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Mythic Pizza: Semiotic and Archetypal Significance in the Conspiracy Narrative Known as 'Pizzagate'

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MYTHIC PIZZA: SEMIOTIC AND ARCHETYPAL SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CONSPIRACY
NARRATIVE KNOWN AS 'PIZZAGATE'

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Abstract

During the height 2016 American presidential election, the far-right community on 4chan's political message board (/pol/) contributed to a conspiracy theory known as "Pizzagate." Still believed by some today, the theory proposes that a group of media elite and democratic politicians used pizza places throughout Washington, D.C. as a front for a world-wide child trafficking ring. While Pizzagate may seem like another crackpot conspiracy theory, it actually fails to fulfill the traditional definition of what a conspiracy theory is. Whereas traditional conspiracy theories seek to explain historical events, Pizzagate creates a historical event that it then explains, signaling the creation of a new type conspiracy: conspiracy narratives.

Through an examination of conspiracy narratives as literary objects, it becomes clear that these narratives gain their potency, not through a factual assertion of rhetoric, but through an exploitation of mythology's semiotic process. During conspiracy narratives' creation, language is militarized to instill or reaffirm subversive values within its audience. In Pizzagate, democrats become Satanists, children become victims, and pizza places become sites of occult ritual. These outlandish characterizations survive off their appropriation of mythological archetypes, which, when close-read, highlight the twisted psychological complexes of the authors. Through its exploitation of semiotic ambiguities and corruption of archetypes, conspiracy narratives gain epistemological powers to influence the world view of individuals who read and believe it. While the average reaction to these conspiracies would be to debunk and ignore them, a deeper understanding of their exploitation of language can aid in combating the misinformation they spread.

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On December 4th, 2016, Edgar Welch rode his venerable steed to face an underworld of pure evil with his herculean bows by his side -- or, at least, that's how he viewed himself, before being promptly arrested (Hagg par.1). See, Edgar Welch was no hero: his steed was a 2001 Buick station wagon, his bows were an AR-15 along with .38-caliber revolver, and the underworld of pure evil was a pizza place located in the heart of Washington, D.C. called Comet Ping Pong (Goldman par.7; Levin). In his mind, he believed Comet Ping Pong was a front for a massive international child trafficking ring with ties to government and multimedia elite. When he forced his way into Comet Ping Pong's basement, however, he was met with the harsh reality that there was no international child trafficking ring, just a regular old pizza place with an overpriced salad bar. After his arrest, he was rightly portrayed as a dangerous man, who posed a threat to the community and himself (Hagg par.5). While many rightly dismiss Welch as a dangerous radicalized individual, they fail to recognize the significance of his motivation, a conspiracy theory known as Pizzagate¹.

Pizzagate is a debunked conspiracy that began November 2nd, 2016. After the twenty-third batch of John Podesta² leaked emails were made available to the public, Trump supporters, now known as the alt-right³, quickly combed through the data-dump to find any evidence of democratic corruption. When they could not find any hint of illegal action, they instead convinced themselves Podesta was involved in a large conspiracy they named Pizzagate. The Pizzagate conspiracy alleges that members of the government, almost exclusively Democrats, and leaders of the mass-media used pizza places throughout the country to traffic children and conduct satanic rituals for their own hedonistic pleasure (Tapestry par.1). It is a belief in this conspiracy that drove Welch to storm Comet Ping Pong and look for answers, a belief that began from his active presence on niche internet communities.

While many online platforms contribute to Pizzagate's narrative, the politics board on 4chan.org is the most essential to its development and spread. 4chan is an imageboard created in 2003 by Christopher Poole with the innocent desire discuss anime with his friends (Woolf par. 7). On the website, users can visit different boards depending on the topics they wish to discuss, such as Television/film (/tv/), Anime (/a/), and, their most infamous board 'random' (/b/). Each board contains multiple sub-units within them called 'threads,' created by members of the community. For example, on /tv/ one may start a new thread about their favorite *Twin Peaks* episode. Then, other users can enter this thread and reply with their opinions. What makes 4chan special is the fact that anyone who post remains "Anonymous." There are no screen names or accounts, just solve a simple captcha and one can post to their heart's content; however, if a thread does not have users actively posting within it, then it is permanently erased from the website's servers. Due to the ephemeral nature of the website, many archival projects have been created to revisit threads after they have been deleted. To properly analyze the creation of Pizzagate on 4chan, the following research project relies on the /pol/ archive found on the website 4plebs⁴.

The focus of this study will be the politics board of 4chan is known as /pol/, a main player in Pizzagate inception. Politically, /pol/'s voice leans heavily to the rights on multiple issues regarding race, gender, and immigration (Neiwert par.4) . During the 2016 election, the community found their political hero in Donald Trump, who arguably played to their fear and worries. The insular nature of the community acted as the perfect petri dish for Pizzagate to grow and foster. While many people attempt to understand and debunk Pizzagate through rational appeals to logic, they fail to realize that a community's attachment to a conspiracy theory is not operating at any rational level, but at a mythological one. If one is to believe Joseph Campbells

definitions of mythology as not only a narrative that validates and maintains a specific social order, but also as a vehicle to aid in the reconciling one's psyche consciousness, then, through careful study, one can see that Pizzagate fulfills these criteria (*The Mythic Dimension* 221).

From a literary perspective, Pizzagate exemplifies a new form of conspiracy theory: conspiracy narrative. By exploiting mythology's semiotic process, these conspiracies reframe politicians, events, and organizations into a narrative that validate the conspiracist's pre-conceived beliefs. The potency of these narratives lies in their use of mythological archetypes that help the narrative connect to a target audience on a psychological level. As a result, these conspiracies are protected from traditional rhetoric, since they gain their power from a metaphysical sphere rather than a logical one. When a conspiracy narrative connects to a reader, its true epistemic power is unleashed by reaffirming or re-contextualizing one's knowledge of the known world, which leads to radical belief as found in Edgar Welch. Despite their danger, however, these conspiracies still function as a narrative that can be analyzed and close-read to reveal insights into its authors/believer's psychology. Hopefully, through understanding the fears and anxieties of these communities through their narrative, one can help quail their destructive power.

I. Conspiratorial Context – The Beginning

Before analyzing Pizzagate as mythology, one must place the conspiracy in its proper theoretical context to understand the emergence of its new genre, conspiracy narrative. The realization of Pizzagate's mythological significance is not an isolated moment, but the culmination of years of literature & conspiracy studies. To begin, each discipline's foundational texts, Plato's *Republic* and Richard Hofstadter's *The Paranoid Style*, raise similar ethical and epistemological questions about their subjects. In *The Republic*, Plato fixates on the

consequences mythology can have upon a society at large, a concern that mirrors the status of conspiracy theory. According to Plato's idealistic philosophy, beyond the physical world lies the world of forms, which are the truest expression of an object or idea. The real world consists of objects that are mere copies of these forms. When one writes a mythology or paints a painting, they are only making a copy of a copy, moving further away from the truth (Plato 335-44). Based on this reasoning, mythology, to Plato, only offers a distorted reality to its readers, who internalize its false messages that encourage cowardice, lying, and distrust in gods (Plato 76). In Book III, Plato's verbiage has myths "persuading" or "producing" feelings within the public (Plato 77; 84). Here, Plato's arguments operate off the premise that mythologies are strong epistemological tools that can instill its readers with subversive values. If left unchecked, the influential power of mythology can undermine the social order a government seeks to create. Plato concludes that a truly just society should censor these works, since they encourage the public to "form opinions that are for the most part the opposite of those we [Plato & Co.] think they should have" (69). He concludes that, due to myth's influence, those in power would control what narratives the public consume in an effort to promote positive behavior. These concerns are mirrored by modern discussion of conspiracy theory, which poses a similar threat to the intended social order of the powers that be.

Richard Hofstadter, who wrote the first critical work dealing with conspiracy theories, reaches a similar conclusion as Plato. In many ways, *The Paranoid Style* is *The Republic* for conspiracy studies: constantly cited and a great point of contention. Written during the height of the cold war, the essay is an indictment of McCarthyism. Hofstadter coins the term "the paranoid style" to define a new type of political rhetoric that is drawn to conspiracy theories. Hofstadter is openly hostile to this new style, since it has the same potential for damage and misuse as Plato's

myths. Hofstadter states, “of course, the term ‘paranoid style’ is pejorative, and it is meant to be; the paranoid style has a greater affinity for bad causes than good” (5). It is this style that produces harmful narratives that are disseminated to the public. They spread “exaggeration,” “suspiciousness” and “fantasy,” all qualities that threaten a democratic society (Hofstadter 3). These theories have the same power to ‘persuade’ and ‘produce’ opinions that are contrary to those the government wishes the public to have, as Plato feared with mythology. However, these theories pose a bigger danger to the powers that be, since they actively try to discredit the government. Hofstadter argues that the true kindling for this paranoid style lies in “opposed interests” between two parties, in general terms, the paranoid and the establishment (39). Through this dialect, anti-establishment conspiracy theories are born and with that Plato’s greatest fear realized: the dissemination of narratives with falsehoods that aim to undermine the powers that be.

