

Denial networks

On crisis and continuity in the 9/11 truth movement

Datacide

2008

How is it possible that increasingly elaborate conspiracy explanations for the events of September 11th 2001 continue to find appeal amongst a growing population of otherwise rational people, despite the day's events being witnessed by millions and despite these theories being consistently debunked and embarrassed? Why are so many still convinced that the perpetrators of 9/11 were innocent of their greatest accomplishment: the mass murder of thousands for the sake of spectacular Jihad against the west? Why would the partisans of these theories repeat claims long proven false, even at the cost of their own reputations?

We would fail to answer any of these questions by investigating the claims of the theorists themselves. Almost all conspirationist claims have been analyzed and debunked point by point; not by the American government (the nefarious backer of the so-called "official story"), but by thousands of skeptics worldwide from a variety of backgrounds including structural engineers and demolition professionals (see the end for resources which debunk these theories). This collective debunking effort has on the one hand had a large impact in terms of gathering information that details the events of that day and exposes the truly flimsy logic and "empirical evidence" held up by the conspiracy partisans. And yet the emergence of comprehensive debunking has had little to no impact on the Baptist-style evangelism of the core 9/11 truth movement, whose proponents not only continue to propagandize the most obviously disproven "contradictions" from the initial period of 9/11 conspiracy theory (such as the American air defense program NORAD standing down to allow the attacks to happen, the "existence of missile silos at the Pentagon" which should have shot down the plane in Washington, some hijackers still being alive in the Middle East, and much more), they also maintain a multitude of more or less obscurantist facts to dredge up and quibble over when any of their central claims are exposed as logically implausible, or outright lies.

This is a useful strategy when the facts are not in your favor. These self-described truthers, proponents of theories that September 11th was carried out by government forces, tend to pack the field with so much incomprehensible counter-information during arguments that the logical, material and scientific evidence which would sway a passive listener (what Holocaust scholar Deborah Lipstadt would call the preponderance of evidence) is drowned out by the quick succession of seemingly related facts. Similar to their viral videos on the Internet, arguments with truthers usually involve suspending disbelief regarding gaping logical inconsistencies in their

assertions in order to sort through a mountain of more or less obscurantist “unanswered questions”. The unanswered questions themselves are only “unanswered” after being removed from their factual and logical contexts, which one could use to determine if they had sinister implications or not. The more the better, since the rising pile of deceptive “coincidences” creates the basis for imagining even more.

Even when main supports for the conspirationist line of argument are destroyed in the process of debunking (much like passenger jets flying straight into the support columns of the World Trade Centers), truthers tend to hold out for victory by exhaustion or time-out; although they may sense that the collapse is not far off. Fearing that these main supports for their arguments are weak, i.e. a consistent motivation for the conspirators, their material ability to pull the attacks off and their ability to keep thousands of people who might know something completely silent, the truthers hold their head above water with constant revision, backtracking, and the mobilization of hundreds of more or less obscurantist 9/11-related factoids; see for instance the three versions of flagship truth movement series Loose Change. Even the latest installment of this series, the Final Cut still clings to claims disproven at standard debunking resources.

If a movement which claims to stand for exposing the truth does not continually critique itself and its theories, then what “truth” could it possibly stand for? If it cannot construct a counter-theory that is remotely plausible, even an extremely hypothetical one, why would it continue its activity?

What we will find is that quite remarkably, the “truth” movement’s embrace of its own contradictions is the only thing that can keep it in motion given that its very modus operandi provokes a deep internal crisis. This crisis is not for lack of interest. Truthers are correct in claiming an embrace of 9/11 conspiracy theory on a significant scale, for instance a September 2008 World-PublicOpinion poll across several countries found that “on average, 46 percent of those surveyed said al Qaeda was responsible (for the September 11th attacks), 15 percent said the U.S. government, 7 percent said Israel and 7 percent said some other perpetrator. One in four people said they did not know who was behind the attacks.” These numbers are certainly a testament to the vacuum of knowledge that the lying American government has made inevitable in the past seven years. Still, the so-called “truth movement” itself is suffering from a dearth of attention despite the wide-scale denial that the 19 hijackers affiliated with Al Qaeda were responsible for the attack. Recent revisionist history projects such as “the Shell Game”, a novel expounding 9/11 conspiracy theory, and Loose Change: Final Cut, whose creators promised a major theatrical release, have failed quite notoriously to penetrate the mainstream in the ways they had promised. Truther conferences and meet-ups are sparsely attended, flagship web pages see their traffic falling precipitously, and this summer when truth movement superstar Alex Jones took his bullhorn down to a Barack Obama rally at the DNC, he was roundly mocked and physically confronted by the audience before having his bullhorn cord cut.

