illuminating the obscure and powerful sources of social regulation. Yet, paradoxically, it produces quasi-sociological insights by attributing intentionality to the level of the social order. Those possessed by it find hidden communiqués inside generic social messages; they view mass social controls as forms of individual persecution; and they see social and economic patterns as the result of *willful* malevolence. In other words, they unearth forms of human intentionality where a strictly sociological analysis would find only institutions, mores, economic structures, and discourses. Their attempts to trace social effects to an intending subject depends on a form of misrecognition, but one that is difficult to avoid and often quite fruitful. My refusal to make sweeping assessments of conspiracy theory in general, then, stems from the intelligence and political usefulness of some such narratives. But it also stems from theoretical considerations, to which I now turn.

INTERPRETIVE DISORDERS

Because they attempt to unearth hidden forms of control and communication, theories of conspiracy and mass manipulation depend heavily on the interpretation of half-hidden clues, telltale signs, and secret messages. In postwar literature, such procedures are frequently intertwined with explorations of paranoia, which figures prominently in a stunning array of texts. This is not surprising, because paranoia is an interpretive disorder that revolves around questions of control and manipulation. It is often defined as a condition in which one has delusions of grandeur or an unfounded feeling of persecution, or both. Understood less judgmentally, it is a condition in which one's interpretations seem unfounded or abnormal *to an interpretive community*. These descriptions highlight a problem inherent in the definition of paranoia: despite the seemingly obvious marks of extreme (or pathological) paranoia, it is remarkably difficult to separate paranoid interpretation from "normal"

interpretive practices. Freud himself repeatedly noted that paranoid interpretations are akin to the very philosophical and psychoanalytic schemes necessary to define and diagnose the disorder. "The delusions of patients," he writes, "appear to me to be the equivalents of the constructions which we build up in the course of analytic treatment."[26] Because of this similarity, cases of paranoia take the form of *interpretive contests* between analyst and patient, each of whom claims to have unearthed the hidden truth about the patient's (apparent) persecution. Consider, for instance, Freud's remarks on the purported homoerotic foundation of paranoia:

> Paranoia is precisely a disorder in which a sexual aetiology is by *no means obvious*; far from this, the strikingly *prominent* features in the causation of paranoia, especially among males, are social humiliations and slights. But *if we go into the matter only a little more deeply*, we shall be able to see that the *really* operative factor . . .[27]

I could have cited many other passages from Freud's work, because going "more deeply" into the "obvious" would serve as a crude definition of psychoanalysis in general. But what is significant in this passage is how much Freud's description of paranoia has in common with paranoia itself. First, both psychoanalysis and paranoia depend on interpretations that move beyond "prominent" or "obvious" factors. Second and consequently, both appeal to the category of the real—to the "really operative factor," foundation, or causal agent for certain events. (As the popular slogan insists, "It's not paranoia if they're *really* out to get you.")

It is this second move that has made the fictional representation of conspiracy and paranoia increasingly popular in a period marked by skepticism about unmediated access to reality. Because diagnoses of paranoia depend on a strong concept of reality—a conviction that the patient's claims do not correspond to events transpiring in a measurable reality—the postmodern tendency to put "the real" in quotation marks has undermined the pathologization of paranoia. As a result, if what is real seems more and more to be a construct, and if the procedures for pathologizing insane interpretations seem increasingly indistinguishable from the procedures of the insane, then paranoia (or "paranoia") becomes an obvious vehicle for writers to use in illustrating the politics of interpretation, normalization, and knowledge production

