PARANOIA

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Paranoia seems an inevitable product of the increased accessibility of information. It makes consuming information seem mandatory, a form of necessary vigilance; it helps rationalize voracious news consumption. Attention has become a scarce economic resource, and the efforts to commandeer it and disrupt our sense of control over it have become more and more intense and technologically sophisticated. Paranoia appears in this context as a kind of coping mechanism, a Pyrrhic effort to reassert executive function and reorient the self through heroic acts of feverish interpretation. Adam Phillips has described paranoia as “the self-cure for insignificance,” a way of placing the paranoid person “at the center of a world which has no center.” Social media often function as a literal instantiation of that idea, organizing information algorithmically based on the data that’s been collected about a user. In that context, paranoid interpretation may become a kind of decentering process, as we try to decode who the platforms think we are and how we might eventually become somebody else.

CLEARINGS

Historical wounds are recalled, distorted, and even forgotten, but living with nuclear waste means remembering on a different scale

by JACQUELINE FELDMAN

On January 24, 1994, Michel Faudry, mayor of Chatain, in France's Vienne Department, adjourned to his mother's house and, later on, a hunting lodge. The French state had nominated the granite that underlay the Vienne as a candidate for the disposal of nuclear waste, and Faudry, endeavoring for consensus within his community, had paid himself, out of pocket, to hold a referendum. It seems the department's prefect had told Faudry he could not fund it publicly and that Faudry had been, for his efforts, bombarded by eggs, tomatoes, and anonymous phone calls. Now, on a riverbank, he breathed. In one telling, he wrote two letters, one to his sister, one prescribing the care of his donkeys and canaries to a friend. It is said he requested that the town he loved reconcile and proposed it reunite at a party in his honor the following day. News reports about Faudry's day that January 24 are not consistent with regard to the details. Faudry lifted a pistol and, sitting, or lying on a table, a cushion below his neck, fired one shot through his heart.

IN DEFENCE OF INDUSTRY BY FELICITY HAMMOND.

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Andra, the public utility that handles France's nuclear waste, did not build in the Vienne, but, in 1999, obtained authorization to sink a laboratory below Bure, a village of roughly 90 inhabitants in the Meuse Department, in the Lorraine, a region of fluctuating fortunes bordering Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany. Pending experimentation and approval, it will bury 85,000 cubic meters of waste here, 500 meters below what's now a forest, and, in 2150, seal the repository.

I visited Bure in January after reading news of a contest Andra held, calling on artists to design warning signage. The waste may remain dangerous for 100,000 years, according to the company's projection. Whoever lives here, if anyone, must be discouraged from digging it up. Lower-activity waste at another dump in the Manche, in northwestern France, presents just 300 years of toxicity, but a few of the artists, in on-camera interviews for Andra, explained that the longevity of the danger to be contained at Bure had inspired them. The markers they devised did not rely on any contemporary language or culturally specific symbol.

Legally, Andra, which also maintains paper archives, must steward knowledge of the Bure site for a minimum of 500 years. While it held its contest twice, in 2015 and 2016, it did not promise to build any marker. Winners received 3,000 or 6,000 euros. Out of the 2015 contest came a plan to modify the forest's trees so they'd grow blue. Other entries dealt with memory as a communal enterprise. In 2016, second place went to a baton made out of the site's native clay, accompanied by a plan for its relay across generations. In 2015, third place was conferred on a nursery rhyme to be passed down by schoolchildren. The lyrics are banal—*open your ears really wide / listen to my advice*—but I was struck by their characterization of the waste, which ascribes a fretful sentience to it.

Shut in, worrying
A light, palpating
All the way down there, deep
That's where it lives

I stayed for nine days in total, and, after I returned from Bure, I could describe the place where I'd been, a dwelling for waste, only by the landscape's near-photographic contrast. Andra's laboratory presented itself as yellow light filling a shallow valley. It was as bright as goldenrod. Around it, fields opened, stippled with a dull gray snow, and continued on to meet every horizon, broken occasionally by the pylons of long-distance power lines. Above one horizon I saw sparkling white lights, and only afterward, the white forms of wind turbines appeared against a bone-white sky.

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Although France relies exceptionally heavily on nuclear energy, which accounts for 75 percent of the country's electricity, the United States contains more plants and similarly has sought to memorialize their by-product. In 1981, consulting on a study submitted by the Bechtel Group to the Department of Energy, Thomas Sebeok, a Budapest-born semiotician known for arguing that apes would never understand language, suggested an "atomic priesthood" who would safeguard knowledge of the waste over millennia while scaring people away. Specifically, he recommended they spread a threat of "supernatural retribution." Among the information that is searchable online, I find little to indicate the government's reaction to this proposal. In 1994, Susan Garfield, a psychotherapist, wrote that the report "demonstrates that the very premise of 'out of sight, out of mind' deep geological burial of radioactive materials leads inevitably to procedures in the social, political and spiritual life of the people that are not any less destructive because they are absurd." New Mexico's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), built to last 10,000

years, began accepting the transuranic waste that weapons leave in 1999.

A team that the government convened in 1991, tapping experts in "history, future studies, economics, law, physics, sociology, geography, engineering, political science, risk analysis, agriculture, climatology, history, and demographics," as well as the illustrator responsible for Carl Sagan's cover art, duly condemned secrecy and fear as tactics. Still, as I read this team's report, I noticed a glow of disingenuousness. Burial is a technology of forgetting. It's a cover up.

These experts suggested fields of spikes or massive thorns, all askew, or else an expanse of black rock that would get hot, or a plain of rubble, or a charmless maze of cramping, too-small passageways, all made of lasting but cheap materials like granite to preclude looting. "Note our use of irregular geometries and the denial of craftsmanship," they write. "At the same time, we make an enormous investment of labor in these rude materials. It speaks of a massive investment, but not one tinged with pride or honored with value-through-worksmanship."

Our descendants would inherit markers that were ugly but forbiddingly expensive. While these markers would resemble ruins at the time of their building, their scale would not confer sublimity. Ruins lost their grandeur during the First World War, writes Geoff Dyer in *The Missing of the Somme;* once technology could produce rubble instantly, ruins lost their mystery. Time failed to dignify them.

The Meuse, where Bure is located, is little visited, even by the French, but it does draw tourists curious about the First World War. Parts of the department were furrowed with trenches. After the war, the French government isolated a "red zone" that included part of the department. Unexploded shells turned up, and still do; in 2014, according to *National Geographic,* some of the workers collecting them guessed they'd take 300 years to remove. Six towns near Verdun that the enemy shelled to destruction were decorated, like human veterans, with the Cross of War. Honored and quarantined, the land was treated as if it had served actively.

Wars vary, as do enemies. With apparent gusto, the American experts write, "Some of the archetypal feelings and meanings we will explore in design of the markers for the WIPP site are those of: dangers to the body; darkness; fear of the beast; pattern breaking chaos and loss-of-control; dark forces emanating from within; the void or abyss; rejection of inhabitation; parched, poisoned and plagued land … and others."

By contrast, Andra's awardees propose designs that are pretty: equilateral triangles of a gleaming silica; scarlet geopolymer set like jewels in metal loops; or trees growing atop rectangular columns that will sink into the ground over 300 years. What's their function? Memorials "honor the dead," Arthur C. Danto wrote in 1985, referring to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. "With monuments, we honor ourselves." If these markers are monuments, celebrating future humans as victors, the war won by humanity against nuclear waste will have been one of attrition, valuing outlasting, like a staring contest 100,000 years long.

Last month, the Global Seed Vault, a monolithic refrigerator on the Norwegian island of

"They are not studying the rock," he said, referring to the laboratory. "They are studying our capacity to resist."

Spitsbergen that stockpiles seeds in case of cataclysm, sprung a leak. Temperatures had risen beyond any expectation, and snowmelt flooded the facility's entrance. "This is supposed to last for eternity," Åsmund Asdal at the Nordic Genetic Resource Centre, which operates the vault, told the *Guardian* of the building, which opened in 2008.