The contradiction, that the conspirational explanations for 9/11 enjoy a certain popularity on the level of popular consciousness, but that the core propagandists who have helped shift responsibility from the Islamists are more and more ignored is intrinsic to “truth creation”, the productive core of the truth movement, which constructs its interpretation of reality and its relation to others. Despite some vain posturing, this paranoid reality tends to fulfill its own prophecy: that the state of affairs could never be changed.

Producing a “truth” fitting one’s preconceived notions is hard work: history must be appropriated as a malleable form (a raw material) from which historical contexts and logical implications are stripped away so that the newly bare data can be given a specific interpretation. For the conspirationists and their readers, this interpretation has to avoid a whole third dimension of history in which the motive force of history originates not exclusively in the political superstructure, but with the mode of production that drives and shapes the actions of human society. Truthers tend to position the asymmetric conflict between fundamentalist militias and would-be superpowers as the handiwork of powerful cabals, bankers, secret societies and militaries, organizations which supposedly determine everything. Presented with such a scenario, we as listeners, as potential sympathizers, find no sort of imminent subjectivity for us to confront these phenomena. Their significance is after all anchored in a political sphere divorced from the everyday life we experience in capitalism: production, circulation and reproduction for the sake of the capitalist economy. Instead of imagining how the events of September 11th bear on our individual and collective activity in capitalist society, the truthers invite us to find the “real criminals” and enter into a forensic examination of their crimes.

To interpret September 11th and other major catastrophes (like the July 7th 2005 bombings in London and the Iraqi civil war), truthers tend to elevate certain portions of existing information as definitive above the broader contexts that surround it, orienting particular facts into a new package. Take for instance the conspirationist claim that sulfur content detected in the wreckage of the twin towers meant that thermite, an incendiary, was used in a controlled demolition of the towers. In fact, the considerable sulfur residue found by investigators is just as attributable to the preponderance of drywall built into both towers, which contained significant amounts of sulfur. Since the average person is ignorant of this, it becomes a talking point, despite contradicting basic knowledge about the buildings’ collapse sites. Conspirationists want to attract attention by using information that has been cut up to sound scandalous and terrible, despite the actual explanation being entirely mundane. Often, the newly re-related facts are deceptively phrased as “unanswered questions” to dodge immediate logical contradictions about their larger contexts. The new commodity is controversial: it asks the questions that haven’t been asked, or are simply frowned upon by unpopular leaders. Yet even as a question these claims are delicate, most incapable of surviving an empirical investigation, let alone logical deduction.

Consider “Find the Boeing”, the original truther flash movie/website which invited the reader to believe that American Airlines flight 77 had not actually hit the Pentagon.¹ The site was created by France-based writer Thierry Meyssan (founding member of the so-called “Axis for Peace”), whose book ironically titled *The Big Lie* popularized allegations of a faked Pentagon attack and has been translated into 28 languages. His photo series cherry picks visuals of the exterior wall of the Pentagon after American Airlines flight 77 had impacted and asks the viewer leading questions like: “Can you find debris of a Boeing 757–200 in this photograph?” or “Can you explain why the Defence Secretary deemed it necessary to sand over the lawn, which was otherwise undamaged after the attack?” (respectively: no, most of the debris was inside the building, and trucks and vehicles which would haul this debris out of the building had to have something to drive on). The goal is to provoke doubt and allude to conclusions but at the same time avoid commitment. Meyssan wants to state what he thinks, he wants to say what is taboo,

¹ www.asile.org

but he refuses the accountability of a definitive statement to let you mouth conclusions that are his own. Thierry Meyssan is just asking questions.²