(this despite theories that continue to associate paranoia with modernism and not postmodernism). This problem has underwritten virtually the entire corpus of Philip K. Dick's science fiction, which obsessively depicts characters attempting to assess their own sanity in situations of radical ontological uncertainty. It has also encouraged many postwar writers to represent paranoia as a positive state of mind, an intelligent and fruitful form of suspicion, rather than a psychosis. Pynchon's characters, for instance, often believe that "operational paranoia" and "creative paranoia" can serve as effective forms of resistance to social or political control.[28] Heller's "paranoid" bombardier Yossarian stays alive in part because he believes "everyone" is trying to kill him, a view that seems increasingly sound as *Catch-22* unfolds. The same strategy pays off for many of Margaret Atwood's characters, who learn that their fears of being watched or stalked are a reasonable response to heterosexual relationships. The postwar literature of conspiracy and paranoia, in other words, is driven by a sense that knowledge and power are inextricably linked and that to be "paranoid" may only be to reject the normalizing ideology of the powerful.

Yet, given the political stakes of conspiracy theories, and the violence associated with some forms of political "paranoia," it may seem especially important to be able to say for certain who is paranoid and who is not. One might thus object to my association of psychoanalysis and paranoia because it seems to undermine the grounds for making such decisions. After all, do not severe cases of paranoia, such as Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber's famous "nervous illness," the subject of Freud's major study of paranoia, go well beyond a mere tendency to draw meanings from what is not clearly "prominent" or "obvious" to others? Schreber's apparent *conviction* that certain evils are being perpetrated against him, it might be argued, is quite different from more recent instances of "operational paranoia," which are marked by a self-critical *suspicion* of the world. We might then distinguish between cases where an individual develops a highly rigid and socially unacceptable interpretive scheme (Schreber's complex system of "nerves" and "rays," for instance) and cases where an individual merely feels uncertainty about the agency of apparently meaningful events (as is the case in most of the texts I examine here). This distinction would be of use in isolating cases of the sort that arise frequently in postwar narrative: cases where individuals not only *suspect* an array of invisible determinants to be at work, but also *suspect their own suspicions*. The secondary suspicion seems to

indicate the process of a rational, self-effacing, skeptical mind—precisely the opposite of irrational or delusional self-inflation.

This distinction, however, is not as easy to make as it first might seem, because a self-effacing uncertainty is not always absent from more serious or "pathological" cases of paranoia. Louis Sass has convincingly argued that extreme cases of paranoid schizophrenia often result from hypercognitivity and excessive self-reflection. Furthermore, interpretive certainty cannot by itself be a sign of insanity, because even Schreber, who was highly committed to a rigid and unorthodox interpretive scheme, is no more certain of his views than Freud is of his own. In fact, Sass's extraordinary analysis of Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903) demonstrates that the apparently rigid claims of a pathological paranoiac may be, in part, the products of overly rigid interpretation on the part of the analyst (or reader of the *Memoirs*). A more self-effacing reader might begin to wonder, as Sass does, if Schreber's apparently insane claims are not actually the work of a brilliant and complex mind:

> One may be tempted to think that the delusions and near-hallucinations it describes are little more than the almost random products of a state of pure irrationality, perhaps of some kind of near-dementia, or of a delirium in which virtually any random fancy passing before the mind can be extracted and treated as real. Yet . . . one cannot help but wonder whether it is possible to discover a coherent system lying behind it all.[29]

Here, the interpretive drive of the analyst—the desire to find some kind of "coherent system lying behind" what initially seems to be "random fancy"—is structurally analogous to the interpretive drive of the paranoiac, whose disorder is characterized by the tendency to locate coherent motives in what others believe to be "random" or "chance" events. As Sass remarks earlier in his study, "paranoid thinking can be viewed as, in some sense, an almost obvious, logical development—in a world . . . where all events feel interpretable, so that nothing can seem accidental and everything therefore appears to be somehow consciously intended" (61).