Due to the subversive nature myth and conspiracy theory, many campaigns have been led against them to stop their influence over an unsuspecting public. When the Christian Church rose to prominence, they had to fight the contradictory nature of foreign religions. These narratives were quickly given the pejorative label as ‘pagan myths.’ It was from this history that the modern definition of myth as a ‘falsehood’ stems (Bidney 1). Today, conspiracy theory has a similar smear campaign waged against it however rightfully so. Believers of conspiracy theories are labeled as “paranoid or heretical, and ostracized” by those in power, leading to a great devaluation of these narratives (Pielak 503). As Charles Pigden writes, “to call someone ‘a conspiracy theorist’ is to suggest that he is irrational, paranoid or perverse” (219). Now, the desire to discredit conspiracies such as 9/11 or Pizzagate is completely warranted, since the accusations therein have been unequivocally proven false; however, one must also acknowledge

the fact that the label ‘conspiracy theory’ has been used as a tool to discredit unfaltering truths. Watergate and Project MKUltra were labeled with the pejorative ‘conspiracy theory’ to discredit them, only to then be proven true (Goertzel 740; Requarth 56). As Hofstadter suggests, while conspiracy theories may be marinated in paranoid falsehoods, “there is nothing paranoid about taking note of them” (29). Instead, much like myths of the past, conspiracy theories should be preserved and studied to understand not only their function, but the literary significance in their narratives.

i. Christian Hermeneutics & Conspiracy Parallels

While conspiracy theories must always be judged on their truth content, to best understand the underlying source of conspiracy’s power, there must be a shift towards analyzing conspiracies not only rhetorically, but as a mythology. A similar shift occurred within the study of mythology incited by Plato’s successors, who began to see these narratives through a new hermeneutic lens. Neo-Platonist and stoics began this tradition in antiquity, believing that these myths revealed naturalistic and moral truth (Bideny 1). Christian theologians later took this revelation to heart. As the fourth century Christian theologian, Saint Augustine of Hippo, writes, “All teaching is teaching of either things or signs, but things are learnt through signs” (156)⁵. To borrow Plato’s language, these Christian hermeneutic scholars believe that the world of forms (truth) is revealed through language (signs), not obscured by it. Therefore, not every sign should be interpreted literally, but, allegorically. As Thomas Aquinas states: “when Scripture speaks of God’s arm, the literal sense is not that God has such a member, but only what is signified by this member, namely, operative power” (183-84). Literal truth takes a back seat to the ideas communicated through literature. The truth of the myth lies not within its depiction of historical events, but in the idea it communicates and how it communicates it.

In a similar vein, conspiracies can be viewed as narratives do not reveal a literal truth, but a deeper metaphysical one. Even debunked conspiracy theories can contain certain allegorical truths: the conspiracy that wealthy Americans place fluorine in drinking water and chemtrails in the air to control the mind of the lower class can point to the lack of power lower class American have to effect change in a system that has been built against them by the wealthy. Those who believe the CIA introduced AIDs into black communities can be interpreted as a metaphor for the systemic economic and social ‘poisoning’ of black Americans through accepted institutions of power. Of course, the trouble arises when one considers that conspiracy theorists actively believe in these propositions. They do not attempt to understand them allegorically, but accept them as the unequivocal truth, much like ancient civilians believed in their collective mythology. The ‘research’ done to prove a theory is largely an unproductive perverted scientific discourse⁶.

While mythology and conspiracy theory both contain allegorical truth, its true meaning can only be accessed by one who does not believe the narrative to contain any literal truth. When a believer approaches a mythology or conspiracy, they operate off the assumption that what they are reading is true, disregarding any ‘metaphorical’ truth behind the narrative on a conscious level. Subconsciously, however, believers attach themselves to the allegorical truth that exists in the narrative through its use of mythological archetypes. It is this blind belief that strongly influences believers to change their world view. Here, the epistemological aspects of mythology surfaces, as a tool that affects one’s knowledge of the ‘truth.’ This power of mythology to influence people is a double edge sword, since it can result in greater community bonding and/or exploitation. To explain this phenomenon, one must look at the social aspects that surrounds mythology and, as a result, conspiracy.

ii. The New Science of Online Communities & The Birth of the New Form

Socially, mythology's epistemological qualities have been used throughout history to reinforce & manufacture a reality that benefits the myth's creators. As previously discussed in *The Republic*, Plato's plan to censor immoral literature operates off the premise that individual's morals and behaviors are controlled by the society around them, namely their literature, a premise that leans towards a more social-materialistic philosophy than the idealism Plato is known for. In a greater sense, modern scholars argue that popular narratives help construct one's knowledge of the world they inhabit. As conspiracy scholar Neil Levy writes, "knowledge is deeply – constitutively - social" (182). Even though a society is not guaranteed to always produce truths, it has "truth-conduction" mechanisms to explain phenomena through its epistemic authorities (Levy 182). Epistemic authorities are individuals who have earned credibility in their given field by attending social institutions, such as doctors, scientists, FBI agents, etc. Their findings are then disseminated to the public through narratives, be it the news, books, or social media. However, conspiracy and mythological believers reject the epistemic authorities of mainstream society for those from their own community. For example, instead of believing in evolution from scientists taught in mainstream institutions, believers of fundamental Christianity believe in creationism from their priest. Instead of believing that jet fuel can melt steel beams, 9/11 conspiracist believe pseudo-scientist from their own community who argue the opposite. In each case, the mainstream authority is dethroned by someone who the community accepts as more credible, regardless of their claim's merit. Since a greater communication with mainstream epistemological authorities can threaten the integrity of an embryonic conspiracy, most conspiracies begin in small communities, where they run little risk of being challenged.

With the invention of the internet, isolated internet communities have become easier to form than ever before. The speed at which these communities form and communicate has caused

conspiracy theory to evolve into a more sophisticated narrative form. This evolution mirrors the development of ancient mythologies as outlined by Enlightenment philosopher Giambattista Vico in his work, *New Science*. According to Vico, the age of the divine is the first stage of humanity's mythological development. At this stage, ancient societies create simple myths that stem from a "need to explain and be understood" (Vico 321). These narratives operate off a simple explanatory framework that quenches an appetite for answers in an unfamiliar world. Nature itself provided the catalyst for this mythological age in which one would look at thunder and believe it to be caused by a divine spirit or a tree and believe to be a scared space. During this era, events or phenomena are easily explained in a community through the mythology they invent. This basic desire to explain and be understood can also be found in the first generation of conspiracy theories.

As with Vico's age of the divine, traditional conspiracy theories have been defined by numerous researchers as strictly explanatory projects that hinge upon an 'event.' Brian Kelly's 1999 article, "Of Conspiracy Theories" defines conspiracy theory as: "a proposed explanation of some historical event (or events) in terms of the significant causal agency of a relatively small groups of persons--the conspirators--acting in secret" (116). Moreover, his definition and others are synthesized by Pete Mandik in his essay, "Shit Happens." Mandik breaks conspiracy theory down into five essential parts. To him, conspiracy theories postulate:

- Explanations of
- Historical events in terms of
- Intentional states of multiple agents (the conspirators) who, among other things,
- Intended the historical events in question to occur and
- Keep their intentions and actions secret (Mandik 206)

Mandik and Kelly most likely had some popular traditional conspiracy theories in mind, such as, the JFK assassination, 9/11, or Elvis' death, which are all tied to some type of historic event that had a large impact on American society; however, both definitions fails to address the anti-establishment dimension within conspiracies⁷. Through these definitions, there is a heavy emphasis on 'explanation' that mirrors Vico's age of the divine. These traditional conspiracies stem from a need for 'explanation.' For example, 9/11 and JFK, two classic conspiracies, explain their respective historical events: Who destroyed the twin-towers? Who killed John F. Kennedy? These questions are similar to ancient mythological questions: Who creates thunder? Who causes floods to occur? While these narratives are useful for the time being, as time passes, they evolve into categories that defy the tradition definition, an evolution that can be observed in conspiracy's development, as in mythology.

Despite being cited as a conspiracy theory by both its believers and detractors, current conspiracy, such as Pizzagate, fail to fulfill the definition of traditional conspiracy, since it is not tied to any historical event or explanatory framework. According to Chase Pielak, in his work "Outside in: Conspiracy Theory as Cultural Artifact," a historical event is an encounter with the "impossible" (503). A true historic event would be 9/11 or John F. Kennedy's assassination, wherein a seemingly impossible event occurred that altered the course of political and social history of the entire country. After those incidents, people turned to conspiracies for an explanation. However, Pizzagate operates off a contradictory premise. The conspirators saw Podesta's photos/emails, then created the impossible 'event' to explain it, a creative, rather than explanatory act⁸. Even more, the event they created is not historical. Pizzagate would only become historical, if the accusations were true and all the politicians in the conspiracy ring were caught. Since the new conspiracy theory fails to fall within an explanatory framework⁹, it might

be better understood as operating within the next stage of mythological development, what Vico calls the ‘age of heroes.’

According to Vico, as time passed, mythologies develop from an age of the divine that seeks to explain to the age of heroes that seeks to convey. Vico writes, the heroic age expresses “ideas through gestures and objects naturally related to them” (321). In this era, metaphor and symbols are utilized to communicate ideas that are more abstract than the previous age. The classical mythologies of Greece and Rome are all a product of this stage. Here, the poets use “rational archetype[s] derived from moral philosophies, which are simply the most complete ideas of human types in each genre” (Vico 320). Pizzagate operates off a similar structure to what Vico describes, moving towards allegory rather than explanation. The lack of explanation in modern conspiracy has been noted by several scholars. In, “The New Conspiracists,” Muirhead reveals the erosion of conspiracy’s explanatory discourse. He writes:

Conspiracism is not new, of course, but the conspiracism we see today does introduce something new—conspiracy without the theory [...] The effect of conspiratorial thinking, once it ceases to function as any sort of explanation, is delegitimation” (Muirhead 51-52).

Murihead’s observation is true of Pizzagate and other contempered theories. They are no longer tied to an ‘event’ or an encounter with the “impossible” as Pielak would put it, but tied more to the ideology of the community that creates it (503).