Rising sea levels also threaten a concrete dome on Runit Island, in the Marshalls, which, though only 18 inches thick (and thinner in spots), covers the detritus of U.S. bomb tests. Workers bagged plutonium-239, which has a half-life of 24,000 years, in plastic, and cached it there. A 2013 report for the Department of Energy found that the dome had cracked. Typhoons likely will increase its seepage.

In February 2014, a drum containing plutonium and americium exploded within the WIPP, temporarily closing the site. (It has since reopened.) The waste had been packaged in cat litter. Proponents of nuclear power stress that inorganic litter would have been perfectly appropriate, but this drum had been packaged in sWheat Scoop, a wheat-based litter.

"Every war is ironic," Paul Fussell writes in *The Great War and Modern Memory,* an analysis of British literature after the First World War, "because every war is worse than expected." One man's death, by assassination, exacted more than 38 million. Like obsessive hand washing, disposal technologies confuse scientific means with a moral end, with purification.

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In Bure, I stayed six days and, later, three more days with anti-nuclear demonstrators. Their anger was grounded in asymmetry: For 50 years' worth of energy, they said, their country had produced 100,000 years' worth of toxicity. They lived deliberately in a fixed-up farmhouse, the Maison de la Résistance, which anti-nuclear activists had owned for 13 years. Twice daily they ate meals that were communal, vegan, and gluten- and salt-free. In a back room were a few old computers, fitted out with Tor and passwords, and built into the rafters were a free shop and a dormitory containing a couple dozen mattresses, closely laid out, and a space heater. In a bathroom, a sign explained how to make soap without chemicals; other notices mandated withholding information that might identify demonstrators, especially a few who slept in the forest where the repository would be dug. In the kitchen, a sign had read, "Choral workshop Wednesday December 14," but the "14" had been crossed out in another ink, replaced by "21," which was also crossed out. The sign now read, "Choral workshop every Wednesday for the rest of your life."

While I stayed at the Maison de la Résistance, I faced a problem of scale. I had planned to imagine the Andra contest's markers superimposed over the land, but I could not think 100,000 years ahead. And because the demonstrators were dealing with threats that were urgent, any attempt would have been callous. Those who slept in the forest, which belonged to Andra, were anticipating a court date in a case for their eviction. A few slept in trees so that they'd oblige gendarmes to return with cherry pickers. Just before the forest gate, they'd laid slaloms of tires and wood barricades, and within, they'd built a tower of scrap wood, which they called the "South Vigil." Tarps flapped from it, sounding like shouting. A demonstrator who'd slept there since August and wore a balaclava told me the canopy would prevent gendarmes from launching grenades. A refrigerator was used to insulate food. The olive oil the demonstrators used had frozen. After lunch one day, they called for Plato, a huskie. It was stalking a deer and had killed deer already, a demonstrator who went by Sylvestre told me.

Sylvestre also spoke to me of the protests that had impeded Andra elsewhere. "They are not studying the rock," he said, referring to the laboratory. One night he and I pulled up before the lab and, as we sat, our engine idling, we saw another car also idling, and left. "They are studying our capacity to resist."

On my return to Bure, cardboard boxes had

been piled in a meeting room. They contained gauze and bandages. I toured the Andra laboratory, 490 meters deep, wearing a safety belt I'd been issued, and felt my back arch to accommodate the weight. A worker guiding a tunneling machine's spiraling snout wore dog tags. At both ends of an elevator chute were figurines of Saint Barbara, the patron saint of those who work with explosives. On January 26, 2016, a tunnel wall had buckled during drilling. A worker had died. Among the demonstrators' court dates and mobilizations, the anniversary had snuck up on them, and, at the house, they disagreed about how to act, whether any action would offend the worker's family, whether the issue was as simple as picking the right one.

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In contemporary American English, epigrams like "Never forget" and "Never again" imply that remembering enacts something automatically. There is, from Nietzsche, a competing idea that too much collective memory inhibits action, working like a neurotic's insomnia. Forgetting makes humans happy, Nietzsche argued, so each pretends to greater forgetting than they actually enjoy, inspiring jealousy in others. This mechanism, by which forgetting escalates, reminds me of an arms race.

The villagers of Bure, who were older than the demonstrators, spoke to me of the Second World War, not the First. So I was surprised to hear from Sylvestre that the oldest ones discussed how the sky had lit up "like fireworks" over Verdun, 100 years ago. Afterward, the land, flecked with barbed wire and ordnance, resisted tilling. The war, occurring before anyone's recollection, had taken its effect on the terrain anyway, persisting there as a kind of unremembered memory.

Approximately 50 Meusian associations concern themselves with the First World War, and in the first round of this year's presidential election in France, a plurality of the department voted for Marine Le Pen, who favors removing France's colonial history, as well as the Nazi collaboration, from primary-school curricula. I assimilated these two facts about the Meuse, the proliferation of memory associations and the popularity of revisionist history.

The demonstrators explained that the fight against Andra had worn out the villagers, and I did not find it easy to ask, following up, whether any villager had declined to fight at all. Even villagers friendly with the demonstrators sustained conversations on their homes' thresholds, however warmly, without inviting the demonstrators inside. One demonstrator told me of a certain Marcel, whose face could be seen in the earliest photographs of the resistance, and whom he did not recommend I interview, for he had an aptitude for putting shit in everything, *foutre de la merde partout.* To

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know Marcel was to open oneself to his machinations.

According to the Meusian story preferred by Sylvestre, a crisis in the price of milk had forced its farmers from cattle to grain, which led to the razing of hedges that set off field and pasture, sheltered fauna, and tempered winds. The plains' barrenness was a sign of war and not peace, as their denizens relied on pesticides to fill quotas. "It is no longer a territory producing things," Sylvestre said, "but a flux of energy."

In the demonstrators' mini-library was a copy of *Pig Earth*, John Berger's 1979 novel about the French peasantry. In it, Berger argues that while peasants viewed time cyclically, governed by the rhythm of crops as they fulfilled their feudal duties, they were disappearing by the time of his writing, moving to cities or otherwise becoming consumers, beholden to a linear chronology. You cannot observe the absence of anything, but I became convinced that I observed the absence of peasantry in Bure. What I noticed was the presence of forgetting.

Mornings I walked the village, hearing bells of a small church. The masonry was patchy, but the graves, of glossy multicolored granite, were lavish. Snorts emanated from a barn hung with a sign, "Beware of Dog," and one lot was stacked with hay. At the same time I saw that

We have a future, or not. Until then, we have a past

wood-shuttered houses typical of rural France had been improved according to someone's notion of Florence, or a foggy memory of the gentry. In 2015, Andra and two other nuclear utilities contributed 30 million euros to the Meuse Department and another 30 million to the adjacent Haute-Marne, which the demonstrators likened to hush money. These numbers occurred to me as I noticed the architectural oddities. One house boasted a modern porch walled in glass, like a greenhouse, and a wrought-iron balcony. Stuck to another was a square tower like a castle's, topped with a weathervane, and as I watched the house shouts rose within it. On the porch, two small, golden purebred dogs were waiting.

A woman in a neighboring village asked not to be named. Her husband had died, and she gave Sylvestre a cap that had been his. She heaved a log into the stove and, letting water heat in a pot, gossiped of local problems she called new: Lyme disease, drugs. She specified the time of year at which pigs were traditionally killed. From an armoire she drew a folder of clippings and, tugging out an article about the worker's death, pointed, prompting me. "42," I read.

"A baby!" She gathered up Nespresso packets from me, Sylvestre, and another demonstrator, and tossed them into the stove. She was born in 1941, she offered for my tape. In 1945, a bombardment killed her grandparents. I asked about the village. "*Bah,* it's changed because people weren't jealous of each other," she said. "Like they are today." Sylvestre ascribed this competitiveness to the shift from livestock to grain, which took up land. The other demonstrator suggested gently that after the war, the villagers experienced a special solidarity only to see it dissipate as life found its level. The woman spoke equivocally. "We don't see all that," she began. "Us old people, we don't really see all that *en rose,* but, oh well. As for the young people I don't too much know what they think."

At the Maison de la Résistance, sleepy from the day's cold, I met a woman who'd lived there in 2012 and 2013, Marie. An actor by training who'd grown up in southwestern France, she had bought a house nearby. Her

intention had been to legitimate her activism. She discovered the villagers would not speak to her about Andra, but they liked her. So few Meusian young people stayed.