If the sense that there are no accidents—that everything is connected, intended, and meaningful—is a hallmark of paranoia, then the difference between a paranoid theory and a brilliant theory may only be

a matter of how much explanatory power the theory has for a given interpretive community. And if this is so, then the work of sorting out paranoid claims from justifiable claims—the work of diagnosing, pathologizing, and normalizing—will require a vision at least as penetrating as the one to be judged. Indeed, Sass's desire to match Schreber's own perspicuity seems to be part of what compels him to look for a "coherent system" in Schreber's account, where other analysts have found only "pure irrationality" and "random fancy" (244). Sass even goes on to suggest that Schreber's paranoid system bears a powerful resemblance to sophisticated social theories, such as Foucault's account of panoptic surveillance. Given such resemblances, we might say that the interpretive differences between Freud's account of Schreber and Schreber's account of himself amount to something like a contest between psychoanalysis and sociology—a disciplinary dispute about whether the "really operative factors" in a series of events are best located through study of individuals or analysis of social institutions. Even in the spectacularly delusional case of Schreber, then, serious and intelligent readers disagree about whether Schreber's vision is a profound perception of the social realm or a pure projection of internal material outward. To put the matter in the terms Kathy Acker uses in *Empire of the Senseless* (1988), "Dr. Schreber was paranoid, schizophrenic, hallucinated, deluded, disassociated, autistic, and ambivalent. In these qualities he resembled the current United States President, Ronald Reagan."[30]

This sort of challenge to traditional conceptions of paranoia is a central preoccupation of much postwar writing. One of the reasons stories of paranoia and conspiracy have become so popular recently is that they stage a contest over the reality, or social basis, of a potentially paranoid individual's perceptions. These conflicts have become preoccupations of recent social and cultural theory, because they reveal that "knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?"[31] What is often overlooked in such debates is the degree to which they revolve around issues of agency—questions about *who* or *what* is producing the meaning in a set of signs. Paranoid interpretation, in fact, may be understood as a complex, and often self-defeating, attempt to think sociologically about agency while *simultaneously* retaining a concept of individual action that is at odds with sociological work. It sometimes amounts, then, not only to a self-defensive posture in the

face of external controls, but to a fraught and paradoxical defense of liberal individualism itself.

Consider, for instance, Freud's early encounter with the problem we have just been examining, an encounter that occurred in his 1901 study of motive and accident and became pressing as he attempted to make the critical distinction between psychoanalytic and irrational forms of interpretation. When explaining potentially meaningful coincidences, Freud claims that "superstitious" persons behave "just like paranoics," while he, on the other hand, explains coincidence rationally:

> The differences between myself and the superstitious person are two: first, he projects outwards a motivation which I look for within; secondly, he interprets chance as due to an event, while I trace it back to a thought. But what is hidden from him corresponds to what is unconscious for me, and the compulsion not to let chance count as chance but to interpret it is common to both of us.[32]

A strict definition of the boundary between self and world here grounds Freud's distinction between rational and irrational interpretation. While "irrational" interpretations find motive in *external* determinants, psychoanalytic interpretation locates motive and agency *within* the individual.

This would seem to separate psychoanalytic and paranoid approaches rather nicely. Yet it must be noted that the deepest "inside," the unconscious, is in some ways only another kind of "outside"—a region outside conscious control. Locating motive there, in other words, is not *radically* different from locating it in the suprapersonal agencies (or gods) of the superstitious, or in the collective networks (or conspiracies) of the paranoid. Indeed, we might even say that psychoanalysis solves the problem of whether interpretation is overzealous, or paranoid, by relocating motive from the unitary consciousness of an *intending* subject to a shadowy agent (the unconscious) whose deliberations are veiled and not easily subject to interrogation. This "solution" bears a striking resemblance to conspiracy theory. After all, the unconscious, as Freud later theorized it, is not an affective state, but a mental agency or "system."[33] Freud's "discovery of unconscious processes," writes Paul Ricoeur, "invites us to form the idea of 'belonging to a system'"— precisely the idea so terrifying to the conspiracy theorist.[34] The "systems" in both cases, we might add, govern many of our actions,

thoughts, and desires, and are frequently described in a rhetoric according them motive, unity, and efficacy. Lest my comparison of these mental and social systems seem far-fetched, it is worth adding that the very same analogy allowed Freud to develop social and historical theories on the basis of his mental model.