Since mythologies are written by isolated communities developing at their own rate, /pol/ can be seen as a similar isolated community that has developed into their own age of heroes. Their conspiracies do not seek to explain but convey a world-view to those who will listen. Framed through the logical lens of Murihead, this development is seen as a regression. He writes, “the new, lazy conspiracism satisfies itself with vague assertions.” (53). To dismiss the accusations as lazy fails to realize the archetypal power behind them. Without the explanatory

nature of previous conspiracy theory, Pizzagate projects moral archetypes onto political personalities. Evil is projected onto the liberal political establishment and their leaders, such as Hillary Clinton and the liberal Comet Ping Pong. Good is embodied in their alt-right hero's, such as Donald Trump. The political arguments are turned into moral ones. It transcends the realm of explanatory discourse into a mythological one that tells the classic tale of good versus evil, much like age of hero mythology.

As a result, a new type of conspiracy has emerged, not one of theory, but of narrative. In Pizzagate, one can observe the creation of this new genre of conspiracy that can be best described as a conspiracy narrative. Conspiracy narratives are alternative social narratives created and spread by insulated communities that borrow heavily from mythological archetypes to define a secret group of conspirators, who commit taboo acts to serve their own interest. Due to this emergence of a new structure of conspiracy, a new form of analysis must be used to understand them, one that deals with the archetypal and allegorical dimensions of the theories to reveal its author's humanity (of lack thereof). To do this, one must look to modern psychology and symbiotic theory.

ii. Reading Conspiracy Narrative

In contemporary scholarship, the hermeneutics of suspicion gave a new life to critical study of literature, starting with the developments of modern psychology at the turn of the 19th century. Freud's approach to dream analysis gave a new vocabulary to speak of abstract and concrete ideas. He proposed that within dreams the dreamer experiences a *manifest content* through experiences and sensations, however, this manifest content has a deeper connection to *latent content* of the subconscious (Freud 818). Manifest content is the concrete objects and forms one interacts with in a dream, whereas latent content is the abstract meaning being

communicated by one's subconscious. Both layers play upon each other to communicate symbols of the dreamer's neurosis or deep psyche. While Freud's theory provided a great framework to build from, it failed to relate the manifest images to the active psychic life of the dreamer, according to Carl Jung who critiqued Freud on this oversight. Jung writes:

these dream images were called 'archaic remnants' by Freud; the phrase suggests that they are psychic elements surviving in the human mind from ages long ago [...] They are not in any sense lifeless or meaningless 'remnants.' They still function, and they are especially valuable (*Man and His Symbols* 32-33).

Jung believes Freud operates on a premise that diminishes anything 'primitive' as lesser; however, Jung believes that these archaic remnants "form a bridge between the ways in which we consciously express our thoughts and a more primitive, more colorful and pictorial form of expression. It is this form, as well, that appeals directly to feeling and emotion" (*Man and His Symbols* 32-33). To Jung, each symbol is appropriated by one's psyche to communicate a unique message to the dreamer, communicating complex ideas that one usually ignores. In this way, these primitive symbols do a better job of connecting to a dreamer's emotions than any modern imagery. If one is to dismiss them as primitive, as Freud does, then that is to ignore their modern psychological application.

To combat the pejorative nature of these 'archaic images', Jung coins a new term for them: archetype. A word used by Vico, here, revived for modern psychiatry. Jung believes an archetype is an expression of the unconscious, not the Freudian subconscious. This distinction is important because the subconscious is a catch-all hole for repressed thoughts and experiences, while the unconscious is a "real part" of a person's life with its own powers to influence and communicate to the conscious (*Man and His Symbols* vii). While there is a personal unconscious, there is also a collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is a shared encyclopedia of

images and ideas preserved in everyone's unconscious (*The Archetypes... 4*). In Jung's own words, "the archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear" (*The Archetypes... 5*). Through archetypes, unconscious ideas find a way to express themselves to the conscious mind. Since the conscious mind normally consumes information through senses, archetypes communicate through these means in one's dreams. Although certain archetypes are 'eternal images,' such as those of the divine syzygy or the anima, each time an archetype is used it is altered by the conscious that perceives it. In order to fully understand an archetype's meaning, one must place it in the context of its use. In this way, these images are being constantly reinvented in the modern era, gaining a greater 'living' quality rather than archaic. While recognizing these images began only in dreams, the power of these archetypes also appear in literature.

Jungian psychologists were some of the first to apply these ideas of literature, bridging the gap between psychology and literary analysis. Older Freudian practitioners followed the notion of 'free association' as a method to subconscious desires through dream images only, while Jung began to apply them to images outside of dreams. He writes that "it was not necessary to use a dream as the point of departure for the process of 'free association' if one wished to discover the complexes of a patient" (*Man and His Symbols 11*). One can close read any human created symbol and uncover something about their psyche. This realization lead to archetypal readings of literature. Henderson, a Jungian scholar echoes the philosophy of Christian hermeneutic scholars when he writes on the topic of studying mythology: "The more closely one looks at the history of symbolism, and at the role that symbols have played in the life of many different cultures, the more one understands that there is also a re-creative meaning in

these symbols” (*Man and His Symbols* 100). Like the Christian Hermeneutics before them, Jungian scholars see great use of these images to uncover the depths of human psyche. In any effort of human creation these archetypes manifest, even in conspiracy narrative.

iii. **The Stalled Theory: Conspiracy Narrative’s Need for Archetypal Significance**

Conspiracy narrative is loaded with plenty of archetypal imagery that is usually overlooked by those who encounter it. When confronted with a conspiracy, most people are justifiably concerned with its truth content. On a factual level most conspiracies fail to ring true to most people with a basic understanding of the world, but they still attract thousands of devotees who will stop at nothing to spread their message. Although these devotees consciously believe the logic of these narratives to be true, the actual power of conspiracy narrative lies not in its rhetorical devices, but how well the narrative utilizes mythological archetypes to speak to the unconscious of the reader. Jung writes, “that people should succumb to these eternal images is entirely normal, in fact it is what these images are for. They are meant to attract, to convince, to fascinate, and to overpower” (*The Archetypes...* 8). It is this very attraction towards archetypes that conspiracy narrative exploits, drawing millions to its fire. Only conspiracies that successfully incorporate archetypal ideals into their narratives are successful. To illustrate this point, one can observe a proto-Pizzagate conspiracy narrative that failed to gain any traction on /pol/ during the 2016 election.

The first use of the phrase Pizzagate¹⁰ occurred on October 04, 2016, when a series of democratic documents were ‘leaked’ by a hacker named Guccifer (“Guccifer 2.0 Hacks...”). Shortly after the documents went public, they were quickly dismissed by mainstream media as fraudulent; however, this did not stop the members of /pol/ from creating a conspiracy narrative (Williams par. 1). The conspiracy narrative posits that Nancy Pelosi, then House Speaker, used a

San Francisco Pizza place, named Goat Hill Pizza to funnel tax payer TARP funds into the pocket of the Democratic National Committee, who would then use the money to pay for the 2016 Democratic presidential campaign. Despite the investigation by /pol/, the conspiracy narrative did not gain a large enough devotion to become a wide-spread conspiracy narrative. Of course, one can point to the manipulated documents as reason why this so-called ‘Pizzagate’ failed to gain a significant following, but if the /pol/ cared about the mainstream media debunking or fraudulent evidence, the actual Pizzagate would fall apart. Factual analysis is not the reason this conspiracy theory failed to gain enough traction; it failed because its narrative did not appeal to the psyche of the community.

In the real Pizzagate both Clinton and a performance artist named Marina Abramovic work as great vehicles for archetypal significance, however, in Nancy Pelosi, /pol/ failed to find a proper woman for this feat. As speaker of the house, Pelosi is a low status target on /pol/. Most posters are unfamiliar with her history or position. In the following post, one can see the initial reaction most /pol/ members had towards Pelosi:

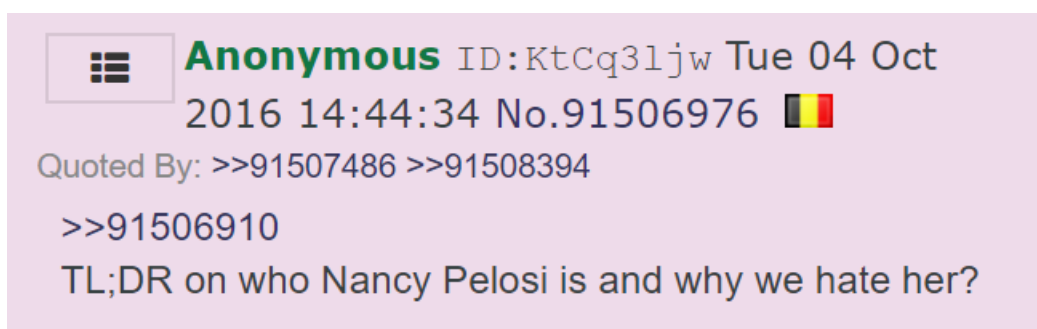



Fig. 1. Post replying to proto-Pizzagate accusation from: Anonymous, “TL;DR.” *4plebs*, 04 Oct. 2016, <http://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/91505962/#91506976>. Accessed 16 Mar. 2019.

“TL;DR” stands for “too long didn’t read.” The user is asking for a condensed summary of who Nancy Pelosi is and why they hate her. The initial reaction is one of explanation, rather than the emotional repulsion the real Pizzagate would achieve, hindering the momentum of the narrative’s development. If the mythologic nature of a narrative is functioning correctly, then the initial reaction of the reader is an emotional one. A successful conspiracy narrative is one that utilizes archetypes and actions that are “fraught with fascination and numinous energy” (Kline 189). The user’s post illustrates a strong desire to believe the theory, however that desire conflicts with the lack of emotional resonance with the accusation. As the post states, there is no ‘hatred’ the conspiracy triggers. Although Nancy Pelosi as a character fails to evoke an emotional response in the community, there are other tactics the conspiracy could have relied on to achieve this effect.