By way of getting by she taught theater, and she found the schoolchildren sweet, if blasé. Their curricula lacked for objectivity, she found; history classes underemphasized the collaboration with Nazi Germany, and science classes involved field trips to the Andra facility. She had thought of warning her students about nuclear technology, but finally she had not wanted to come off as propagandizing. She smiled calmly. From Bure, she mentioned, we couldn't see the halo of the laboratory. The village sat lower in the landscape. "It's funny," she said. "I have trouble remembering my first years here and what shocked me."

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I RARELY SAW ANYONE else walking, but one morning I met a man in galoshes who surprised me by cheerfully agreeing to speak with me, identifying himself as Marcel. In fact, I had been hoping to meet the Marcel against whom a demonstrator had warned me. This man invited me over, spoke of Andra's money, said he couldn't hear me for the wind, and, opening the door, yelled, "Shut up!" A dog started barking angrily.

We sat on the glass-walled porch, which concentrated the sun's rays. Americans like me came in 1944, Marcel said. Their convoys rolled by him. His wife came into the room. "You are telling your life so that it can be published everywhere?" she asked.

"Precisely," Marcel said. "No."

I explained my project, and she brightened. "It's not a good time to go walking in the streets, now is it?"

I was startled.

"Because of the cold," she said.

I asked Marcel whether it bothered him that outsiders had descended on the village and made its issues theirs. The dog became excitable, he said. The cat recently had clawed his wife dramatically. As for Marcel, he said, he did not do politics. He preferred the comfort of his house but had chopped the forest's trees, participating in the *affouage,* a practice governed by 19th-century forestry code, when the forest was a commons. He asked me to notice how well we were and, within the glass, how warm. "To have a house one must house oneself," he said. He told me to find wood that was dead but upright.

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WE HAVE A FUTURE, or not. In 100,000 years, humankind may have been extinguished by an environmental catastrophe. Until then, we have a past.

In 1945 Charles de Gaulle laid out the French nuclear plan in terms of national glory although privately, he referred to it as "the work of the apocalypse." In the 1940s and 1950s, American bomb tests displaced Marshall Islands residents, who, upon returning, fell sick. "Let's face it, the people of Bikini were screwed by history, but it wasn't deliberate," an Energy Department official is quoted as saying in John Wargo's *Green Intelligence.* The book chronicles an America menaced by fallout from covert nuclear tests; in 1953, Buffalo, New York, was called a "radioactive sewer" for the pollution of its lake-effect snow, Wargo notes.

Sylvestre told me a story of a rural territory, its population poor and aging, that was zoned as a dump, which was one story of the Meuse. Here's another: In a forest by Verdun, a bare area was known to locals who picnicked there as "the place of gas." In 2007, the soil was revealed to contain copper, lead, zinc, and arsenic and ammonium perchlorate, which had been used to detonate shells. It was so acidic that only three plant species grew. In 2012, national authorities blocked off the clearing.

I had been reading *Le Monde* and clicked it shut, ashamed. I felt bloodthirsty, frankly. See-

ing there was always more to read, I began to experience remembering as a war of attrition. Explicit memory, the stockpiling of facts, hardly explained what I had observed in Bure.

In their report about markers, the American experts entitle a curiously confessional section "Personal thoughts":

Working on this panel, always fascinating and usually enlightening too, has led to the following personal thoughts: (a) We have all become very marker-prone, but shouldn't we nevertheless admit that, in the end, despite all we try to do, the most effective "marker" for any intruders will be a relatively limited amount of sickness or death caused by the radioactive waste? …. An analysis of the likely number of deaths over 10,000 years due to inadvertent intrusion should be conducted. This cost should be weighted against that of the marker system.

What was memory after all, if not a series of personal thoughts? While there was a gruesomeness to the sacrifice of future humans, the American experts' aside read as a relief. It struck me as refreshingly truthful about memory, which is instructive only occasionally. Rarely is it preventative. It usually isn't a thing we outwit. As the American experts suggest, in dying we remember best. In *Voices From Chernobyl,* by Svetlana Alexievich, one Chernobyl local self-compares to an airplane's black box: "We think that we're living, talking, walking, eating. Loving one another. But we're just recording information!"

As a foreigner, I require proxies for childhood memory, and I was relieved to find a Meusian story when I returned to Paris. In a neighborhood where I used to live, at a bookstore I frequented, I bought *Brouillards Toxiques,* by Alexis Zimmer, which tells of a fog that settled on a Belgian section of the Meuse valley in December 1930, occasioning 60 deaths over two days. Farmers coughed black and yellow, and what they brought up tasted sweet. Carbon particles as wide as 1.35 micrometers were discovered in victims' alveoli, notes a 2001 *Lancet* article. A few died without having left their houses, indicating that the danger traversed walls. "No graphs were drawn or statistical tests done," notes the Lancet. "The increase in morbidity and the sudden ten-fold rise in mortality made detailed statistical analysis unnecessary."

Human bodies are indispensably informative. Who first? Nuclear waste, Timothy Morton writes in *Hyperobjects,* incentivizes current generations to betray future ones. As one Bure demonstrator told me, "We don't even send it to another continent. We send it into the future." Whenever time travel comes up, say, during slumber parties, the direction on the agenda is backward. Would you undo your mistake, stop the Holocaust, sleep with your grandfather? Comparatively, the task of future travel is undesirable, as the American experts eventually realized: "If the WIPP is ever operational, the site may pose a greater hazard than is officially acknowledged." Therefore markers must be "truly gargantuan." Morton, who praises a plan to encase such waste in gold and monitor it, not bury it, submits that "lameness" and "weakness" are two of only a few aesthetic attitudes available to humans in the Anthropocene, the geological age that began in 1945, many experts say, with the detonation of the first atomic bomb.

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To specify the date of waste burial, the American experts recommended mapping precession, a lazy circle the Earth's axis traces every 26,000 years. "Any culture (even low-tech) that watches the stars will know where the pole for their own epoch lies," they write. Humans, they reason, have always loved the sky. Fussell locates a crescendo during the First World War. Trench warfare nourished a craze for sunsets. It became fashionable to comment on the sky. "As the only visible theater of variety, the sky becomes all-important." He describes the "walls of dirt and ceiling of sky" that ran for 25,000 miles through Belgium and France. By day, soldiers glimpsed over the top by periscope. These trenches flooded, attracted rats, and smelled of corpses of humans and horses, which could not be thrown away. For soldiers in such a position, the sky became the

only cipher for figuring infinity.

No other sky rivaled the views above the Meuse, a Bure demonstrator instructed me, as we observed a violet sunset. Subsequently, a Meusian fog followed me to Paris. Catastrophe came up. "We have all the time in the world for it to happen," Sylvestre had said, "as the waste will remain dangerous for 100,000 years where it's been stashed." I did my research via a laptop on my thighs, occasionally nudging it away from my ovaries. I cooked dinners with a friend whose mother died after I moved away. It was funny, he said, he knew many people who'd died in their 60s. Lightly, he ascribed this to chemically processed food. He added that the Chernobyl cloud had passed over France within the year of his own birth. "So maybe I will die young, too," he said slyly, as if daring me to laugh at him.

Another day, I visited a Ukrainian friend in the 16th Arrondissement. As she peeled potatoes and I unwrapped some cheeses I had brought, she told me of her godfather, who was a soldier and sent to Chernobyl. She mentioned that the disaster had happened two years before her birth. He died, she said, not right away but a few years afterward. He had not been sick. He was healthy, and died. He was young, she said, early 30s, not much older than she. As I learned these stories about my friends, I understood that I too participated in a collective project of forgetting, and that fear, enshrouding me, canceled out to numbness, which felt like safety.