The real difference between "irrational" and "rational" interpretation, then, lies not so much in *whether* one believes in uncontrollable determinants or agents as in *where* one locates those determinants—and, thus, in how one conceptualizes the agency of persons. For Freud, human action is governed by a complex of mental systems. Freudian theory, to borrow Ricoeur's words, results in a "wounded Cogito . . . a Cogito that posits itself but *does not possess* itself" (439; my emphasis). This conception of the self reverses the basic presumption of possessive individualism, which identifies self-possession and "freedom from the wills of others" as "the human essence."[35] Freud's model also dispenses with the voluntarist aspects of the liberal self—the idea that rational will is the primary determinant of human action—even as he rejects the paranoid compulsion to interpret "chance" as the work of willful actors. We can in fact hypothesize that paranoia is a defense of—perhaps even a component of—liberal individualism. The paranoid, like the superstitious, cannot dispense with the notion that *intentions* are the supreme cause of events in the world, that coincidences are never simply "accidents." In the words of William S. Burroughs, an open enemy of psychoanalysis and postwar America's high priest of agency panic, "there is no such thing as a coincidence. . . . Nothing happens in this universe . . . unless some entity *wills* it to happen."[36]

Whether such a view is "paranoid" in the sense of "wrong" is hard to say. More clear is its implicit view of the self as an atomistic, rational agent beleaguered by other (often immense) rational agents—a view that the writing of Burroughs, among others, articulates with great frequency. Rather than accepting a view of self-control as divided and *less-than-absolute*, the so-called paranoid stance retains an all-or-nothing concept of agency. And unlike Freud, the paranoiac finds the idea of being dispersed into an ineffable system of control (even if it is only his or her own unconscious) wholly intolerable. Paranoia is therefore not merely an interpretive stance, but part of a discourse about agency. Within that discourse, it often produces compelling insights about social control, yet it also tends to promote forms of hyperindividualism, extraordinary desires to keep free of social controls by seeing the self as

its *truest* self when standing in stark opposition to a hostile social order. I now want to offer two distinct, yet equally popular, examples of this sort of thinking from the early Cold War. I offer these texts, in place of more extreme examples, in order to illustrate the popularity and cultural centrality of postwar conspiracy theory's central premises.

THE DEPTH BOYS

In 1957 Vance Packard described a postwar phenomenon he found deeply troubling. "Large-scale efforts," he claimed, are "being made, often with impressive success, to channel our unthinking habits, our purchasing decisions, and our thought processes by the use of insights gleaned from psychiatry and the social sciences."[37] According to Packard, a vast array of "subterranean operations," designed to manipulate the behavior of individuals, had been established by public relations firms, advertisers, "social engineers," and political operatives (8). "Typically," he wrote, "these efforts take place beneath our level of awareness; so that the appeals which move us are often, in a sense, 'hidden.' The result is that many of us are being influenced and manipulated, far more than we realize, in the patterns of our everyday lives" (3).

The notion that a network of agents might be operating "beneath the surface of American life" (9–10) was certainly not original. Nervousness about the supposedly extraordinary powers and dangerous motives of large organizations has long been a feature of U.S. political culture. In Hofstadter's account of it, this paranoid "style" insists that important events are controlled by "a vast and sinister conspiracy, a gigantic and yet subtle machinery of influence set in motion to undermine and destroy a way of life."[38] Of course, Hofstadter associated this "paranoid style" not with the sort of cultural criticism practiced by Packard, but with traditionally "political" texts—that is, documents having to do rather directly with the control of government bodies.