To function mythologically, if the characters of conspiracy narrative do not evoke an emotional reaction from their name alone, they can provoke this emotional reaction through their behavior, a feat this proto-Pizzagate fails accomplish. Pelosi’s misuse of TARP funds did not provide the numinous energy the mythology needs to survive. On /pol/, there would be numerous stalls the conspiratorial discussion to ask for an explanation of TARP funds. Observe the following explanation:

☰

Anonymous ID:+1E6JrAB Tue 04 Oct
2016 16:48:52 No.91521153 

>>91520953

nancy pelosi is laundering money thru pizza place in san fran, DNC fundraising and donations are based off and possibly funded by TARP(taxpayer bailout) funds

Fig. 2. Explanation of Proto-Pizzagate from: Anonymous. "Nancy Pelosi." 4plebs, 04 Oct. 2016, <http://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/91517158/#91521153>. Accessed 02 December 2018.

To understand this story, one would need an intimate knowledge of TARP funds and the intricate bureaucracy of D.C. There is no immediate punch to the user's unconscious mind because most users are unfamiliar with the severity of the accusation. TARP funds do not use natural archetypal symbols to tell its story and become a definitive conspiracy narrative. Joseph Campbell argues one main function of mythology is to render

an image of the universe, a cosmological image in keeping with the science of the time and of such kind that, within its range, all things should be recognized as parts of single great holy picture, an icon as it were: the trees, the rock [...], and thus serving as [...] vehicles and messengers of the teaching (*The Mythic Dimension* 220).

A main facet of mythology is this ability to take objects natural to the world around the reader and load them with a numinous energy that places them within the greater picture of the universe. Mythologically, the core of this conspiracy narrative hinges on the icon of a TARP fund, which lacks any "power" as an archetype image. The only everyday object in the theory is the pizza place, a symbol that the later (successful) Pizzagate kept due to its mythological potency. The accusation of misusing tax payer money is also not as mythological as accusation of child abuse found in the real Pizzagate. The stakes of this story are so cemented into the moral realm that it does not reach into greater complexes of the community's psyche.

The whole conspiracy only lasted seven full threads, then lost interest in about the 8th. The archetypal significance proved too little to excite the horde. In contrast, the real Pizzagate is a conspiracy narrative that successfully utilizes archetypal elements to create a mythology that speaks to the unique psychology of /pol/ community; however, before Clinton or any other public figure can be filled with archetypal significance, their original significance must be

appropriated into the conspiracy narrative. To successfully accomplish this feat, Pizzagate operates off a semiotic process that transforms real life people and events into literary characters in their narrative. /pol/ achieved this effect through an exploitation of mythology's semiotic process, which allows one to appropriate existing language to suit their own *concepts*.

II. Conspiracy Narrative's Semiotic Shell

Theoretically, conspiracy narratives operate off a similar semiotic system as mythologies that Roland Barthes outlines in his work, *Mythologies*. A semiological system is the process in which symbols are given meaning. To understand where mythologies and conspiracy narratives overlap, one must first acknowledge the first-order semiological system, which is the basic way language communicates an idea. This system is defined through a tri-dimensional pattern of signs, signifiers, and the signified. Every word is a sign that signifies an idea. Take the word: tree. The letters and their order (the signifiers) communicate the idea of a tree (the signified) to the reader (Saussure 852-54). The relation between those two ideas is the sign, which is referred to as a *language object* (Barthes 115).

Now, mythology operates off the completion of this first order semiological system. Only after a word is inscribed with meaning as a *language object* can it then be used to create a mythology. Barthes writes, "myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system" (114). When a word or idea is mythologized, another layer of signification is added to the language object that already contained a linguistic meaning. Mythology can therefore be categorized as a *meta-language*, since it takes a completed sign and re-programs it for its own gain (Barthes 114).

As a semiological system, myth operates off a similar tri-dimensional pattern as language objects. It contains a unique signifier, signified, and sign all of which are added on top of an existing language object. Since it can quickly get confusing using similar terms for both semiological systems, Barthes renames the elements of the mythological system: the mythological signifier is now the form; the mythological signified is now the concept; and the mythological sign is now signification. Spatially, their relationship can be noted as the following:

1. Signifier	2. Signified	
3. Sign		
A) <u>Form (Myth's Signifier)</u>	B) <u>Concept (Myth's Signified)</u>	
		C) <u>Signification (Myth's Sign)</u>

Table 1. Mythology's Semiotic Process (Barthes 115)

The first order semiological system is represented by the phrases numbered 1 thru 3, whereas the second mythological one is lettered A thru C. In this representation, the relationship between 3 and A illustrates the point of contact between the language object and the metalanguage that grows from it.

i. The Conspiratorial Spark

Depending on the mythology, many different events or creative impulses can initiate the mythology's semiotic process. As previously discussed mythology can be created to explain phenomenon or to convey ideas about the human condition. When it comes to conspiracy

narrative, however, the catalyst for its mythological process begins with the manufacturing of errant data; this data not only acts as a catalyst for making outrageous conspiratorial accusations, but also adds to the accusations ‘credibility’ by cementing the narrative within the real world. Errant data is a term coined by Brian Kelly in his work, *Of Conspiracy Theories*. He explains that in every conspiracy theory, there lies a ‘received view’ that contradicts the conspiratorial claims. The received view is the official explanation of an event by mainstream epistemic authorities. For example, 9/11’s received view attributes the attack on the Twin Towers to Al Qaeda. Despite the factual basis of these claims, inconsistencies still exist in the received accounts as they do in any explanatory endeavor. Kelly names these inconsistencies ‘errant data’. However, if an explanation contains errant data that does not affect its verisimilitude. In fact, most accepted explanations of phenomena contain errant data, even accepted scientific theories contain several inconsistencies within them (Kelly 120). There is never an explanation that can accurately account for all inconsistent data it contains, a fact that conspiracy exploits.

Conspiracy theory and narratives thrive off errant data. They gain a devout following by presenting explanations that account for all the inconsistencies of the received view. According to Kelly, there are two types of errant data: unaccounted and contradictory data. Unaccounted data “do not contradict the received account but are data that fall through the net of the received explanation. They are data that go unexplained by the received account” (Kelly 118). For example, a believer in Pizzagate might wonder why John Podesta received messages about a ‘black’ and ‘white’ handkerchief, if they were not speaking in code or why do democrats make references to the god of child sacrifice¹¹ (Sandler; Amselem). Both events are left unexplained in articles debunking Pizzagate. Then there are contradictory data: “data that, if true, would contradict the received account” (Kelly 118). To a Pizzagate believer, although logically

unsound, Clinton's association with convicted pedophile John Epstein contradicts her denial of child trafficking¹². The believers incorrectly believe this to be a contradiction in Clinton's character. To believers of Pizzagate, the real world fails to account for these bits of errant data. In the conspiracy, however, believers get a full explanation of all the so-called inconsistencies: the emails about the strange handkerchief is code for child trafficking; the reference to the god of child sacrifice hints at their exploitation of children; Clinton's friendship with Epstein aids her crimes. It is conspiracy's ability to account for all the available data that inspires deep belief from its followers.

At this point, it can be misconstrued that conspiracy narrative operates off a similar explanatory framework as traditional conspiracy theory; however, in conspiracy narrative, these 'explanations' are based within a manufactured non-historical 'event.' The explanatory discourse here still fails to fall within the traditional definition of conspiracy, due to the fact that Podesta's emails are not a 'historical event' in the true sense. The process of traditional conspiracy theory is as follows: an event that demands an explanation occurs, epistemic authorities research and present their own explanation ('received view') to the public, then, the errant data within the received view sparks the creation of a conspiracy theory that accounts for all the errant data. Conspiracy narrative flips this structure by, first, manufacturing an event through 'errant' data. In Pizzagate, the so-called errant data that needs 'explanation' are Podesta's emails. The official explanation of those emails is self-evidence: they are innocent emails sent by and to Podesta; the words therein are not code, but still adhere to their original meaning. When /pol/ is presented with these emails, they ignore the self-evident explanation to fabricate their own interpretation that implicates Podesta in a fictitious child trafficking ring. The content within the email becomes errant data to the conspirators. In a sense, the community forces the email dump to

become a significant event that demands an explanation by mainstream epistemic authorities. From here, the community justifies its research project without realizing the creative act they are participating in, since they believe they are explaining errant data. Only by observing this behavior from outside of the community can one perceive the creative act as it unfolds into a semiotic process. In this process, the fabricated errant data points conspiracy theorists towards the forms can appropriate into their narrative.

ii. Pizzagate's Forms

Most threads about Pizzagate start with a list of their so-called evidence, which, when looked at semiologically, is merely a list of empty mythological forms based on unaccounted/contradictory data. After the initial Pizzagate thread, multiple offshoots were created to further the investigation. These threads always began with a main post that summarized the 'evidence' they had collected thus far:

Keep this shit going lads, American /pol/ is just starting to wake up.

Jeffery Epstein's Lolita Express' flight log shows a lot of trips to Asia:

<https://i.sli.mg/8XLWle.png>

Lots of pedos came out for the Indian tsunami too; it was around that time that GHWB and WJC teamed up to do a big new charity initiative.

<http://archive.is/Y3qya>

The two women in the pizza.jpg photo? Those are the two reporters who caught captured in NK. They were reporting on HUMAN SEX TRAFFICKING.

Guess who went to pick them up? Bill Clinton and Steve Bing, who both are Lolita Express passengers.

Source on this:

<http://nypost.com/2015/02/14/bill-clintons-libido-threatens-to-derail-hillary-again/>

Original email here.

<https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/10037>

Another related email invitation for a possible pedo party at David Brock's

<https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/28538>

Sleuthing around for Pizza related things led us to this email:

<https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/37543>

Comet Ping Ping Pizza joint in DC named:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comet_Ping_Pong

The owner of Comet Ping Pong, JAMES ALEFANTIS was the gay lover of David Brock for a while. He stars in a number of creepy ads for the pizza place.