I picked up *Brouillards Toxiques.* Popular hypotheses to explain the Meusian poison fog abounded: A toxin in the soil had taken wing. A volcano had erupted, somewhere. An English scientist proclaimed a new Black Death, while a French scientist developed a theory of "hydro-diffusion," a slow asphyxiation by wet air. Perhaps there had been an explosion at some storage for leftover war gas, or the area's factories—steelworks, zinc smelters, and manufacturers of fertilizer, explosives, and glass—had seized on the weather to emit unusually copiously and noxiously. A doctor for the Minister of the Interior's Hygiene Service pronounced the deaths "purely and simply natural," due to the cold, wet air. Another doctor at a local factory producing steel tubes suggested all the casualties had been asthmatics. An investigation ensued in which toxicology reports came back clean, and further experts concluded the pollution had not been, in itself, dangerous. Meteorological conditions, they said, turned it deadly.

I caught a train at a station I used to pass through regularly, noticing a familiar smell of sweat and the seats' upholstery. In Châtenay-Malabry, at Andra's headquarters, I interviewed Patrick Charton, an engineer by training who heads the company's Memory Program, which is tasked with preserving knowledge about the radioactive waste. He told me of a photographer that the company brought on for a residency, who proposed the site be ornamented with nudes "because he really loved naked women." Noticing that Charton enjoyed this subject and would go on, I scanned the office for a telling personal object, ideally one to do with art or memory, and fixated on a mini Jeff Koons balloon dog, in silver.

Charlton handed me a disc of industrially synthesized sapphire. The material lasts a million years, and discs such as this, according to an Andra press kit, can contain up to 40,000 pages' information. I lifted the disc, which was very light, and turned it. A fluorescent glow caught in shrunken text, which I could not read.

When Charton had left off speaking of the photographer, I said, "He wanted to use nudity to convey safety, although most of the artworks in the competitions, they are there in fact to signal danger."

"In fact, the problem of the memory of the repository resides in this dilemma you have just laid out," he said. "Are we to speak about safety or speak about danger, knowing that the two are linked?"

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PROACTIVE PARANOIA

The dark web's embrace of state-endorsed "operations security" tactics previews what could become standard procedure for us all

by ROBERT W. GEHL

Until this past July 4, Alphabay had been the largest market for drugs and stolen information on the "dark web," the part of the internet accessible only through special routing software, such as Tor, I2P, or Freenet. But on July 20, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions finally announced what the dark web market participants had suspected for weeks: Alphabay had been seized by law enforcement agents. The marketplace had already been offline for weeks, and users had been wondering, in Reddit subs and Tor-based forums such as the Hub, whether

OPEN HANGAR; CACTUS FLATS, NV; DISTANCE ~ 18 MILES; 10:04 A.M. (2007), LIMIT: TELEPHOTOGRAPH OF A CLASSIFIED MILITARY BASE, BY TREVOR PAGLEN. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND: METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK; ALTMAN SIEGEL, SAN FRANCISCO.

it was down for maintenance or something more ominous. After Sessions's announcement, panic replaced the nervousness: *How did law enforcement find Alphabay? And am I next?*

One Redditor, digging through the civil forfeiture documents provided by the Department of Justice, proposed an explanation for what went wrong; it was all due to a "simple mistake." The Redditor pointed out that Alphabay's alleged founder, Alexandre Cazes, had been caught because his personal email had been sent to new users via the header of the Alphabay registration welcome email. "Just think about it," the Redditor wrote, "He made one mistake, and got fucked."

On Alphabay, Cazes was Alpha02, the administrator of a three-year-old market for drugs, stolen credit cards, and weapons. His Hotmail account, by contrast, belonged to a Canadian expat living in Thailand, driving expensive cars and posting about his sexual exploits on pickup artist Roosh V's forum. Cazes's "one mistake," which law enforcement agents exploited, was failing to keep these identities apart. The Redditor called this a "simple OPSEC mistake," drawing on military jargon for "operations security," and other Redditors and dark web forum participants also reminded one another: "Let's keep our OPSEC on point here people."

This is far from the first time dark web market participants have invoked "OPSEC." The term is a keyword for dark web markets, regularly appearing in thousands of forum posts, particularly in the wake of the last great market bust—of Silk Road in late 2013. It has effectively become the organizing principle of dark web markets. In a YouTube video of a 2012 presentation from a Malaysian security convention, widely shared among dark web market participants, the information-security researcher and software-exploit broker known as the Grugq lays out techniques for hackers to avoid drawing the attention of state agencies. "What the fuck is OPSEC?" he asks. "OPSEC, in a nutshell, is *keep your mouth shut. Don't say it.* The less you say, the harder it is for people to figure out what you're doing … In short, *shut the fuck up.*"

According to the Grugq, OPSEC is not a matter of technology but of mentalities, practices, and relationships. Central to it is a radical distrust of everyone one associates with. "This particularly goes for people you are operating with," he says. "They are not your friends; they are criminal co-defendants … there is a high likelihood that they [will get busted] because they are dumb, because they are doing what they are doing." He intones that "it hurts to get fucked," meaning that it hurts to go to jail. And because of this pain, "No one is going to go to jail for you … Your friends will betray you." The Grugq argues, above all, that one needs to be "proactively paranoid," because you can't be paranoid in hindsight.

Notably, the Grugq's presentation includes multiple favorable references to the agencies of state power, including the military, which is not surprising given operations security's provenance: the Vietnam war, according to a heavily redacted, formerly top secret U.S. National Security Agency research report.

In 1965 and 1966, U.S. bombing raids were producing low casualties and little damage to the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army equipment, because they were getting advanced warning of the attacks. The U.S. military formed a research team, Purple Dragon, to discover the source of these early warnings. After discounting theories that the North Vietnamese forces had broken American encryption, the team focused on the mundane ways an enemy could gather information: monitoring Voice of America or BBC broadcasts, listening to tactical radio broadcasts and paying attention to military call signs, or reading nonclassified documentation such as requests for food for specific regions. None of these on their own provided specific information about impending attacks, but as a whole they provided many small details that could be pieced together into a high-probability prediction about upcoming targets.

By training commanders and soldiers to avoid talking about seemingly insignificant details via "open source" (i.e., non-encrypted or classified) channels, the Purple Dragon team was able to reduce forewarning of bombing attacks from eight hours in 1966 to under 30 minutes in 1968. In other words, operations security increased the body counts.

Based on the success of Purple Dragon, operations security was championed by the National Security Agency, which set up a training course

in the practices in the 1980s that thousands of government workers would eventually take. Toward the end of the decade, President Ronald Reagan signed an executive order instructing all U.S. government agencies and their contractors to provide operations-security training for their employees. As it spread from the military to government contractors and beyond, "OPSEC" became a keyword for corporate organizations seeking to defend their intellectual property. From there, it moved into information security circles more broadly—culminating in hackercon presentations such as the Grugq's.

The phrase from OPSEC training that seems to resonate most among dark web market participants is the Grugq's call for "proactive paranoia." This is understandable, given the law enforcement raids, fear of surveillance, and scams that permeates these markets. Everything in dark web markets is subjected to intense OPSEC-driven skepticism, from the infrastructural level *(Is Tor compromised? Is this market's web software secure?)* to the administrative *(Are the people running this market law enforcement agents?)* to fellow market participants *(Is this vendor going to steal my Bitcoins? Am I selling to a cop?)* to the larger flows of information *(Is this bank routing information secure, and if not, can I take advantage of it?)*. OPSEC's proactive paranoia provides heuristics for market participants as they relate to both the state, to their market colleagues, and to the broader information society.

Above all, OPSEC as politics has the goal of structuring an emergent social order through radical self-regulation and individualism. On dark web market forums, new members are advised to self-regulate by studying operations-security guides, which are now a regular feature of dark web markets and forums. New users are instructed to read the guides, practice the skills, and defend themselves. They also are taught that, in the end, they are solely responsible for their own safety and security. As one participant put it at the Hub, "Big things are coming … are you prepared to Learn how to protect yourselves? Don't end up like fuckwad Vendors that do not take their Safety and their clients Safety seriously." And as the Alphabay FAQs warned users, "We take no responsibility if you get caught, so protecting yourself is your responsibility."

The proactive paranoia of OPSEC politics on markets prompts lack of trust for others. While the Grugq argues that law enforcement agencies are the apex predators of the internet, dark web market participants also have one another to fear. The history of dark web markets is littered with scams. Market forums are full of posts by vendors complaining about buyers, buyers about vendors, and everyone about market admins. The goal of OPSEC, then, is to avoid being put into a position of vulnerability, not only to the state but also to fellow market participants. Markets are, after all, fine places for people to exploit one another.