For a more conventional example of the paranoid style from the same period as *The Hidden Persuaders* we might consider J. Edgar Hoover's *Masters of Deceit* (1958), a popular account of communist infiltration. "The communist," Hoover warns, "is in the market places of America: in organizations, on street corners, even at your front door. He is trying to influence and control your thoughts."[39] Like Senator Joseph McCarthy and other practitioners of "paranoid" Cold War politics,

Hoover regards communism as a veiled "plot" (81), a revolutionary "conspiracy" (53) with extraordinary powers.[40] It is "virtually invisible to the non-communist eye, unhampered by time, distance and legality" (81). Significantly, these extraordinary powers seem to lie less in the conspirators themselves than in their massive and half-hidden "thought-control net" (93). Despite the rhetoric of conspiracy, in other words, the real threat is not so much a specific agent or group as *a system of communications*, an organized array of ideas, discourses, and techniques.

In all of these regards, Hoover's account is remarkably similar to Packard's, which also posits a large and powerful program designed to manipulate unwitting Americans. Yet there is a striking political difference between the two texts, and this difference makes their structural resemblance all the more odd: Packard's book exposes a dangerous facet of corporate *capitalism*, while Hoover's hopes to foil *communist* activity. The question, then, is why these accounts of national crisis look so similar when they seem to be at ideological cross-purposes.[41] One possible answer, a familiar one, is that they are part of a "paranoid" tradition transcending particular ideologies and historical conditions. But the notion of a transhistorical paranoid style does not by itself explain why such politically different projects might find a strategic advantage in the notion of conspiracy. Nor does it account for the specific historical conditions that may have shaped these postwar accounts. Even Hofstadter, who traces political paranoia back to colonial America, notes that the nature of paranoid politics is different after World War II, focused on domestic rather than foreign threats and especially concerned about "the effects of the mass media."[42]

These are significant changes, plainly visible in the texts at hand and striking in their consequences. In the first place, they crack open the notion of the paranoid style, making room for texts like Packard's, which is not a traditional "political" document but which nonetheless detects a "gigantic yet subtle machinery of influence" at work in American mass culture. More important, changes in postwar "paranoid politics" indicate an important shift in popular conceptions of political power. After all, to suggest that *conspiracies* are perpetrated through the mass media is to rethink the very nature of conspiracy, which would no longer depend wholly on private messages, but rather on mass communications, messages to which anyone might be privy. This new model of "conspiracy" no longer simply suggests that dangerous

agents are *secretly* plotting against us from some remote location. On the contrary, it implies, rather dramatically, that whole populations are being *openly* manipulated without their knowledge. For mass control to be exercised in this manner, persons must be significantly less autonomous than popular American notions of individualism would suggest. The postwar model of conspiracy, in other words, is dependent on a notion of diminished human agency. And it is *this* concept that makes *The Hidden Persuaders* and *Masters of Deceit* so much alike, despite their distinct ideological underpinnings. Like so many other postwar narratives, both are deeply invested in a traditional concept of individual autonomy and uniqueness, and both reveal this investment through expressions of nervousness about its viability.

One index of this shared anxiety is that Hoover and Packard each posit a secret effort whose real goal is the mass re-engineering of persons. Hoover, for instance, insists that the Communist Party is "a vast workshop where the member is polished and shined, his impurities melted out" (159). The rhetoric of such passages connects communist indoctrination to deindividuation, simultaneously implying that capitalism guarantees human freedom and uniqueness. What is most frightening about communist training, in Hoover's view, is that it seeks to remove *all* "undigested lumps of independence" (163). The "communist thought-control machine" (188) is designed to refashion "renegades" and "deviationists" (185) through a program of "ruthless uniformity" (172). The hypocrisy of this view is rather stunning, since Hoover devotes his book (and devoted his career) to rooting out deviants in order to conserve the ruthless uniformity of *American* politics.[43]