The Pizza place also has hidden doors to rooms according to their webpage:

<http://www.sashalordpresents.com/comet/>

Possibly related Tumblr

<http://pizzapac.tumblr.com>

Fig. 3. Original Post of Pizzagate General Thread from: Anonymous. "Podesta/Pizza PAC

General 13: They're All Pedos Edition." *4plebs*. 03 Nov. 2016,

<http://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/95878120>. Accessed 04 Nov. 2018.

Each language object that will be repurposed into the mythological form is represented in this list. The post acts as a cast of characters for Pizzagate: Clintons, Jeffrey Epstein, the Clinton Foundation, Comet Ping Pong, James Alefantis, etc. All emptied of their original significances in order to fit the conspiracy narrative. In appropriating a language object that is already filled with meaning into a mythological system, the original intent of the word is vulnerable to change, a fact that allows conspiracy narratives to thrive.

iii. Conspiracy Narrative's Militarization of Language

In conspiracy narratives, the language objects writers appropriate are mostly names of politicians, historical events, or social institutions, as seen above. Semiotically, semiotic scholar Vyacheslav Nikonov theorizes that names operate off of three types of significance: etymological, anthroponymic, or de-anthroponymic (Bagby 487). First, etymological significance is the literal definition of a name. The anthroponymic significance is the function of the name as a practical label of an individual. Lastly, the name's socio-cultural meaning is taken into account of the de-anthroponymic significance (Bagby 474). In conspiracy narrative, writers manipulate a name's existing anthroponymic/de-anthroponymic history to create or reinforce an alternative de-anthroponymic significance.

Podesta and Clinton are both public individuals whose names have been appropriated into the Pizzagate narrative. Before their inclusion in the narrative, their names had already fostered mainstream socio-cultural (de-anthroponymic) significance throughout their careers; however the socio-cultural significance of a politician's name changes depending on the politics of the community the name is used in. As a culture, /pol/ already has existing socio-cultural significances against certain names, such as, Obama, Hillary, Trump, favoring those with hard right-wing views more than those on the left; in the creation of a conspiracy narrative, one sees a

formalizing of these already established socio-cultural significance into a larger narrative. Take, for instance, the first post that sparked the Pizzagate narrative:



24KiB, 480x360,
e4c7b25c3bc4713820c45c14358a22aebbc94f7febcb
62f5e92445a1bdee6aa.jpg

[View Same](#) [Google](#) [iqdb](#) [SauceNAO](#) [Trace](#)

[View](#) [Reply](#) [Original](#) [Repo](#)

PODESTA IS A FUCKING PEDO **Anonymous** [331 / 68]
ID: qymNxxRx3 Wed 02 Nov
2016 14:17:20 No.95752720

Quoted By: >>95753083
>>95753113 >>95753137
>>95753274 >>95753303
>>95753343 >>95754533
>>95754988 >>95755047
>>95755274 >>95755445
>>95755580 >>95755944
>>95756269 >>95756395

>>95756721 >>95757027 >>95758064 >>95758168 >>95758351 >>95760166 >>95760620
>>95760880 >>95762467 >>95763648 >>95764072 >>95764221 >>95764363 >>95764542
>>95765063 >>95765520 >>95765722 >>95766371 >>95767088 >>95768043 >>95768399
>>95768572 >>95768934 >>95768995 >>95769204

Lads, remember this email titled "pizza.jpg" that only had pic related attached?

They are showing off wares to Podesta and Hillary's high level staff. They are shopping a kid essentially.

Jeffery Epstein's Lolita Express' flight log shows a lot of trips to Asia:

<https://i.sli.mg/8XLWle.png>

Lots of pedos came out for the Indian tsunami too; it was around that time that GHWB and WJC teamed up to do a big new charity initiative.

<http://archive.is/Y3qya>

Original email here.

<https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/10037>

Help me find other supplemental info, let's nail these sick fucks.

Fig. 4. First Pizzagate Post from: Anonymous. "Podesta Is a Fucking Pedo." *4plebs*, 02 Nov. 2016, <http://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/95752720/>. Accessed 13 Aug. 2018.

In the image, the poster utilizes mythology's semiotic process to emphasize /pol/'s unique socio-cultural significance of "Podesta" and "Hillary" as signs of evil anti-human corruption.

Conspiracy narrative's semiotic power lies in its ability to transform existing language into its own signification. Barthes writes, "when [a language object] becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains" (117). When the politician's name becomes form in the conspiracy narrative, its initial anthroponymic/de-anthroponymic significance is emptied and replaced. The original anthroponymic meaning of Hillary signifies the 2016 democratic presidential nominee, who has a long and tumultuous personal history. John Podesta signifies Hillary's chief of staff, John Podesta. He, too, has a long history in politics, dating back to Barack Obama. Through campaigning, news articles, their work, and even, on a superficial level with their looks, both of these figures have attempted to foster a positive socio-cultural significance to their name when read in print. As the names become mythological form, the original significances of the language object are left in a limbo, only to be refilled by the intentions of the conspiratorial writer. Here, /pol/ cherry-picks this email from Podesta's political history, holding at arm's length other aspects of his history that would invalidate the claim. They then pair it with the (untrue) concept that Podesta is corrupt child-abuser. Through this, the community's unique de-anthroponymic significance of the name "Podesta" (as an evil corrupt democrat) is disseminated and reinforced in a new narrative, a process that occurs an incalculable amount of times during conspiracy narrative's creation. In posts such as these, politicians are robbed autonomy over their identity and turned into characters in a conspiracy narrative. Their true history and morals are emptied from the word. When one posts about a politician on /pol/, their initial de-anthroponymic significance dies and is replaced with one that fits the will of the community.

In this post, there is also a third character involved that deserves discussion: the elusive conspiratorial “they.” Here, ‘they’ is used as the plural pronoun without an antecedent. The word ‘they’ has been popular in conspiratorial language for years, due to its abstract nature which allows it to be easily manipulated into mythological form. The writer does not need to specify who they are. ‘They’ are merely a projection of the conspiratorial enemy: corporations, the government, the illuminati, etc. On a semiotic level, ‘they’ is a perfect language object for conspiracy narrative, because, without an antecedent, it is inherently empty and impoverished, making it easier for it to become a form. It has no history, due to its vague nature. Here, the first ‘they’ refers to the email sender, of course, but there is no discussion about the person who wrote the email throughout the thread. It is implied that ‘they’ refers to a larger unnamed child trafficking network. The second ‘they’ is more interesting, since it now refers to not only the sender of the email, but also to Podesta and Hillary’s staff, implicating Hillary herself in the act. ‘They,’ as a subjective pronoun, places the conspirators directly into the action. Their personal and professional history all emptied in order to fit the accusation.

In conspiracy narratives, the repurposing of real-world histories as evidence for conspiratorial accusations not only occurs to names, but any word of significance to the community. Conspiracies often turn social institutions into characters with their narratives as well as politicians, such as the FBI, CIA, or, as with Pizzagate, the Clinton Foundation. One can observe this process in the following post:

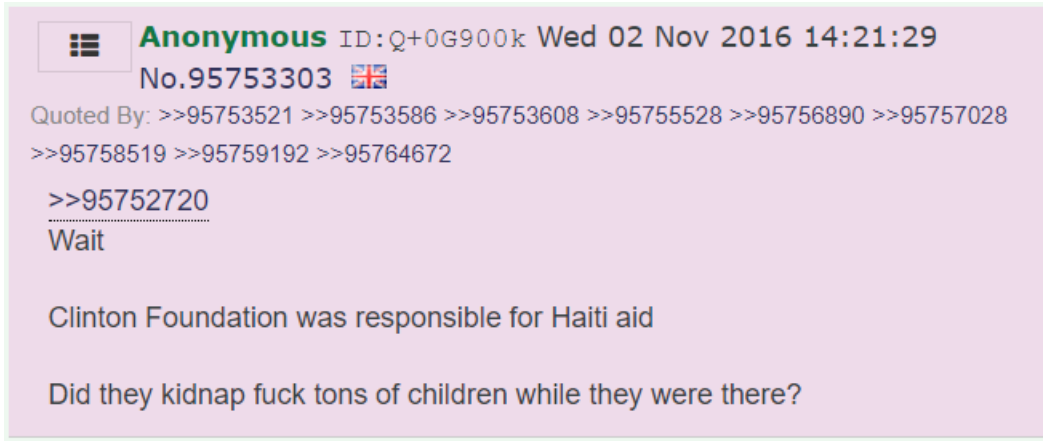


Fig. 5. Clinton Foundation Pizzagate Connection from: Anonymous. “Wait.” *4plebs*, 02 Nov. 2016, <http://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/95752720/#95753303>. Accessed 06 June 2018.

Here, the phrase ‘Clinton Foundation’ signifies the non-profit institution founded by Bill and Hillary Clinton meant to fundraise to complete humanitarian projects (Magaziner 11); however, when the phrase becomes a form, its meaning is reprogrammed. As with names, the myth feeds off of the history of the Clinton Foundation, selectively. It offers the fact that the Clinton Foundation aided Haiti after the 2010 earthquake to connection the institution to human trafficking. The real-world history of the Clinton Foundation work in Haiti excites the conspiracy narrative’s believability to the users of /pol/, as shown through the large amount of replies this post received. Conspiracy narrative constantly hides in coincidental facts, such as this one, that one can point to when challenged. In this way, the narrative can be simultaneously rooted into reality and imaginative conspiracy. Conspiracy survives off of selective evidence gathered from the history of the *form* in order to validate claims made within the narrative. It is this apparent link to reality that inspires most theorists to believe the accusations are true, a phenomenon intricately tied to the mythology’s semiotic system. Barthes states,

The meaning¹³ [of a language object] loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment. The meaning will be for the form like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation: the form must constantly be able to be rooted again in the meaning and to get there what nature it needs for its nutriment; above all, it must be able to hide there (118).