Similarly, OPSEC politics orients dark web market participants to the wider world of unsecured information. Besides drugs, Alphabay was best known as a market for credit card fraud, Paypal and Amazon scams, and the theft and sales of "fullz" (full identification of people, including Social Security numbers, addresses, and date of birth). These activities reveal the flip-side of dark web OPSEC. Markets for poorly secured information are a direct result of the increasing pressure to move more and more of our personal information into digital databases, from our social connections to our shopping habits to our state-sanctioned legal documentation. In other words, while OPSEC politics is geared toward the individual's paranoid ability to self-regulate with respect to the revelation of personal information, it also teaches dark web market members to watch for opportunities to exploit others who don't "shut the fuck up." While the rest of us reveal ourselves via social media, health or dating apps, or commercial exchanges, the paranoid exfiltrate our data.

While "proactive paranoia" sounds like a pathological condition reserved for users of hidden web sites, OPSEC politics functions as a means to structure online social relations and from there build a social order. After all, de-

spite scams, exploitation, and arrests, dark web markets continue to thrive. This is where dark web market OPSEC politics become instructive for those of us who never visit the dark web. Proactive paranoia was forged in the toxic cultural contexts of increasingly militarized states, ubiquitous surveillance, global neoliberalism, and an all-out hustle for online money. In other words, OPSEC politics need not be limited to the dark web. In a world of arrests, scams, fines and fees, constant monitoring, and extreme *caveat emptor,* suspicion and paranoia are rational responses—not just in dark web markets, but in our daily lives.

Reasons to be paranoid seem to be endless. The use of police to harass citizens—particularly people of color—to gather revenue through citations and court fees has increased in the past few decades as tax-adverse governments use policing to try to fill coffers. Dark web markets are explicitly marked by scams and fraud, but then again, scams and fraud abound in our daily lives as well: Recently, the bank Wells Fargo has been repeatedly engaging in charging customers for accounts without their knowledge or consent. Data breaches and personal information exfiltration are increasingly common (and incidentally these data often show up for sale on the dark web). Legal recourse for violations such as these are being undermined by forced arbitration agreements, making disputes a market commodity. Whether dealing with states or markets—the powerful institutions of our contemporary age—each of us is on our own.

It seems then that OPSEC politics has application beyond the dark web markets: Perhaps we all could use dark-web-style proactive paranoia and a radical lack of trust. In light of the cruelties of life under neoliberalism, we may feel the need to "shut the fuck up," to never trust anyone, to suspect every institution in our lives. We may welcome the growing market for privacy technologies, laud those who avoid paying taxes to the state, or move our transactions into cryptocurrencies. We may see the state as the adversary and use our self-interest as our only compass. The dark web, it seems, has something to teach us.

But there are dangers lurking in OPSEC politics. First, as an appropriation of state practices, drawn from the language of the U.S. military and National Security Agency, dark-web-style operations security can be, in turn, re-appropriated by the state. By engaging in OPSEC politics, dark web market participants reinforce the idea that communication is a Manichean battle of states and subjects—that communication and information can be "weaponized" and thus should be subject to state regulation and policing. Like other social practices linked to war metaphors, dark web markets' appropriation of operations security will further fuel the expansion of military and police surveillance of and action in spaces of communication, continuing to make communication itself a theater of war—the purportedly legitimate sphere of state control. This isn't limited to the dark web but is directed at all forms of digital communications, as shown by the search warrant filed by the Justice Department (which it has since filed to amend) for information on visitors to an anti-Trump website.

Even in the face of the cruelty of contemporary neoliberal life, where making a mistake may mean "getting fucked," we run the risk of strengthening the now commonsensical idea that everyone is out to get everyone if we take up OPSEC politics into our lives. This comes at the expense of other potential social formations. Radical lack of trust may make sense in a market-driven, hypercompetitive world where every institution is out to take advantage of us—and where, conversely, those who can exploit others are lauded as winners. Collective organizing would continue to give way to individual grievance and self-defense. This is the real lesson of the seizure of Alphabay and its OPSEC failure: Even if OPSEC offers a prescription for self-defense, the adversaries it takes on are too great for any of us alone.

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INFLUENCING MACHINES

If a paranoid delusion becomes the basis for a shared worldview, it ceases to be a delusion

by GEOFF SHULLENBERGER

In 1810, London apothecary John Haslam published *Illustrations of Madness,* an account of a "singular case of insanity" and arguably the first-ever psychiatric case study. The patient at the center of Haslam's book, James Tilly Matthews, believed that a cabal of Jacobins based in a crypt beneath London was using a mesmeric mind-control machine he called an "air loom" to torment and persecute him from a distance. Matthews also asserted that this device was secretly dictating the actions of English and French politicians and sowing discord across Europe. According to historian and Matthews biographer Mike Jay, the air loom was a "watershed in the technological imagination": "Until this point, machines were 'dumb things' … that we manipulated. This is the point at which our relationship to machines becomes more complicated—the point at which people begin to believe that machines can actually manipulate us."

FROM APRÈSLUDE, (2001) BY ALEXANDRA RANNER. COURTESY LENBACHHAUS, MUNICH AND THE ARTIST.

In his time, Matthews's case was "singular," as Haslam put it: Nothing quite like it had been encountered before. Soon enough, however, individuals with experiences similar to Matthews's began to publish versions of their stories. In 1852, for instance, German merchant Friedrich Krauss published *Cry of Distress by a Victim of Magnetic Poisoning*, in which he recounted being hypnotized and persecuted by a wealthy Flemish family in possession of a "magnetizing device" that resembled Matthews's air loom.

About 50 years later, the German jurist Daniel Paul Schreber published a book detailing the cosmic conspiracy directed against him, which involved his chief physician, Paul Emil Flechsig, and a lascivious bipartite God. The book accuses Flechsig of an act of "soul murder"—an unauthorized invasion of Schreber's inner self – that has initiated a crisis in the "Order of the World" and tainted God with the corruption of human beings.

On the surface, Schreber's grand Gnostic vision of a fallen universe differs significantly from the secular technological anxieties of Matthews and Krauss. However, Schreber's metaphysical language belies a concern with the technologies of his era. For instance, he attributes the fact that he hears voices that others do not to "a phenomenon like telephoning: the filaments of rays spun out towards my head act like telephone wires; the weak sound of the cries of help coming from an apparently vast distance is received only by me in the same way as telephonic communication can only be heard by a person who is on the telephone, but not by a third person who is somewhere between the giving and receiving." He also imagines a universal network of disembodied nerves, capable of instantaneous communication across vast distances by way of "light-telegraphy"; an automated "writing-down-system" that registers all thought much in the manner that recently developed recording technologies – gramophone and film – registered sound and sight; and a world populated by "fleetingly-improvised men" who resemble the ghostly projections of the newly invented cinematograph. In its blend of theological fantasia and technological nightmare, Schreber's text anticipates the novels of Philip K. Dick, many of which also envision the endpoint of technological surveillance as a quasi-Gnostic apocalypse overseen by degraded god figures.

Matthews, Krauss, and Schreber all arrived independently at parallel visions. None knew of each other, and no shared vocabulary existed that could bring together the common threads of their stories, or similar ones told by even more obscure individuals, mostly confined to asylums. That changed, however, in the decades after the publication of Schreber's memoirs—which were read enthusiastically by Freud, Jung, and Eugen Bleuler, the Swiss psychiatrist who codified the diagnosis of schizophrenia. For Haslam, Matthews's narrative had been merely bizarre, and held no lesson other than a justification of confinement. But by the early 20th century, through the new medical metalanguages of the period—psychoanalysis on one hand, and Kraepelinian psychiatry on the other—experiences like those of Matthews, Krauss, and Schreber became legible as instances of a specific symptom. In a

To assert that "Targeted Individuals" are simply undiagnosed schizophrenics underestimates their self-invention as a collective identity.

1919 paper, Freud's protégé Victor Tausk coined a term that could equally describe Matthews's air loom, Krauss's magnetizing device, and Schreber's cosmic system of rays and nerves: the "influencing machine."