The “inquiry” only succeeds in its limited capacity by sealing off the crime scene, by capturing it in two dimensions outside of the logical inconsistencies which would invalidate it. Inconsistencies like: why would the government fake an attack on the Pentagon in the first place? If the World Trade Center attacks were “inside jobs”, why go to the trouble of taking the passengers out somewhere in favor of a missile? What would a missile add to anything? What happened to American Airlines flight 77 and its passengers..? Since Meyssan only presents images that tend towards the conspiratorial explanation, many viewers at the time assumed that these were the only pictures that exist of the crash scene (of course they are not).³ But the contradictions in logic and evidence did not hinder the appeal of the page; in fact Find the Boeing has enjoyed millions of hits. The “documentary” Loose Change followed, as well as a bevy of other September 11th conspirationist movies and books.

Similar to a card game hustle on the street, one way conspirationists manage to sell their theories is by appealing to the absolute authority of one’s own senses. Take this conversation between a skeptic and a conspiracy theorist in 2007 at Ground Zero, where the WTC towers once stood:⁴

“So, you wanna know why the towers collapsed, and why World Trade Center 7 came down. How many structural engineers have you contacted to find out this information?”

“No no no. Look I can tell you that I’ve read books, I’ve watched videos, I’ve listened to mp3s, I’ve read a lot of articles, I’ve done as much research as I possibly can, for myself using my brain, my heart and my common sense.”

Truthers appeal to their viewers’ sense of imminent rationality, claiming that no event is explicable beyond someone’s concrete ability to perceive it. In the two-dimensional world of video analysis and “unanswered questions”, the audience is invited to find their subjectivity as impartial judges of events that pass before them. Certainly this goes beyond September 11th. Any act of political violence is fair game for being a “false flag operation” with enough imagination and cut-up Internet “research”. All it takes to negate the Islamist massacres of 9/11, the Bali bombings, the sectarian civil war in Iraq and more is shoddy “video analysis” and hand-waving about undetectable intelligence agencies conspiring to achieve the aims of their governments. Multi-faceted conflicts with a material class and social reality are wished away with the same perverse pleasure that children take in telling their friends that Santa Claus does not exist. Believers find themselves in a vague limbo where no action can be attributed as the satisfied work of fundamentalists, and society is dominated by a pitiless ruling class, capable of killing anyone and getting away with anything. This is an interpretation of reality that is much more stable than actually existing class society, in which ruling classes really have to struggle to retain legitimacy vis-à-vis

² This practice is referred to by many in the skeptic community as ‘JAQing off’.

³ See photos on this page for instance: wtc7lies.googlepages.com

⁴ These claims are summarily debunked at wtc7lies.googlepages.com and other debunking pages. One must add that there is a particular cruelty in denying that the last words heard from a loved one were faked “by voice-morphing” technology. Especially coming from people trying to downplay the heroism of those who fought back against the Al-Qaeda hijackers intent on killing all of them.

the working classes due to the miserable dispossession inevitable to capitalism. Conflict is relativized to the perceptions of the conspiracy theorist: in his world there is only the super-state and its duped subjects. Any world event is appropriated as evidence of what is already assumed. In this way, truthers can avoid traumatic encounters with the wider context of logic and evidence around a particular event and preserve their world view.

Many believed what they wanted to believe: that the Islamic fundamentalists, who were not real prior to September 11th and only faintly so afterwards, didn't have to be real after all. The martyr ideology didn't have to be comprehended and so what about their motivations; these fundamentalist phantoms were only illusions, or puppets hiding the real perpetrators. Inside job theories came to be the easiest way out for the average person wanting to escape the new reality where America had invaded Afghanistan and Iraq. The Jihadist attacks which started it all were just a bad trip.

The reasoning behind September 11th truth conspiracy requires a closed, two-dimensional world, in which the concept of contingency, i.e. that uncertainty is inevitable in any still system, does not enter into play. Truthers refuse to accept the convergence of security vulnerabilities and Jihadist intent which constitute the random element of the September 11th events, instead insisting on finding connections among the various 'coincidences'.