Conspiracy narrative keeps the meaning of the language object in a state of limbo from which the form can feed. The concrete nature of the language object gives the abstracted mythical form real-world dimensions. There is a constant cherry-picking of facts in the creation of conspiracy narratives; however the fact that the Clinton Foundation worked in Haiti does not easily connect to child trafficking in any rational mind that large leap in logic can be best explained upon further examination of the myth's concept.

In order for the form to operate within the mythology it must be paired with a concept. The form is a conduit for the concept the author intends to communicate. Barthes writes, "the concept "reconstitutes a chain of causes and effects, motives and intentions. Unlike the form, [it] is in no way abstract: it is filled with a situation" (119). The authors motives become clear through an investigation of the mythological concept. To investigate the concept, one must look at the forms the authors choose and how those forms behave in the narrative. The obvious politics behind the Pizzagate narrative are revealed through the choice of democratic leaders and their anti-human actions¹⁴. To the conspirators, the behavior of Podesta and Clinton communicates the inherent evil within the democratic party, one that goes against all moral codes one is taught to believe in. The narrative is unabashedly filled with the politics of the time and the author, which on /pol/ is heavily anti-democrat. The play between form/concept can be seen in numerous /pol/ posts, where authors constantly manipulate language objects to fit their perverted concepts. Since 4chan is an imageboard, most posts related the form to the concept

through images and texts. Semiotically, images operate off of a similar first order tri-dimensional semiological system as language-objects, which can be taken over by mythology's metalanguage (Barthes 114). One can observe this process in the following November 2nd Pizzagate thread that circulated an image of Podesta's house:

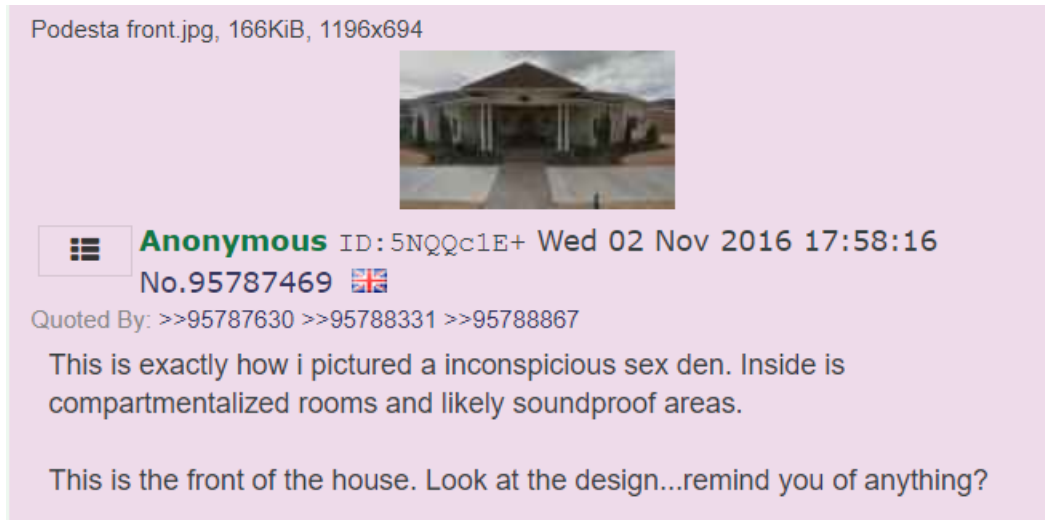


Fig. 6. Post concerning Podesta's house and Pizzagate Accusations from: Anonymous. "This Is Exactly..." *4plebs*, 02 Nov. 2016, <http://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/95782324/#95787469>. Accessed 22 Aug. 2018.

In this image, the house is the concrete sign that will undergo the mythological process. As an image-object, the house is shelter to a marginally wealthy man and his family. However, the true significance of the house is held in limbo as it turns into a form. The 4chan format provides an easy method for pairing image-object forms and concepts, due to its separation of images and texts. Neatly arranged, the *form* on the left (the image) and the *concept* on the right (the text), one can see the mythological process at work. The objective truth of the image is quickly held at arm's length, then incorporated with Pizzagate concepts; as Barthes said, the concept is not

abstract, but filled with the current situation to prove Podesta's involvement in a child trafficking ring. The house is now a 'den,' a loaded word that implies implicit activity. Now, when the word 'den' is paired with the adjective 'sex,' the writer offers his concept with little innuendo or abstraction. With no evidence, the author then writes about the interior of the house in a wild display of perverted imaginative thinking. The image alone offers no hints of the activities within the interior of the house, but, through the writers' suggestions, the reader assumes the nefarious purposes of the 'soundproof areas' and 'compartmentalized rooms.' The image-object is, literally, empty or void of any information regarding the interior of the house, a vulnerability the concept can quickly take advantage of. The concept, then, fills the void with a new loaded meaning, reconstituting the idea of the interior in the reader's head to slander Podesta. All throughout the mythological process the meaning of the house is injected with the depraved concept that Podesta is a part of a child-trafficking ring. Of course, there are no facts to back up these claims, but the mythological process ingeniously does not need fact to win over the minds of its readers. Its 'truth' is self-sustaining.

iv. The Truth – Socially Constructed

Using the second order semiological system, conspiracy narrative is protected from traditional rhetorical analysis because the knowledge transferred between the writer and the reader is protected within the concept, which reveals the social epistemology at the core of conspiracy. Believers of conspiracy narrative engage in large cognitive leaps to believe. In order to connect a vague historical moment, such as the Clinton Foundation's aid in Haiti to child trafficking, involves a disregard for traditional argument in favor of mythological rhetoric.

Truth to tell, what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality; in passing from the meaning to the form, the image loses some knowledge: the better to receive the knowledge in the concept. In actual fact, the knowledge contained in a mythical concept is confused, made of yielding shapeless associations (Barthes 119).

Since a 'certain' knowledge lies within the concept, mythology can act as a vehicle to communicate an alternative point of view to the reader, which, when accepted by the reader, helps structure his or her perception of reality; this process highlights the radical influence social narratives have on one's world view.

When it comes to epistemic arguments, some thinkers believe in an individualistic philosophy, which theorizes that people create their own reality on an individual level, with little to no outside influence; however, to scholars such as Levy, argue epistemology is radically social. Levy writes, "our cognitive abilities are [...] deeply social, in that they are actually *constituted* by their embedding in the social world." (Levy 182). To Levy, knowledge is only knowledge once it is integrated into a greater social network. Knowledge is, therefore, a heavily external experience, rather than an individualist, internal, process. Progress in any field of study cannot be made without the inclusion of outside knowledge from trusted sources, who have each taken the knowledge from the past and built upon it. These sources contain high level thinking created by individuals or institutions who have become trusted epistemic authorities through their socially earned credibility. They are "the distributed network of knowledge claim gatherers and testers that includes engineers and politics professors, security experts and journalists" (Levy 187). As a society, the collective grants authority to these institutions and its members, allowing them to perform high level thinking that an individual would not be able to accomplish without the aid of other socially gained knowledge. In return, the society generally believes the explanations these institutions create and holds them as knowledge specialist. Through their work, epistemic authorities help shape the individual's perception of the world, sharing their findings with a public that accepts them.

However, conspiracy narrative operates off a perversion of social epistemology, one informed by an alternative set of epistemic authorities and validated through the mythological conspiracy narratives of internet communities. /pol/ operates as its own isolated culture. The more time one spends on /pol/, the less time one spends in the real world. If society influences its members based on the amount of time they both are engaged with one another, now, more than ever before, people are able to actively ignore mass society, in favor, of fringe internet communities. With a new society, comes new epistemic authorities, such as FBIanon¹⁵ or anonymous conspiracy posts. These authorities reshape the readers perception of the world through their shared mythology. These myths quickly become truth to anyone tapped into this culture, since knowledge is radically social. Moreover, the knowledge held within the mythical concept are made of ‘yielding shapeless associations,’ which means they are not held up to the same scrutiny as mainstream facts¹⁶ (Barthes 119). The associations between the Foundation’s aid in Haiti and child trafficking is a vague mess, lacking traditional logic; however, the connection stands, since it functions in their collective mythology. That connection is in fact the *signification* of the myth’s semiological system: the conspiracy narrative in full. It is within the concept that the power of mythology can become dangerous, because there is no moral code for the ‘knowledge’ mythology spreads. Barthes expresses a similar concern over the morals of mythology, when he writes, “from the point of view of ethics, what is disturbing in myth is precisely that its form is motivated. For if there is a ‘health’ of language, it is the arbitrariness of the sign which is its grounding” (126). In mythology, there are numerous *forms* to choose from to fill any concept one chooses. In the first order semiotic system, the choice of the signifier is completely arbitrary (Saussure 854). The letters T-R-E-E have been arbitrarily chosen and agreed upon socially in order to communicate a shared idea. In mythology, the *form* is motivated

by the intentions of the author. Therefore, Podesta's house becomes a 'sex den,' Clinton becomes the head of a sex trafficking ring and a conspiracy narrative is born. There are no morals or ethics in appropriating language objects into conspiracy. It is up to the mercy of the author to decide what ought to be published. The only guard against this would be the difficulty in starting a large enough community that could share a common set of anti-establishment values; however, due to the internet, this has become increasingly easy.