In the past two decades, a competing metalanguage has emerged, which also furnishes a shared language for talking about persecution anxieties, mind-control machines, and other experiences long associated with the diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. However, unlike the psychiatric vocabulary that emerged around a hundred years ago, this metalanguage originates among those having the experiences—many of whom, for some time now, have been finding each other online. The members of the resulting subculture call themselves "Targeted Individuals" (TIs). Self-identified TIs believe that they are the victims of systematic harassment by organized civilian groups linked to the state; they call this "gangstalking." Over time and through internet-mediated discussion, they have developed a standard nomenclature to refer to the influencing machines used against them. For instance, they refer to "Direct Energy Weapons" concealed in satellites and cell phone towers, and "voice-to-skull" (V2K) technology that broadcasts voices into their brains. They connect these technologies to the CIA's MKUltra program.

Like Schreber and especially Krauss, whose *Cry of Distress* is over 1,000 pages long, many TIs are prolific writers. Hundreds of blogs and websites, originating in dozens of countries, recount variations on the gangstalking narrative, deploying the shared language of electronic harassment, "psychotronic torture," Direct Energy Weapons, covert electronic harassment, MKUltra, and so on. Quite a few TIs have adapted their narratives into works of fiction and memoir, many of which are for sale on Amazon.

The collective TI worldview has also spread into offline spaces, with support groups for TIs meeting in cities worldwide. In 2015, an international Covert Harassment Conference convened in Berlin. Speakers from eight countries addressed topics such as the "history and techniques of mind control," "adverse health effects of modern electromagnetic fields," and "Technology as False God: the Heresy of Exposing Covert Harassment." Participants in the conference included doctors, engineers, programmers, and ex-intelligence operatives, who lent their credibility to the TI belief system.

The TI phenomenon first earned mainstream attention around 2007–08, when coverage focused on the novelty of internet-based organizing among apparently paranoid individuals, and its implications for mental health. Curiously, one early New York Times piece on gangstalking beliefs appeared in the Fashion and Style section, seemingly categorizing TIs as a lifestyle community. Early representations of the subculture resembled media treatment of other online self-diagnosis communities, ranging from those suffering from (what they believe is) Morgellons disease to those who hear the Hum.

More recent coverage, however, has acquired an ominous and panicked tone, in the wake of the mass shootings carried out by Myron May in Tallahassee in November 2014 and by Gavin Long in Baton Rouge in July 2016. May and Long both self-identified as TIs and victims of gangstalking, and participated in TI communities online. A *New York Times* article on Long is typical in its air of moral panic: It reports that the Targeted Individual phenomenon "remains virtually unresearched," but "for the few specialists who have looked closely, these individuals represent an alarming development in the history of mental illness: thousands of sick people, banded together and demanding recognition on the basis of shared paranoias." The underlying message here echoes Haslam's argument about Matthews 200 years ago: Individuals with beliefs like these are dangerous and need to be kept under close medical supervision.

Media reports often focus on the resemblance between TIs' accounts of their experiences and symptoms of what has been called, for the past century or so, paranoid schizophrenia. Many TI sources don't deny the resemblance, arguing that gangstalkers are attempting to produce schizophrenia-like symptoms in their victims to undermine TIs' credibility. In any case, to assert that TIs are simply undiagnosed schizophrenics underestimates the implications of their self-invention as a collective identity. By elaborating its own shared metalanguage and designating its own experts and

information sources, the TI subculture has generated an explanatory system that aims to circumvent psychiatric authority altogether—and it is partly succeeding, in view of the proliferation of websites, blogs, and books that recapitulate variants of the standard gangstalking narrative. In online spaces, psychiatric interpretations of TI experiences are dispersed and hidden behind paywalls, while TIs' narratives are accessible, numerous, and consistent in the explanations they offer.

Until recently, psychiatrists had a virtual monopoly on explanatory discourse, as well as access to prominent media and government-sponsored platforms to establish their explanations' cultural authority. The dispersed, fragmentary, idiosyncratic narratives of individuals with apparently delusional belief systems could easily be dismissed as mere manifestations of a symptom whose content was mostly arbitrary. Under such conditions, individuals who voice a belief that they are being targeted by shadowy enemies using electronic mind-control devices will likely end up under psychiatric observation and be expected to "translate" their understanding of their experiences into the psychiatric metalanguage. In such cases, narratives of mind control can be reduced to manifestations of the standard first-rank schizophrenic symptomsof "thought insertion," "thought broadcasting," and "thought withdrawal."

A parallel process of translation occurs when an individual experiencing vague suspicions encounters TI sites and embraces the narrative they offer: A sensation of hostility from strangers becomes evidence of organized gangstalking, for instance, and mysterious voices in one's head become a broadcast from a V2K device. Yet the purpose of the translation is to reinforce rather than dispel the suspicion, leaving the powerful underlying affective experience intact. That said, much TI literature serves a therapeutic as well as an explanatory function, offering an array of advice on coping with systematic harassment and blocking electronic torture. The internet, it would seem, is facilitating not only self-organizing communities but self-organizing therapeutic discourses and self-organized institutions that establish those discourses' authority.

The consequences of this development are profound. As one of the first (and one of few) medical studies of the TI phenomenon points out, the community's shared narrative raises fundamental difficulties for the psychiatric concept of a "delusion." The DSM's criteria for a delusion, the study notes, "indicate that it should not include any beliefs held by a person's 'culture or subculture.'" So by the current definition, if a delusion becomes the basis for a shared worldview, it ceases to be a delusion. It gains the approximate status of a belief that lies outside the mainstream consensus—like, say, the flat earth or 9/11 trutherism—but is not viewed as symptomatic of a psychiatric illness.

The study concludes, "the internet may enable complex support mechanisms without reference to a view of reality held by the authorities or even the mainstream of opinion."

But on closer examination, the TI worldview actually draws quite heavily upon the "mainstream of opinion," once you look past the community's insular and obfuscating jargon. Indeed, a look at TI

A look at Targeted Individual literature suggests that the "consensus reality" of the mainstream and apparently delusional beliefs have never been closer to each other

literature suggests that the "consensus reality" of the mainstream and apparently delusional beliefs have never been closer to each other. Many elements that ground the TI worldview, that is, also figure in non-TIs' worldviews.

As we have seen, individuals from past centuries told similar stories to those of TIs about elaborate electronic devices being used to monitor and torture them, but each had to invent a unique vocabulary and frame of reference to describe their experiences. By contrast, TI sites frequently draw points of reference from the established historical record, and from pop culture representations of it. As the ultimate prototype of gangstalking, they cite the FBI's COINTELPRO program, an infamous covert campaign that targeted "subversives" with surveillance, harassment, blackmail, slander, psychological warfare, and more. The CIA's MKUltra mind control experiments, another frequent point of reference in TI online literature, are familiar to many from their representations in films like *Jacob's Ladder, The Killing Room,* and *American Ultra,* to name a few. TI sites also mention movies from *Videodrome* to *The Matrix* to *The Adjustment Bureau* as semi-realistic representations of experiences similar to theirs.

Additionally, the online literature refers to a wide range of present-day realities as examples of organized targeting, surveillance, and harassment, such as the NSA spying apparatus revealed in the Snowden leaks. In a rare but not totally atypical variation on the typical TI narrative, Baton Rouge shooter Gavin Long understood systematic police abuse against African Americans as the most common instance of gangstalking. More commonly, the gangstalking narrative converges with far-right anti-government rhetoric. Dr. John Hall, a Texas anesthesiologist who is a recognized authority within some areas of the TI subculture, has appeared on Alex Jones's show.

What's significant, then, is not only that the internet has allowed TIs to find each other and establish a shared frame of reference. It's also that they inhabit a social, political, and cultural world that stokes varying degrees of—in some cases reasonable—paranoia in many of us, across the political spectrum. Much of what's on the news and what's in the recent historical record, especially if brought together with the paranoid visions that saturate popular culture, offers ample evidence to support a belief in organized, state-sponsored harassment and surveillance, and even mind control and brainwashing.