In their movie, all characters are targets for the audience's suspicion, no object is throwaway and any coincidence necessarily hints at the binds which hold the leviathan conspiracy together. Truthers have worked hard to conceptualize September 11th in this light, as a closed event, as a soap opera. Everyone involved is a suspect, from the group Project for a New American Century to the firefighters at the World Trade Center 7. Nothing is off limits; even the desperate final phone calls of Flight 93 passengers to their families are pitilessly depicted as "hoaxes" in order to edge out any doubt that "everything's connected man." This still world; this air-conditioned theater has been emptied of the random chaos of reality. It exists solely to provide what the peace movement couldn't: the comforting illusion that the Americans who did not act against the security and imperialist state after 2001 were merely duped.

The truth only needs to be disseminated to change the whole scenario, this is the conclusion which drives the baptist style activism of the conspirationists.

Take for instance the We Are Change organization, whose members take pride in their surreal Maoist-esque confrontations and denunciations of supposed "collaborators" such as Larry Silverstein (the owner of World Trade Center 7), Lee Hamilton (vice-chairman of the 9/11 commission) and many others. We Are Change activists make it a point to go to public speeches to heckle and deride their target from the auditorium, or try to catch them off guard with a random bit of September 11th trivia which causes the target to stumble. This is all captured on video and uploaded to the web.

What could appear to be a confrontation against the powerful, or brave men shattering the passivity of the audience is anything but. When he rises from his seat for this brave confrontation, the denouncer knows that were the "conspirator" truly capable of organizing an international plot to engineer the September 11th attacks, they would also be capable of making the denouncer disappear with no questions asked. However, this is the very contradiction that ensures the reproduction of the truth movement. The "heroic" act is just as necessary as the paranoiac propa-

gandizing about an all powerful state. In finding their concrete target for denunciation, truthers openly acknowledge the falsehood of their own “theory” in their own actions. However what would otherwise be a painful admission of flawed thinking is ironically what sells it. A semblance of activity in public is all it takes to lend legitimacy to the dream factories online. There’s no real desire for debate here. Most public “truth” performance is oriented towards the listener and need only be long enough to shout out a website or reference an Internet movie to keep the game moving.

If pressed, they are “just asking questions”. Pretending that they do not already have foregone conclusions and are mere ‘truth seekers’ is after all what has kept truthers marching in anti-war demonstrations and allowed them a broad, if temporary, Internet audience. Still, the truthers encounter another contradiction in that people quickly lose patience with those constantly ‘asking questions’ to the wrong people: namely not structural engineers and demolition professionals. A more aggressive posture is needed, even if it contradicts the claims of innocent inquiry. Thus at every truther rally we can hear the self-assured chant that “9/11 was an inside job! 9/11 was an inside job!” This combination of fake skeptical inquiry with the joyous certainty of their pornographic accusation keeps the truth movement controversial even while adding to the stack of visible and laughable contradictions within the milieu. But enough appeal is generated to recruit the participants needed for its network experiment with historical revision.

Anyone could be a producer, anyone could be a transmitter. For this reason September 11th conspiracy theories experienced a widespread popularity. Free and accessible to anyone with a decent Internet connection, the truth movement has even been described by some as an anti-authoritarian network. Perhaps it has no central authority beyond the token experts which produce its analysis, but there is certainly what we may call a production structure here, one which relies on a simulacra of classic capitalist production: “truths” are created with a value created via collective labor, but this truth will lose its value if it is not circulated. No listeners, no network. Similarly, the hodgepodge of theories around the movement which roughly divide into speculation about the two WTC towers, WTC 7, the Pentagon, Flight 93, hijackers and Al Qaeda are capable of existing simultaneously independent of each other as particular accusations and then coming together as “the overwhelming evidence” often cited by conspirationists to recruit the unprepared. If one theory fails, another is there to take its place, not dissimilar to a capitalist division of labor.

Truthers would probably explain their own evangelism with the idea of broadening the network of “truth-seekers” to carry on the forensic battle, perhaps even recruiting in the crass sense. But actually the need to recruit at all costs stems from the vulnerability of their theory to source and fact checking. This in turn leads them to feign legitimacy in science and forensics long enough to attract those already ideologically predisposed to their belief system. Here truthers avoid staking ground in any particular configuration of facts, nor producing a coherent theory compatible with the existing eyewitness testimony, the physical evidence and the reports of engineering organizations like that of NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology). Instead, the truth movement wins what credibility they have by distributing their distortions as far as possible and creating a false consensus, by remaining in motion and asking the same answered “unanswered” questions to people who simply haven’t heard them. This way, whenever

a skeptic thoroughly disproves certain claims (for example, that the phone calls of passengers to their families were somehow faked via voice-morphing technology) and the value of these “unanswered questions” is openly put into question, the speculation survives because it can be shifted elsewhere and taken up by others, somewhere else, who see some rhetorical value in the memorization of conspirationist arguments and now possess a thousand obscure factoids with which to unleash upon their peers.