My intention here, however, is not to critique the familiar illogic of Cold War anticommunism. It is rather to show how that illogic governs the impulse toward conspiracy theory. Hoover's unwillingness to consider anything like *capitalist* "thought control"—that is, his failure to portray both communism and capitalism as ideologies—is central to his conspiratorial view of communist training. Because he refuses to see capitalist training as training, he views communist training as a *secret* and *total* means of social control. How else can we account for the fact that, when Hoover reveals the deep secret of communist thought control, it turns out to be nothing more sinister than education? The Communist Party, Hoover explains, is "an educational institution. . . . One of the first things a new member does is to go to a school" (160). Of course,

for Hoover, this is no ordinary school; through its diabolical curriculum, the originally autonomous individual "is made into *communist man*" (159). What allows Hoover to present this little tale of education in the form of a horror story is his assumption that education in a capitalist society, by contrast, is not ideologically shaped and does not construct individuals by its own mechanisms of "thought control." The ironic corollary to this view is not simply that it borrows (and hugely simplifies) an account of ideology from Marxism, but that it undercuts its own premises. If Americans are defined by their extraordinary individual autonomy, then why do they need powerful government protections from communism? The answer can only be that autonomy is precisely what they *lack*, since they are easily turned into "brainwashed" communist dupes. It turns out that for all their putative individuality, Hoover's Americans are deeply susceptible to ideological controls.

The same problem of agency haunts *The Hidden Persuaders*, which asserts that scientists have discovered secret new ways to manipulate human desire. According to Packard, these motivational researchers—"known in the trade as 'the depth boys'" (8)—exploit a model of personhood derived from psychoanalysis, employing special "triggers of action" and "conditioned reflexes" (24) to control components "deep" inside persons. They use packaging and display techniques to induce a "hypnoidal trance" in shoppers, causing them to "[pluck] things off the selves at random" and buy more than they can afford (107); they use "subthreshold effects" (subliminal messages) that might someday make "political indoctrination . . . possible without the subject being conscious of any influence being brought to bear on him" (43); and, in the words of one public relations expert, they are involved in "the most important social engineering role of them all—the gradual reorganization of human society, piece by piece and structure by structure" (217). While Packard suggests that most of these depth experts only "want to control us just a little bit" (240), he speculates that their work may lead to practices like "biocontrol," in which "a surgeon would equip each child with a socket mounted under the scalp" so that "subjects would never be permitted to think as individuals" (239–40).

For Packard, this lurid fantasy—in which "electronics could take over the control of unruly humans" (239)—reveals the real threat of motivational research: it is a technology for the radical reconstruction of persons. Even motivational researchers themselves, in Packard's view,

are "custom-built men," barely separable from the "sample humans" on whom they perform manipulation experiments: each trade school "socially engineers" them to be more compatible with corporate needs (5-6). Such assumptions generate a problem of control much like the one implicit in Hoover's argument. If even the agents of persuasion have been constructed, then who governs the system of depth manipulation? Indeed, if we carry Packard's view to its logical extreme, the very idea of manipulation, in the sense of a *willful* attempt to control others, becomes obsolete, since attempts at manipulation are themselves only products of previous manipulation. In Packard's world, the system of depth manipulation is self-regulating. Control has been transferred from human agents to larger agencies, institutions, or corporate structures.

This way of understanding social control is certainly not new. Social theory has frequently relied on the notion of structural agency, often linking it to the problem of ideology. We might even say that Packard and Hoover have begun to formulate crude theories of ideology—crude not because they are wholly mistaken (advertisers *do* try to manipulate us and communists *do* train new recruits), but because they view social control as a mysterious and magical process, activated instantaneously and capable of utterly disabling rational self-control. The concepts of thought control and depth manipulation provide theories of social conditioning not by accounting for the complex effects of numerous institutions, discourses, rules, and agents, but rather by reducing those effects into a simple mechanism, a "trigger of action" that almost instantaneously converts people into automatons. In other words, Packard and Hoover both attempt to describe a *structural* form of causality while simultaneously retaining the idea of a malevolent, centralized, and *intentional* program of mass control.