Through the concept/form relationship, these theories create a new understanding of the world. Using language objects that correlate to real life individuals, they are actively re-writing the individuals perception of real-life people. The knowledge communicated through the concept is emotionally volatile, since it includes many anti-human acts, such as murder, etc, which invites the community to do further research. When the community begins to form a conspiracy narrative, they elevate themselves as epistemic authorities, anyone who is accepted by the community is allowed to hypothesize or present evidence for review. A mirror reflecting upon a mirror, rejecting the epistemic authorities that deem their research incorrect. What those who critique the theorist fail to realize is that they are operating off their own radicalized knowledge of right and wrong, whereas the ones creating the conspiracy are not doing so through rhetoric but a mythological system. It is through the semiotic process that the politicians and characters of Pizzagate are transformed into fiction characters inside a mythology or conspiracy narrative. Now that the language has transcended the ordinary into the mythological, one can begin to approach it with the same tools of literary analysis to reveal deeper truths about the community that created it.

III. Pizzagate's Witchy Women

When read as a mythology, Pizzagate's characterization of women stands out as a grotesque addition that deserves further study. While multiple women play a role in Pizzagate, no two women draw out the most vitriol of the community than Hillary Clinton and, performance artist, Marina Abramovic. They alone act as the catalysts for numerous posts and emotional rants. Although anger directed at Clinton should not come as much surprise given that she is the main political opponent of /pol/'s heroic figure, Donald Trump, Marina Abramovic's inclusion comes from an unlikely source.

Marina Abramovic is a Serbian performance artist who was dragged into Pizzagate by a leaked email she sent to John Podesta on June 28, 2015. Years before Pizzagate, Abramovic rose to prominence in the 1970s by pushing the boundaries of performance art through her lively exhibitions (Abramovic and Iles 192)¹⁷. Her work usually crosses the threshold between audience and artist in order to reveal tensions within human psychology. Due to her experience in the art world, she rose to prominence throughout the years and even became the feature of a documentary *The Artist is Present*. Her small celebrity made her a fixture at parties with celebrities and politicians who admired her work, such as John Podesta (Urist par. 4-8).

Days before the 2016 election, a 2015 email Abramovic sent to Podesta was released online by wikileaks. In the email, Abramovic invited Podesta to a 'spirit cooking' dinner she was hosting ("Dinner"). Many members of /pol/ and the right-wing media immediately connected the ritual to Aleister Crowley, a famous occultist and founder of religion Thelema which holds 'spirit cooking' as a sacred sacrament¹⁸. However, Abramovic's relationship with spirit cooking stems from her aesthetic fascination with occult imagery in her art. Abramovic has stated herself that the dinner was "just a normal menu, which I call spirit cooking. There was no blood, no

anything else. We just call things funny names, that's all," and that the dinner was a "reward for donors to a recent Kickstarter campaign" (Ohlheiser par. 13). However, her admission did little to quail the conspiratorial tide that surrounded her. Thousands and thousands of post on /pol/ and throughout the internet connected her spirit cooking dinner to occult rituals that implicated the Clintons and the democratic party. Traditional rhetoric did little to stop the growth of this narrative, because it was operating off a larger, mythological level from where it drew its influential power.

When examining Pizzagate as a mythology, it becomes clear that the narrative's focus on occult rituals is merely a contemporary application of the witch archetype. The characterization of Abramovic and Clinton as witches, while being highly illogical, draws the strongest sentiment from the /pol/ than any of the other characters involved in the narrative, due to political/social biases of the conspiracy's audience. Through close reading the archetypal significance of the Clinton's and Abramovic's characterization in Pizzagate, one not only gains a greater sense of conspiracy narrative's semiotic power, but also a deeper understanding of the fears and psychological complexes that dwell deep within the alt-right.

i. Clinton - The 'Obvious' Witch

Although it may seem like a throwaway insult by partisan posters, Clinton's characterization as a witch reveals the ability of mythology's semiotic process to recharge stereotypical archetypes with a new contemporary numinous energy, unearthing the deep psychological complexes unconsciously embedded into the narrative by the writer and unconsciously communicated to the readers. In Pizzagate's witchy representations, Clinton and Abramovic serve as expressions of /pol/'s repressed and, as a result, hostile anima.

Unfortunately, it is this psychological connection to archetypes that drives a strong devotion to the conspiracy narrative that objectively defines logical thinking.

To understand Pizzagate's appropriation of the witch archetype, one must understand its historical beginning as an oppressive tool of social control. In order to become a mythology, an archetype must have what Jung called an "numinous" energy that unconsciously engages with one's psyche (*The Archetypes...* 39). In the past, the 'witch' gained this potency centuries ago in Europe and America through witch trials. These trials historically rose in prominence during eras of heavy female oppression, where women were rarely seen in positions of power. In these trails, females were accused of practicing witchcraft and forced to prove their innocence in court. However, men exclusively held their trials, since women were not allowed to be "judges, magistrates, or jurors" (Opitz-Belakhal 97). As Bovenschen writes: "the contradiction between the power represented by [women accused of witchcraft] and the utterly impotent existence of women in reality is jarring" (109). It was from this male dominated world that the witch archetype gained its emotional potency in those accused and accusing. Those accusing (mostly men) feared the supernatural or, psychologically, held a fear of castration or the all-consuming mother, whereas women feared for their lives (Bovenschen 92). Through this painful history, the witch archetype was loaded with a numinous energy for centuries, until it became an empty stereotype in recent history.

Today, the witch archetype holds little of its numinous power of the past, due to many factors, but most importantly the rise of feminism. After the witch became a classic figure of American folklore in the 19th and 20th centuries, many feminists began to fight the archaic ideals of the 'witch' through mimetic interpretation of witch iconography (Bovenschen 83). Clinton

herself participated in this process in the following photo, which has since become a favorite of Pizzagate propaganda:



Fig. 7. Clinton Laughing in a Witch’s Hat from: “The #Pizzagate Wiki.” *Archive.Today*, 24 Aug. 2017, <http://archive.is/ruHl6>. Accessed 06 Oct. 2018.

This image has been appropriated by several right-wing publications and Pizzagate itself. However, before diving into the image as a part of the Pizzagate mythology, one must observe its original intent as an image-object: to deconstruct the ‘witch’ archetype from those oppressive notions of the past. While the confirmed origin of the photograph is unknown, a 1993 *Vanity Fair* article titled “Looking Back at Hillary’s First 100 Days in Office” details an event where the image might have been taken. Journalist Margaret Carlson writes, “At the end of the week, the Clintons slip off for a private dinner at a friend’s house on 16th Street. The president is given Ross Perot ears, and Hillary is given a black cone-shaped hat and toasted as the Wicked Witch of the West (Wing)” (Carlson par.38). It is likely the image could have been snapped at this informal dinner. This explanation would account for Clinton’s joyful attitude adorning a witch’s hat, if it was given to her in a celebratory context of victory in the 1993 presidential election. The light teasing from the couple’s friends hints at the enemies the Clintons have overcome. For Bill

Clinton it is the independent opponent, Ross Perot (who many feared would split the vote and cause Bush a victory), for Clinton it is archaic ideals of femininity.

Since Clinton has identified as a feminist throughout her career to her friends and colleagues, her adornment of the witch's hat is a mimetic appropriation of the witch stereotype. She is participating in the modern feminist movement to remove the numinous energy of the archetype. With the advent of feminism, women began "dressing up as witches for their demonstrations and festivals," utilizing a "mimetic approach to their own personal history through the medium of mythological suggestion" (Bovenschen 87). Clinton and her friends, in the original image, are playing within a similar mimetic logic. Even though she is socially forced into the role by her peers, she joyfully adorns the witch's hat to play on the iconography of stereotypical female witch. It is safe to assume that most supporters and close friends of the Clinton's are in on the joke, if they are comfortable enough to make the suggestion. Feminist and their supporters believe that, through reclaiming these historically oppressive images females, they reaffirm their own power of self-definition, adding a positive spin to a historically negative image.

It was this approach to female history that has contributed to the archetype's reduction to a stereotype in modern society. As Sieter defines it, a stereotype is a "systematic representation, repeated in a variety of forms jokes and cartoons, to news broadcasts, feature films, and television series" (184). This has process has undoubtedly happened to the witch in American society. Since the witch's numinous introduction, there has been countless media and fairy tales that play upon the stereotypical image of the witch's hat, the cackle, etc. However, in mythologies, stereotypes are counterproductive. Stereotypical images or language are useless in mythologies because, through their overuse, they have lost their "ability to emotionally affect a

person” (Kline 189). Before its inclusion in Pizzagate, the image of Clinton in the witch’s hat is an impotent stereotype that has been used in countless right-wing propaganda¹⁹. As a piece of propaganda, the image carries little numinous energy. It is merely another stereotypical depiction of a woman in power. Despite the images apparent lack of power, stereotypes can be refilled with numinous energy when used in a conspiracy narrative.

Observe the similar stereotypical image of Clinton, now, wrapped up in the second semiological mythological system of Pizzagate:

Hillary Clinton



- 2016 Presidential candidate of the Democratic National Party and wife to [Bill Clinton](#)
- Known to have facilitated child trafficking at least once in the case of [Laura Silsby](#) [24] [↗](#)
- Co-founded [Clinton Foundation](#) which offers political favors to donors and a host of suspicious business practices [25] [↗](#)
- Used [State Department](#) email to relay a supporter Lewis Amselem's message on important campaign news and a "chicken to Moloch" sacrifice. [26] [↗](#)

Fig. 8. Clinton Laughing in Witch's Hat with Pizzagate Accusations from: "The #Pizzagate Wiki." *Archive.Today*, 24 Aug. 2017, <http://archive.is/ruHl6>. Accessed 06 Oct. 2018.