Born during the Internet streaming and downloadable video boom as well as the explosion of blog-related media, these theories took a viral form. This allowed even the most routinely debunked claims to survive major debunkings thanks to network spread, since debates surrounding the hard facts and core of the theories were not distributed in any proportion to the claims themselves. Almost like a torrent or a file sharing structure, as long as the films (Loose Change, 9/11 mysteries, Zero etc.), manifestos, blog entries and so on survived, so did the theory, because they could be re-transmitted to find new life with new people. The core of initial conspiracy theorists whose “research” laid down the tracks for the flagship allegations set up shop at the center of a productive and distributive network which, once started, required only a minimum of input from “researchers” due to the sheer popularity of the conspiracy itself which was rooted in the political appeal of negating the Al-Qaeda network, and in turn seven years of war. As long as the “peers” are active in spreading and half-heartedly defending the half-baked theories of the “seeds”, the truth commodities remain in circulation. For their part, the more committed conspirationists at the center like radio show host Alex Jones and the writer David Ray Griffin, have multiplied their propaganda and demagoguery into small media empires, staking real monetary interests in keeping the game moving.⁵

To keep information rotating and themselves in the public eye, truthers deploy a wide variety of methods, anything from: Internet video, blogs, “boosting” sites on search engines, spam relay machines, masking “truth” movies as hot search items on Youtube and Google video, preaching 9/11 truth over Wal-mart intercoms (!) and even urging their readers to “Trick or Truth” last Halloween (perhaps setting a record for sheer asininity!). Like any pyramid scheme, the larger the pool of participants and their perceived activity, the larger the pool of perceived value; for the conspirators, the more hits on their Youtube videos, the more people are behind them, the more their own participation seems to acquire a deep meaning and even a messianic importance.

Indeed, there seems to be no humiliation and no thorough debunking from which the partisans of September 11th denial cannot recover. While certain deniers, such as the “Loose Change” crew of Dylan Avery, Jason Bermas and friends have seen their stars decline due to boorish ineptitude and plain-faced lies that thankfully did not go unnoticed, it is true that a more general feeling that “9/11 was an inside job” is on the rise. In this sense, the September 11th attacks approach a sort of urban legend status. Nowhere is this more true than in countries without access to information that would contest these claims. There, even ideas openly derided by veteran conspirationists, for example that no plane hit the Pentagon, are picked up and run with by those looking to focus popular resentment against America into political gain, or publishers working on the profit motive and willing to overlook the plausibility of these claims. Case in point, Yukihiro Fujita, a Japanese Diet member from the opposition Democratic Party of Japan recently caused a great stir when he argued against permitting the Japanese Self Defense Force to provide fuel for the NATO mission in Afghanistan by citing “evidence” that 9/11 was possibly an inside job. Using

⁵ youtube.com

visuals hardly more sophisticated than Google and Youtube movies, Fujita cast doubt on whether a 757 really hit the Pentagon, described the collapse of World Trade Center 7 as “strange” and speculated on stock deals right before the attack. For his performance, he received adulations from other diet members and of course from conspirationists all over the world. Fujita is only exceptional in being one of the first politicians to raise the lukewarm conspirationist points into an institution of government. Previously of course these theories had mostly appeared in organs of reaction like Al Manar, the American Free Press, the Tehran Times etc., meeting with little controversy in traditionally anti-American areas. Fujita’s example shows the potential for how these theories can be used in helping ruling class factions politically shift away from the American superpower.