This odd conjunction of the intentional and the structural is the essence of agency panic, the motive force of postwar conspiracy culture. It stems from a paradoxical desire to conserve one of the central fantasies of liberalism—the notion that Eve Sedgwick has called "pure voluntarity," an absolute freedom from social control.[44] But in the postwar period this fantasy has come under considerable stress, and the postwar rhetoric of diminished individual agency has often registered this stress with a sense of shock or surprise. Texts from the last half of the twentieth century are replete with the frightening "discovery" that human behavior can be regulated by social messages and communications. What

is striking about such texts is their concomitant assumption that, once revealed, social controls should be so ubiquitous, so effective, so *total*. It is this all-or-nothing conception of agency that in turn feeds the imaginative projection of the liberal self—with all its rationality, autonomy, and self-enclosure—onto the level of the social order, onto the very bureaucracies, information-processing systems, communication networks, and institutions that seemed so threatening in the first place. The most significant cultural function of these texts has been to sustain an increasingly embattled notion of individualism. Conspiracy theory, paranoia, and anxiety about human agency, in other words, are all part of the paradox in which a supposedly individualist culture conserves its individualism by continually imagining it to be in imminent peril.[45]

NOTES

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1. Don DeLillo, *Running Dog* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 111.

2. Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), 347; Rick Marin and T. Trent Gegax, "Conspiracy Mania Feeds Our Growing National Paranoia," *Newsweek*, 30 December 1996, 64–71; Michiko Kakutani, "Bound by Suspicion," *New York Times Magazine*, 19 January 1997, 16; Bob Hoover, "Conspiracy Theories Are Sign of the Times," *Toledo Magazine*, 24 March 1996, A1.

3. Tony Tanner, *City of Words* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), 15. See also Patrick O'Donnell, *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia in Contemporary U.S. Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); and Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). The tendency I am commenting on is obviously not exclusive to the United States. Yet the nation's historic embrace of liberal individualism, its relatively uniform political culture, and its lack of feudal and revolutionary traditions have created an especially fertile climate for conspiracy theory.

4. For a more thorough discussion of this range of fiction, film, and nonfiction, see Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

5. Harry Truman, "The Recall of General Douglas MacArthur (Department of State Bulletin, 16 April 1951)," in *Documents of American History*, ed. Henry Steele Commager, 8th ed., vol. 2 (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), 568.

6. *Dennis v. United States*, 341 US 494 (1951), 564; my emphasis.

7. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 38.

8. DeLillo, *Running Dog*, 183.

9. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (1841), in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 261.

10. Theodore Kaczynski quoted in David Johnston, "In Unabomber's Own Words, a Chilling Account of Murder," *New York Times*, 29 April 1998, A16. In May 1998 Theodore Kaczynski was sentenced for what the FBI dubbed the "Unabom" crimes, a series of mail bombings against industrialists and scientists.

11. In *I Heard It through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), Patricia Turner has documented the importance of conspiracy discourse in African American communities. Comparable tales circulate in a range of communities. See Robert Singh, *The Farrakhan Phenomenon: Race, Reaction, and the Paranoid Style in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997); and Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* (New York: Free Press, 1997). For a prominent example of white supremacist conspiracy fiction, see Andrew Macdonald [William Pierce], *The Turner Diaries*, 2d ed. (Hillsborough, WV: National Vanguard Books, 1980).

12. Charles Siebert in "Forum: Our Machines, Ourselves," moderated by Jack Hitt, *Harper's*, May 1997, 45–54.

13. R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (New York: Ballantine, 1967), 51.

14. Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Bantam, 1970), 10.

15. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 152.

16. My explanation of this response is indebted to Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992), esp. 17–21, 84, 155–56.