This raises further problems for categorizing TI communities as a collective delusion. Psychiatrists and journalists worry that TIs are reinforcing each other's paranoia by banding together online, but the world we all inhabit and the media we all consume are doing just as much to reinforce it. And in a moment when the U.S. president himself promulgates conspiracy theories aired on Alex Jones's *Infowars,* and establishment liberals cite the unfounded speculations of Louise Mensch to support their belief that the Trump presidency is a real-life replay of *The Manchurian Candidate,* fringe beliefs have fully infiltrated the mainstream consensus. Call it the *paranoization of reality.*

The paranoization of reality, in turn, feeds into what we may call the "normalization of paranoia." This phrase, used lately to describe the mainstreaming of conspiracy-driven beliefs in the Trump era, is better used to describe the uncanny familiarity of the supposedly bizarre TI worldview. Though TIs are stigmatized for their distance from the shared reality of the majority, TI narratives actually recycle prevalent cultural material, serving up a blend of recognizable genres (especially self-help) and political ideologies (especially anti-government libertarianism). Their paranoia differs from that of the larger culture they inhabit mainly in intensity and hardly at all in basic content.

Here the real significance of the TI phenomenon comes into view. If the normalization of paranoia in TI subculture tends to rely on modes of paranoia absorbed from the larger culture, along with the fixation on longstanding cultural commonplaces like COINTELPRO and MKUltra comes a general lack of attunement to the complex modalities of electronic surveillance in the digital spaces where our lives occur.

Self-designated TIs have used technology to build a subculture around a shared fear of technology—an irony that I am by no means the first to point out. TIs worry, as we have seen, about being tracked through cell-phone towers and satellites, but don't worry so much about the consequences

of sharing that anxiety with the world on social media, even though any such activity exposes them to a more systematic tracking than anything they imagine. But if TIs themselves usually don't recognize this irony, that's because there is a broader cultural disconnect between the dimensions of technology they view as dangerous and the technologies they use to connect and organize.

As Nathan Ferguson argued recently, we all need to "update our nightmares." Popular ideas of surveillance remain trapped in an outdated paradigm, and as a result we "fail to account for surveillance's surreptitious commercial tracking, as it manifests in grocery rewards programs and across websites and within our phones" and likewise "don't look at how entire populations are tracked, rather than specific individual suspects." Siva Vaidhyanathan has similarly noted that most of us fall back onto the paradigm of the panopticon, a form of surveillance that relies on the subject's awareness of the gaze of authority to enforce control. Hence, our fears revolve around "the precisely targeted surveillance of specific individuals"—like TIs, as their self-designation reveals.

If the collective imagination has not caught up with the evolving and increasingly complex modes of targeting, surveillance, and control, TIs are no exception. They, like most of us, have not yet adjusted their anxieties to a reality in which, as Wendy Hui Kyong Chun has put it, "we no longer experience the visible yet unverifiable gaze but a network of nonvisualizable digital control." Or to quote Vaidhyanathan again: "Surveillance is so pervasive that it is almost impossible for the object of surveillance to assess how he or she is manipulated or threatened by powerful institutions gathering and using the record of surveillance … The threat is that subjects will become so inured to and comfortable with the networked status quo that they will gladly sort themselves into 'niches' that will enable more effective profiling and behavioral prediction."

That TIs have self-sorted into a global, public online network illustrates this risk. Given the panic created by a few TIs' involvement in highly publicized acts of violence, it's likely that many people who self-identify as TIs online are being profiled and tracked precisely *because* of their participation in online TI support networks.

Perhaps, for TIs and for the rest of us, there is a solace in the old model of surveillance. It also seems reasonable to speculate that TIs find a paradoxical agency in believing they are singled out. In any case, individualizing the very real but increasingly unimaginable phenomena of tracking and control can offer a way to cope with problems that are not really addressable at the level of individual behavior. But the attendant risk is a failure to perceive the real workings of influencing machines all around us—ones that do not look like anything out of MKUltra. Instead, they function through the apps, social media platforms, search engines, and news sites we spend much of our lives toggling between, whose programmers, as Tamsin Shaw recently pointed out, are using the insights of behavioral economics to "determine the news we read, the products we buy, the cultural and intellectual spheres we inhabit, and the human networks, online and in real life, of which we are a part." The limited reach of MKUltra looks quaint in comparison.

Reflecting on the continued relevance of Matthews's air loom, Mike Jay writesthat "in the 21st century, the influencing machine has escaped from the shuttered wards of the mental hospital to become a distinctive myth for our times." The manipulative, invasive power of technology has shifted from an obscure fear into a cultural commonplace—and at the same time, a reality that pervades our lives yet remains difficult to conceptualize and imagine. Those who, like Matthews, Krauss, and Schreber in their time, feel that power today most acutely and oppressively now have access to ready-made references and theories and no longer need to develop idiosyncratic visions from whole cloth. Yet this pushes them to the same imaginative impasses that stymie the larger culture. They are paranoid, but not precisely sure what to be paranoid about. Just like the rest of us.

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SUSPICIOUS MINDS

When a political regime is overtly oppressive, paranoia becomes a coping strategy

by ERIC THURM

To call American politics driven by paranoia feels so obvious that it must somehow contain a hidden truth. The President launched his political career by latching onto the racist birther conspiracy. He campaigned on more conspiracies and delights in calling critical reporting "fake news." At the same time, he regurgitates wild articles from conspiracy sites like InfoWars. Congressional Republicans, following Trump's lead, have taken to talking about outside agitators and paid protesters when they face criticism.

Meanwhile, evidence of Russian influence on the election and the administration accumulates, but the truth—whatever it is—has been perpetually obscured by tidbits like the faked image of Russian internet activity or the more lurid details of the intelligence dossier prepared on the subject before the election. After Michael Flynn was fired for lying about meeting with the Russian ambassador, the Russian government accused Americans of being paranoid.

To open Facebook or Twitter is to be exposed to frenzied readings of isolated pieces of information, trying to construct the "real story." Is "President Bannon" pulling the strings? Or is it Jared Kushner? Stephen Miller? Everything they do and everything the President himself tweets is a possible distraction from the real menace, which

THEY WATCH THE MOON (2010) BY TREVOR PAGLEN. A CLASSIFIED LISTENING STATION IN THE NATIONAL RADIO QUIET ZONE, WEST VIRGINIA. FULL MOON, LONG EXPOSURE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND: METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK; ALTMAN SIEGEL, SAN FRANCISCO.

is constituted by, well, everything else.

It's difficult to imagine a climate more conducive to the growth of paranoia. And why not give in to it? Fear can be a powerful motivator. It can prompt the otherwise apathetic or defeated into a stance of engaged resistance. But it also operates by limiting the sphere of possibility. Paranoia zooms in on a few choice explanations for events and sticks with them no matter what. As the old solutions continue to fail disastrously, paranoia's attack on imagination is dangerous.

The paranoid's quest for the "truth" is, after all, a frantic form of reverse engineering. Even before investigating, the conspiracy devotee is convinced of the truth of their suspicions—otherwise how would they know what to look for? Theorists spinning Twitter webs tend to claim they're "just asking questions," but people seem to "just ask" questions about things they think they already know—usually secrets explaining the underlying structure of the world. Persisting in the search for "answers" allows the questioner to continue holding their beliefs without doing anything about them, other than continuing to "uncover" more proof about what's really happening.

In reality, what the paranoid is eager to establish as mind-blowing certainty is often already an open secret. In a conversation with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in the 1980s, at the height of the AIDS pandemic—and related conspiracy theorizing about the Reagan administration's role in the spread of the virus—the sociologist Cindy Patton asked her, "Suppose we were sure of every element of a conspiracy. Supposing we were ever so sure of all those things—what would we know then that we don't already know?"

Patton's rhetorical question reframes our obsession with gathering and connecting the elements of a conspiracy: Would it really be so shocking and important to discover the smoking gun that "proved" the Reagan administration didn't care about HIV or AIDS, and in fact relished the suffering of gay Americans? His government's non-action and willingness to condemn victims, and the apparently unremarkable deaths of thousands of people, said more than enough. As Sedgwick points out in "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You," the difference between methodical evil and casual, ignorant cruelty is negligible.