It is not only the deceptive nature of truth production and circulation within the movement that have come to define it. Many of the activists who have helped shape “9/11 truth” are partisans of the fascist right, veterans of manipulating information and history. We can see their contributions in many of the obsessions of the “truth movement”. For instance the accusations that Jewish financier Larry Silverstein blew up an entire building to destroy documents a paper shredder would have made short work of, the suspicion that a van full of celebrating Israelis were orchestrators of the attacks as well as the crude anti-Zionism and anti-semitism of sites like Whatreallyhappened, Rense.com and Antiwar.com.⁶

Certainly a hard core of conspirationists had existed in nuclei in variously libertarian, gun-clutching, anti-semitic and white supremacist guises before the events of 9/11, cutting their teeth on conspiracy theories surrounding the Oklahoma City bombings. Although there is a more acceptable face on the 9/11 theories now in the person of scientists, professors and right-wing politicians, it remains true that the hard right put in a lot of leg work to deny the role of the 19 hijackers.⁷ People like Christopher Bollyn, Eric Williams, Eric Hufschmid and Carol A. Valentine as well as the American Free Press as a publication were all instrumental to developing the initial crop of 9/11 conspiracy theories. All of them are vocal holocaust deniers and obsessive anti-Zionists. Thanks to their work, core 9/11 conspiracy theory beliefs such as: the basement bombs theory, Mossad involvement, the shoot-down of flight 93, remote controlled planes, the Bin Laden video hoax, doubts about hijacker Hani Hanjour’s piloting skills and many claims of evidence fakery etc. were popularized on blogs and around the Internet.⁸ Holocaust deniers have been active participants in the “truth” movement since its genesis, and today it is no surprise that many white supremacist and Islamist groups promote theories that center around Jewish or Israeli involvement in the attacks.

Take for instance the case of former peace activist and founder of “Citizens for 9/11 Truth”, Steve Campbell. Over local public access television in Aspen, Colorado, Campbell broadcast standard 9/11 conspiracy theory that eventually moved into holocaust denial and anti-Semitic screeds.⁹ Although the grassroots community access channel looked the other way when Camp-

⁶ Even now, at Alex Jones’ Prison Planet we can find an appeal to raise \$80,000 for a “money bomb” to get Jones a satellite television show. The slogan reads: “The sleeping masses see television as truth. Let us prove them correct.”

⁷ See “9/11 Truth is a bald regurgitation of a silly tale we heard ten years ago” by Matt Taibbi in Rolling Stone, www.rollingstone.com

⁸ 911guide.googlepages.com

⁹ adamholland.blogspot.com

bell aired films about “Zionists” planning 9/11, it was only when his connections with Neo-Nazis, including the National Alliance, came to light that the channel’s executive board debated whether his show should be taken off the air. Defending himself, Campbell claimed that “I think there’s a lot of preconceived ideas that have been indoctrinated into people’s minds as to what the Holocaust is all about. Showing the film would give people an opportunity to decide for themselves.” Campbell’s show was taken off the air, but his defense illustrates the scandalous logic of the 9/11 truth movement taken to its most obvious conclusion: history is a laissez-faire market, a perfectly flat venue of ideas that are all equally plausible. We can all buy into the fantasies we prefer and “decide for ourselves.”

No matter their relation to the movement now (many have been pushed to the fringes), for this wing of the movement and for Steve Campbell, it was an important foray into the public. Their way of thinking — paranoid anti-Semitism — was preserved in structure and spread to hundreds of thousands of people worldwide.

Professor of theology David Griffin has been one of the more influential authors churning the truth cash machine, putting out several books on September 11th “unanswered questions” including *The New Pearl Harbor*. This book is enough of a flagship to have helped him create a cottage industry of paid lectures and book writing (seven since 2004), despite being repeatedly embarrassed for his outrageous claims that cell phone calls from hijacked victims to their families were faked.¹⁰ Griffin cannot seem to put an article or book out which does not include quotes or attributions to holocaust denier Christopher Bollyn, the anti-semitic *rense.com*, the American Free Press, *World Net Daily* or other reactionary right-wing journals. Mainly Griffin’s dependence on these sources is due to the fact that these people pioneered the conspiracy “research” to begin with and there are often simply no other sources around! This August, Griffin brought the “truth” to Tennessee-based “the Political Cesspool”, an avowedly “pro-white” radio show.