17. Leo Bersani, "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature," *Representations* 25 (1989): 101.

18. Laing, *Politics of Experience*, 84.

19. Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1965). For Pipes, "*conspiracy theory* is the fear of a nonexistent conspiracy. *Conspiracy* refers to an act, *conspiracy theory* to a perception" (21). By this absurd definition, conspiracy theories are always wrong and thus no actual conspiracy could ever be theorized—except by a paranoiac. While Robert Robins and Jerrold Post note the "contextual nature of what is paranoid," they never pursue their occasional observations about the difficulty of diagnosing paranoia, instead presuming they have unmediated access to the truth. *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). Tellingly, their example of incorrectly

diagnosed paranoids is a group of Soviet dissidents wrongly jailed for anti-communist views.

20. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964); Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

21. C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

22. See Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973). For an account of contemporary patriot groups, see Kenneth Stern, *A Force upon the Plain* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

23. Gabriele Schwab, *Subjects without Selves: Transitional Texts in Modern Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 5.

24. In his early list of schematic differences between modernism and post-modernism, Ihab Hassan associates paranoia with modernism and schizophrenia with postmodernism. "The Culture of Postmodernism," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 2 (1985): 123–24. Jameson and David Harvey have also accepted such associations without an explanation of why paranoia has been so dramatically present in postmodern narratives. See Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 26–34, 345, 375; and Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 43, 53. If I were to situate my argument in these psychoanalytic terms, I would say that the threat of "schizophrenic" dissolution provokes "paranoid" attempts to defend the integrity of the self in postmodern narrative.

25. For a detailed defense of this assertion, see Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy*, 161–84.

26. Sigmund Freud, "Constructions in Analysis" (1937), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953–74), 23: 268. See also "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)," *Standard Edition*, 12: 79; "Preface to Reik's 'Ritual: Psycho-Analytic Studies,'" *Standard Edition*, 17: 261; and "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *Standard Edition*, 14: 96.

27. Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes," 60; emphases added.

28. Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Viking, 1973), 25, 638.

29. Louis A. Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 244. Further references cited in the body of the text.

30. Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless* (New York: Grove, 1988), 45.

31. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 8–9.

32. Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1904), *Standard Edition*, 6: 259, 257–58.

33. Sigmund Freud, "The Unconscious" (1915), *Standard Edition*, 14: 172.

34. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Dennis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 119. Further references are cited in the body of the text.

35. Macpherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 3.

36. William S. Burroughs, "On Coincidence," in *The Adding Machine: Selected Essays* (New York: Arcade, 1985), 99, 101.

37. Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: David McKay, 1957), 3. Further references are cited in the body of the text.

38. Hofstadter, *Paranoid Style*, 29.

39. J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It* (New York: Henry Holt, 1958), 191. Further references are cited in the body of the text.

40. For McCarthy, communism is "a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man." *America's Retreat from Victory: The Story of George Catlett Marshall* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1951), 169. For other postwar instances, see Hofstadter, *Paranoid Style*.

41. I am not suggesting that Packard is offering a radical leftist critique. Indeed, he embraces the same liberal values that drive anticommunist thought. Nonetheless, the political implications of Packard's account are strikingly different from those of Hoover's.

42. Hofstadter, *Paranoid Style*, 24. Hofstadter underestimates the importance of these historical changes because, like many other analysts, he views it as a transhistorical phenomenon.

43. Hoover knows that "communists quickly accuse anybody who disagrees with them of being guilty of thought control" (81–82), but he is unconscious of the way his own actions mirror or double those of his enemies. While he critiques communists for promulgating instructions, for inculcating loyalty, and for operating in secret, he does all of these things himself, even offering "spy-hunting" instructions.

44. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Epidemics of the Will," in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone, 1992), 582–95.

45. See Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955). By "supposedly individualist," I refer to what Hartz called the United States' "irrational Lockianism" (11)—its paradoxically conformist stance to individualism (63) and its "aversion to systematic social thought" (307).