This distinction between active, planned malice and brutish incompetence has little effect on the victims of oppression, but to the paranoid mind it remains a monumental stumbling block. While an outside observer may (correctly) perceive the paranoid's argument as tautological, the paranoid writer experiences it as a breakthrough, a "triumphant advance toward truth and vindication." It's difficult to overstate how intoxicating this approach can be.

One of the main problems with paranoid thinking, Sedgwick argues, is that it is often incapable, by its very nature, of achieving anything. Trying relentlessly to "prove" the existence of the conspiracy makes it more difficult to respond to genuinely *new* information—especially if it complicates the paranoid person's previously existing picture of the intrigue. But it also makes it harder to actually act against the conspiracy (or institutional equivalent). And isn't that the whole point?

Often, what the paranoid reader regards as conspiracy is simply an institution functioning as intended, as when the Democratic National Committee worked to deny Bernie Sanders the party's nomination. These efforts can be treated as a conspiracy only if you ignore the party's creaky, purposefully anti-democratic machinery. Insisting otherwise obfuscates the mechanisms at work in a given instance of injustice and muddles what, exactly, one is fighting against. Assuming some grand conspiracy replaces the real system that must be changed with a fictional cabal of masterminds, infinitely more clever and meticulous than they actually are.

If confirmation were found of even deeper ties between Trump and Putin tomorrow, would we really know anything we didn't already know? Who clicks on links announcing big new breaks in the Trump-Russia investigation or reads a tweetstorm of tenuous accusations to find out new information about the world? These reports no longer seem capable of revealing or describing anything fresh or urgent; instead, they feed into a framework in which news can only deepen our conviction in what we already knew. To consume the news is to

enter a psychic hall of mirrors, where the appearance of depth buries the obvious reality.

This isn't a surprise: It's the same thing that happens in other cases of excessive paranoid reading. If you look for structural systems of oppression—for instance, racism, sexism, classism, discrimination against LGBTQ people—in any given situation, you will almost certainly find them, because systemic oppression is, by nature, everywhere. Injustice is overwhelming and it resists easy solutions, which is why the paranoid hunt for evidence frequently privileges the symbolic, the representational, and the trivial: It's easier to extract evidence of ill will from a text than it is to engage with it in the world. The paranoid's perfect enemy, then, is too powerful to fight and too mysterious to correctly identify.

Political journalism frequently operates on the assumption that evidence of something like blatant racism will have an effect if presented clearly to the public, as if the culprits would of necessity be ashamed. But confronted with a president who asked a black journalist to set up a meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus, pointing out individual instances of rhetorical racism feels silly. In fact, the administration's supporters delight in the exposure of their bigotry as a means of producing "liberal tears."

Everyone knows who the president is—who, exactly, are we trying to convince otherwise? What does it mean to "report" the news when very little of the news is actually new? In paranoid reading, the lack of real information is a feature rather than a bug. Sedgwick argues that for the paranoid, violence "must always be *presumed* or *self-assumed*—even, where necessary, imposed—simply on the ground that it can never be finally *ruled out*." But this assumption is imposed and restated over and over again, making it impossible to move beyond the revelation of violence even when it's the most obvious thing in the world.

Paranoia is, of course, a long-standing pillar of American politics. Richard Hofstadter's 1964 essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" (which Sedgwick references) tracks the way paranoid politics moved from the fringes to the mainstream, from vague Masonic conspiracies to specific theories about presidents and other public figures in the 1960s. He diagnoses the paranoid's worldview as transmuting all political antagonisms from ideological clashes or shortsightedness into cold, calculating betrayal.

For the paranoid person, pointing out injustice feels like it should be, must be, enough. As Sedgwick puts it, paranoia places its faith in exposure, meaning that if someone can just *see* what you *see,* they'll understand the conspiracy and become your ally: "Paranoia for all its vaunted suspicion acts as though its work would be accomplished if only it could finally, this time, somehow get its story truly known." But American liberals bent on exposing the possible machinations of the Trump regime are exposing a different unpleasant truth: that uncovering the conspiracy doesn't actually *do* anything.

The paranoid mind thinks that proving that Jeff Sessions is a racist should have stopped Congress from confirming him and that pointing out Mitch McConnell's hypocrisy is a decisive rhetorical blow. This is deeply misguided. "For someone to have an unmystified, angry view of large and genuinely systemic oppression," Sedgwick argues, "does not intrinsically or necessarily enjoin that person to any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences." Exposing hypocrisy or corruption can just as easily confirm suspicions of their inescapability. The idea that exposure and outrage lead directly to political action—a view that motivates everything from the obsession over police body cam videos to the obsessive cataloging of false Trump statements—rests on an assumption that the public needs to maintain plausible deniability in the face of evil in order to tolerate it. It doesn't.

Still, believing that exposing some fatal flaw in your enemies' logic will save you is very comforting. Sedgwick characterizes paranoia as a "strong theory": it can account for a vast array of experiences, meaning it totally organizes the way the paranoid person sees the world. Paranoia is defined by an "aversion to surprise," whereby the paranoiac accounts for the possibility of catastrophe in any given case. It is not surprising that many of the people shocked by Donald Trump's election have been primed to now adopt a para-

noid strategy. They underestimated or willfully ignored the racist and sexist underpinnings of the country and have heightened their paranoid response as a way to declare: *Never again!* But this wariness in the face of surprise serves only to insulate the paranoid from an unpleasant reaction without doing anything to prevent the affliction.

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Recognizing the fundamental role that chaos plays in our own lives is hard to admit, let alone world affairs. Conspiracy is more comforting than complexity, and it's safer than admitting stupidity or ignorance. The paranoid depends on an assumption of comprehensible, narrative order—even though, as Hofstadter puts it, the morass of history is often "a comedy of errors and a museum of incompetence."

The paranoid's presumption of treason over idiocy is, then, a sort of defense mechanism. Whether it's the comfort of fiction (even Voldemort took over Hogwarts before Harry's final victory!) or too-easy historical parallels (where is the administration's equivalent of the Reichstag Fire?), the paranoid hunts for neat similarities to confirm that the future can definitively, coherently, be known.

The appeal of this kind of thinking is powerful. Sedgwick calls paranoia "contagious," which means the empathy required to understand the paranoid requires the listener to, briefly, assume their mode of thinking. Paranoid reading thrives on seductive, blanketing "what if" questions and the ease with which they can account for all possibilities. And nowhere is paranoia more accessible or easy to fall into than the internet with its tweetstorms and Medium theories, all of which seem just plausible enough to capture unsuspecting readers.

In this light, sharing is more paranoid than informative, Actually believing a Medium essay proves the existence of a coup is less important than the fact that the coup, or something like it, must be happening—and everyone in your social circles need to know it. (Or, at least, to know that you know it.) Paranoia is a tool for building a twisted form of solidarity.

It's impossible to stamp out paranoia in a linear fashion. Its patterns turn everything into circles, circuits, and circuses, mirroring the sprawl of its elaborate theories—a sprawl that is often aided by the disjointed nature of a tweet or image showing up in your feed. So how can people move past paranoia, or at least step away from it momentarily? Logging off isn't enough. Paranoia's embrace will still be there when you come back.

As a remedy, Sedgwick encourages cultivating the capacity for surprise, a mode she calls "reparative reading." Being open to the possibility of being wrong, or of misinterpreting, or of simply acknowledging that somebody could be limited or incompetent rather than actively evil is hard. It necessitates giving up a warm sense of certainty, and forces the admission that intellectual security is frequently an illusion.

Certainly, the regime doesn't deserve any credit. But it's useful to consciously maintain a degree of psychic vulnerability in political debates, especially when we have largely the same goals as our interlocutors. And paranoia isn't always the worst way to approach the world; it's just one way to read among many. Different scenarios require different approaches and a degree of self-awareness that the paranoid person, by definition, refuses.

It's easier than ever to succumb to the temptations of paranoid reading. Our daily consumption of information is scaffolded by algorithmic feeds, and we are given all kinds of incentives to share sensational claims. But that merely makes the choice to read reparatively more important. It may feel obvious to say that people should approach politics with a measure of charity, but it's such a clear recommendation that there must be a secret truth lurking in it somewhere.

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