In terms of sheer reaction, Alex Jones is perhaps the best example of a propagandist who combines “real” American nationalism, anti-immigrant sentiment and anti-communism with 9/11 truth activism. The catch-all conspirationist and populist radio host believes among other things that the world government (run by bankers) is ready to kill 80% of humanity to save on oil and that “globalism” is a tool of the global elite to break down the nation state.¹¹ Outside of his fiery propaganda speeches against the new world order which resemble the ranting of professional wrestlers, Jones directs much of his ire at immigrants, in one video accusing Latino high school groups in the United States of “openly planning to kill all white males over the age of 16.”¹² There is also Kevin Barrett, former professor of Islamic history and rather vocal “truther”, who is published in the questionable “*Journal of 9/11 studies*” and describes himself as a “Scholar for 9/11 truth”. Barrett has described the Iraq war as a “Nazi-style war of aggression” waged by the US and Zionists against the Iraqi people, actively apologizes for both Hezbollah and Hamas in their war on Israel and made sure to stand up for holocaust deniers when their attendance was threatened at an Arizona “truth” conference in early 2007.

With this elite group of originators and propagandists, it is no shock that figureheads of anti-enlightenment reaction such as Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, who believes Jews run the world by “proxy” and who banned the New York Philharmonic from performing in

¹⁰ Some of the idiocies behind his claims are debunked here, on a truther website of all places! www.oilempire.us

¹¹ Some of the idiocies behind his claims are debunked here, on a truther website of all places! www.oilempire.us

¹² youtube.com

Malaysia because they play “Jewish music”, as well as Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, the plainspoken propagandist for a “final war” with Israel, have hopped on the truth bus as well. Ahmedinejad writes in an open letter to President Bush:

“September eleven was not a simple operation...Could it be planned and executed without coordination with intelligence and security services – or their extensive infiltration? Of course this is just an educated guess...Why have the various aspects of the attacks been kept secret? Why are we not told who botched their responsibilities? And, why aren’t those responsible and the guilty parties identified and put on trial? All governments have a duty to provide security and peace of mind for their citizens.”

To which the Alex Jones-affiliated and widely-read Prison Planet “issued a challenge to leaders of all ‘rogue states’ imploring them to blow the whistle on the Achilles heel of all major western government’s, their propensity to fulfill geopolitical agendas by means of carrying out staged false flag terrorism...It is now time for all governments who still operate outside of the control of the Globalists to come forward and join humanity in unveiling the real terrorists who are attempting to deform the world into a prison planet.”¹³ And so the “freedom fighters” of the 9/11 truth movement stand together with the worst totalitarians in the world in a struggle aimed at the “globalists.”

The left for its part seems to have largely contented itself with tacit toleration of 9/11 conspiracy theory. Truthers seem welcome at anti-war protests, with only scattered accounts of confrontations.¹⁴ Major “progressive” radio stations like Air America, KPFK and KPFA have given a great deal of airtime to truth movement figureheads. Given the large support base of the reactionary right within truther groups, one would expect people fighting for a better world to show extreme skepticism and even outrage against these falsifications of history. However, like Counterpunch’s Alexander Cockburn observed back in 2006:

“Five years after the attacks, 9/11 conspiracism has now penetrated deep into the American left... These days a dwindling number of leftists learn their political economy from Marx via the small, mostly Trotskyist groupuscules. Into the theoretical and strategic void has crept a diffuse, peripatic conspirationist view of the world that tends to locate ruling class devilry not in the crises of capital accumulation, or the falling rate of profit, or inter-imperial competition, but in locale (the Bohemian Grove, Bilderberg, Ditchley, Davos) or supposedly “rogue” agencies, with the CIA still at the head of the list. The 9/11 “conspiracy”, or “inside job”, is the Summa of all this foolishness.”¹⁵

¹³ prisonplanet.com

¹⁴ One funny example of truthers being confronted at an anti-war protest is the conflict between supporters of Iraq War Resisters and the Toronto Truthers in which two surly war resisters mock the hamster wheel ‘truth’ arguments. Videos here: forums.randi.org

¹⁵ “The 9/11 conspirationists and the Decline of the American Left”, worth reading for Cockburn’s sharp-tongued deconstruction of the truth movement: www.counterpunch.org

In the same magazine, the writer Joann Wypijewski observes in her article “How Far We’ve Fallen” that:

“Here was the ultimate failure of politics, translated, Go to your room, alone, immerse yourself in ephemera, alone, meet others just like yourselves so you can talk endlessly about this or that loose end lately discovered in your hours of isolation in front of the screen.”¹⁶

With no vocally progressive movements in either Iraq or Afghanistan waiting “in the wings” like the Vietcong of the 1960s or the Sandanistas of the 1980s etc., parts of the left have begun to circle the drain and replace the search for a heroic other abroad with the search for an evil other within. The task of transforming the life we experience everyday, which carries within it the violent exploitation and expropriation propping up the inter-imperialist conflict remains quite remote.

Despite the wider tendency to casually accept these theories, both Counterpunch and Znet have made admirable efforts to debunk and expose their reactionary logic. However most on the left simply don’t feel like burrowing into engineering textbooks to defend their interpretation of political economy and stand up to September 11th denial. The backwash of cultural relativism has led to a sort of reality relativism: what do we really know? Who are we to say? Let’s just avoid the uncomfortable schisms. Liberals, anti-imperialists and the reactionary right can all find common ground in skipping over an analysis of Jihadist martyrism to preserve a simpler world view: the neo-conservative take-over. For those in the left who avoid a structural analysis of society and a real engagement with history, it’s easier this way.

Despite their success in contributing to the shift to a paranoid “mood” amongst the public at large, these are hard times for the activist core of “truth” movement. Rallies and conferences meant to galvanize the public are sparsely attended, and the actual amount of material from which to draw new “unanswered questions” from has been severely depleted. Conspiracy theories about the Federal Reserve, chemtrails, the North American Union etc. are new attractions that are easier to believe in than the “hard science” and obscurantist justifications for 9/11 conspiracy theory. Certainly, shuffling around the old lies with new varnish will work for awhile. As long as movement leaders focus on trivia and make sure not to address larger contexts or logic, a certain core of enthusiasts will be able to justify their interest, and serve as new consumers of old conservative ideologies. But there is an entropic principle at work on the truth network that spins a thousand claims, eventually the facts catch up, no matter how large the circle is spun. The truth movement’s slow circling of wagons and the retreat by many activists from definitive controlled demolition claims into vague speculation about internal government conspiracies which allowed the attacks to happen indicates a forfeiture in the realm of public appeal and an effort to preserve the continuity of only a core audience. Whether this forebodes a discrediting of the movement is less clear due to the widespread and insipid acceptance of certain conspiracy theory memes.

¹⁶ www.counterpunch.org

Meanwhile, these ideologies wreak havoc among the gullible and those in countries without access to debunking resources, wearing away at the very imminence of contingency. Reality is deconstructed, relayed, reassembled in networks that still see their *raison d'être* in denying the possibility for 19 dedicated fundamentalists to change history. Believers will trade a world which they do not try to comprehend for a world which they have built to be perfectly consistent. This is more dangerous than the casual subscribers to the conspiracy theorists imagine. With 9/11 theories, the believer forgoes a critique of existing conditions in favor of assuming the audience's position as passive judge for political events that pass before the eye. This demobilization imagines away the lives and sheer will of Mohammed Atta, Hani Hanjour and the other death squad members, as well as the training camps which made their carnage possible. In denying the power of a small group of men to overpower four planes and use them as suicide weapons, conspiracy adherents wind up denying the possibility for uncontrolled action, for unpredictability. They forfeit acknowledging subjectivities that organize destruction for their own ends (no matter how barbarous) despite a tight security environment, in favor of an ideology where contingency is abolished, the security state is the only frame of reference and you and I are mere subjects to be destroyed.

So far, the all-powerful ruling class that controls everything has not managed to produce a stable Iraqi state and the US now enters imperial brinkmanship with Russia, Iran and Venezuela over resources. In America, the list of major bank collapses grows: Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae, Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers. As the imminent recession approaches, it will be rising taxes and massive cuts in social spending that fill the gap left by bank bailouts. This means that in a period where working class people are more and more subject to ruthless exploitation, they will nevertheless have to organize their activity even though they may see little hope of revolution. In this struggle, paranoia about the super-state and its invincibility must be the first trash out the window. The working class is that contingent element in capitalism which defies the iron laws of history. Its partisans will have to defend the sudden and violent transformation of reality tooth and nail against the conspiratorist faithful who deny not only its realization, but its very possibility!

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