Despite her mimetic intentions, when the image-object becomes a mythological form in Pizzagate, it unloads the original ironic framework of the image and loads it with a nefarious concept, connecting Clinton to archaic notions of evil (Of course, the numinous energy only exists for those who actively believe in the conspiracy narrative). /pol/'s revival of this archetype in an era that has rejected misogynistic female representations illustrates the power of the mythological concept. As Barthes theorized, through cherry-picking parts of an image-objects history, the concept can refill itself with a numinous energy powerful enough to justify regressive politics. Clinton's irony falls on /pol/'s deaf ears, since its members reject feminism²⁰ and its teachings. Instead, the community uses the image as an opportunity to hint at Clinton's inherent 'evil' by building a second-order semiotic system off the original image-object. The original intention of the image-object as a mimetic act is held at arm's length, while they keep its basic imagery to justify the new concept: Clinton's prediction to evil and the occult. This image-object in particular is a perfect form for conspiracy narrative, since it is ripe with implications. From the hat to Clinton's expression, one can almost hear the witches cackle through the image. The witches hat now signifies a predilection to evil. This suggestion is activated, consciously or not, in the reader's mind as they see the image next to accusations of child trafficking and occult rituals. Again, the community appropriates part of her history (the foundation/friendships) to justify the connections between her and occult 'child-trafficking' rings. The evil of these accusations refills the numinous energy the witch previously lost. It is a regression to the past masculine invective Clinton aimed to disassemble, since, to Pizzagate believers, Clinton is not reclaiming the notion of female witchery, instead, in this unguarded moment, she is hinting at her true evil nature.

ii. Clinton - The Stereotypical Anima

Now that the image-object is mythological, one can examine the psychology of the community through a Jungian lens. The use of the witch archetype points to the unhealthy relationship individual believers of Pizzagate have towards their anima. The anima is the repressed female side that lies in the man's unconscious. Of course, these gendered terms have become outdated, since contemporary minds reject the gender binary. More progressive definitions of the anima can be found by James Hillman who defines it as the "contra-sexual," which, admittedly, still implies a gendered/sexual approach to the word (Hill 53). The most inclusive definition available would be by Gareth Hill, who's notion of anima is that which "is the archetypal predisposition for the experience of otherness" (54). Although it is impossible to gauge the demographics of /pol/, one can speculate that the user base is highly male and openly subscribe to the gender binary.²¹ As a result, it is justified to keep the gendered female/male dichotomy when discussing /pol/'s psychological aspects of the anima.

In order to have a healthy psyche, Jung argues males must foster a healthy relationship to their female side, an accomplishment that /pol/ is far from attaining. Considering that the anima is projected onto their sexual 'other,' /pol/'s anima can be observed through the female behavior found in their narratives. If one does not foster a healthy relationship with their female side, then the anima will appear to be hostile, appearing as "the witch" to some (*The Archetypes... 29*). Adding another layer to the metaphor, Jung argues that a witch-like anima acts as "the serpent in the paradise of the harmless man with good resolutions and still better intentions" (*The Archetypes... 28*). Clinton is the perfect vessel for /pol/ to discharge their anima into, since she is the prime antagonists of Pizzagate's believers, politically. Due to her status as the democratic nominee, she is easily the metaphorical serpent out to harm the /pol/'s paradise, which would be

a world with Trump as the President of the United States. The political framework of the two-party system provides the perfect structure to create a literary ‘antagonist,’ no matter which side one is on. In the eyes of /pol/, they, along with Trump, are the central protagonist attempting to make a better world through a republican victory. Pizzagate’s narrative operates off these assumed roles of the two presidential nominees. As the leader of America, Clinton, to /pol/, would only lead to further corruption and even a possible end-of-world scenario through her perceived incompetence²². Their intentions to win the election, in their eyes, are harmless. It is Clinton that is the temptress of the nation, the proverbial snake in paradise, through her position as the democratic presidential nominee. Therefore, she is the easiest vehicle to manifest their twisted anima, since she already is acting in defiance to their ‘paradise.’

Through Clinton’s representation as a witch, Pizzagate utilizes archetypal imagery to communicate the regressive sexual politics of its followers. To villainize Clinton, politically, the community reclaims the masculine invective the witch archetype through mythology’s semiotic process. However, through its use, the narrative unwittingly enters the mythological realm, making Clinton a projection of their anima. Her villainous nature as a ‘witch’ highlights the hostility the community has towards their feminine side. As a result, Clinton’s witchy characterization plays towards this psychological complex of the readers, making the conspiracy potent and appealing to /pol/. It is a narrative that reaffirms the community’s suspicions against women and, even worse, women with power. Clinton’s archetypal significance, while important, best serves only as an introduction to the psychological disorders /pol/ faces. One can gain a greater insight into the community’s view on women through their characterization of Marina Abramovic, a figure sparked the imagination of /pol/ like no other.

iii. Abramovic - The Veiled Witch

In Pizzagate, Marina Abramovic's witchy representation is much more subtle than the stereotypical Clinton imagery and name calling. Although /pol/ rarely calls Abramovic a witch, characterizing her as a leader of occult rituals connects her image to that of magic and spellcasting. In Pizzagate's canon, she is a practitioner of magic, who leads rituals to gain supernatural powers²³. Since her performances are connected to Satan and black magic, she is indeed accused of being the main witch of the supposed occult rituals performed in the pizza places.

Despite the claims of satanic worship, closer inspection of her character in Pizzagate, reveals a deep psychological dimension to their accusations. In the text, Abramovic's witch-like behavior consistently manifests itself through a perversion of traditional domestic roles tied to females. /pol/ emphasis and disgust are always tied to Abramovic 'satanic' subversion of traditional notions of motherhood. Their fascination with her perverted domestic behavior highlights the arrested nature of their erotic development, as outlined by Jung. They seem to be stuck in the first stage of erotic development, in which, one sees, in all females, the potential to nourish and care. Due to the hostility of /pol/'s collective anima, Eve turns into a Bad Mother, a witch. In Pizzagate, the connotations of the witch archetype unconsciously mirror their underdeveloped erotic psyche back to the believers, causing the narrative to gain a deeper connection to its readership than Clinton's characterization.

To understand how and why the community created Abramovic's unique representation of as a witch, first, one must understand that the image of the witch stems from several subconscious conceptions of womanhood. Mythologically, the unique powers of femininity, such as childbirth and nursing, are often interpreted through a spiritual dimension in the divine

goddess archetype, an image ‘the witch’ subverts. The diving goddess archetype stresses the nurturing and comforting side of the mother, which is illustrated best by the natura allegory: “she is represented an extremely beautiful woman, seated and holding to her breast the globe which she showered with milk” (Bovenschen 109). The potential to naturally nourish humanity as an endless source of life and nutrition for all is a power inherent in all women, biologically, since they have the potential through their womb and breast to provide enough substance to an infant at its most vulnerable stage of development. Holding the mystery of birth within their womb grants the mother with a deep connection to the prime life force of the world, since they play a lead role in the flow of life into the world. Symbolically, it is this connection to the mystery of life that endows women with a sense of divinity. The flow of life has been portrayed through the mythological image of the “world’s navel,” a symbol for the mystery of divine “continuous creation²⁴” in the universe, whether from a God or any religious deity (*The Mythic Dimension* 32). Campbell furthers this notion by writing that the womb of the divine goddess holds “the fire of life,” tasking women with a pivotal role for the continuation of humanity (*The Mythic Dimension* 33). Metaphorically, it is the divine mother that feeds humanity, giving female energy a nourishing and loving quality.

While the natura allegory uplifts women’s importance to the life force of a universal brotherhood, the image comes from a place of childlike innocence. Jung argues that the divine vision of the mother is born from “infantile fantasy” one has of their parents as early in their psychological development (*The Archetypes...* 83). As a part of the “divine syzygies” found in father and mother, the divine goddess mirrors the idealized projection one has towards their personal mother, who held them in their womb and provided them with breastmilk to feed (*The Archetypes...* 59). However, the divine image of the mother is flawed. Jung writes,

This condition is undoubtedly present in the child during the first years of its life. It therefore seems to me more probably that the archetypal form of the divine syzygy first covers up and assimilates the image of the real parents until with increasing consciousness, the real figures of the parents are perceived--often to the child's disappointment (*The Archetypes...* 67).

It is from this point of disappointment that one realizes the human nature of their parents. Once separated from the divine syzygy, the mother becomes a human, prone to the same mistakes and flaws as anyone else. The Bad Mother then becomes conscious, negating her promise of perfection perceived by the child (*The Hero...* 92). Mythologically, one's psychological journey is to accept the duality of their mother and regain a sense of totality; however, some encounters with the bad mother turn into disproportion conflicts with one's anima, which can manifest in a projection of the witch archetype. Whereas the divine goddess is connected to the world's navel helping it continue its flow, the witch acts in defiance of its natural flow. Witches are characterized as defying "the laws of nature" through "levitation, psychokinesis, influencing the weather and other natural phenomena; the hexing of illness, accident or death; metamorphosis into animals; exerting magical influence over the process of sex, birth, etc)" (Bovenschen 97). The image is not one of nourishment or love, but of manipulation and chaos, all qualities given to Abramovic's characterization in Pizzagate.

On November 3rd, /pol/ began to paint Abramovic as the evil contra-sexual other, who can best convey the hostile anima of the community ("Podesta/Pizza PAC Investigation"). Pizzagate gained thousands of new followers due to the 'revelations' of Abramovic and Podesta's email, in which she invited him over for a 'spirit cooking' dinner. The following post was copy and pasted hundreds of times that day:



Fig. 9. Post Disseminating Information of Marina Abramovic from: Anonymous. “The Email.” *4plebs*, 03 Nov. 2016, <http://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/95933515/#95937907>. Accessed 15 Sept. 2018.

The post’s syntax signals the beginning of the mythology’s semiotic process. A new mythological definition of Abramovic is going to follow the colon after ‘the woman.’ She is going to be turned in a mythological form and paired with a new concept that is motivated by the community’s political goals. The numinous energy of Abramovic’s mythology stems from the community’s negative views of women. The insistence to address Abramovic only ‘the woman’ indicates her gender status as an ‘other’ to the community, the embodiment of the contra-sexual. Abramovic, now, is unconsciously turned into a general object on which to project their anima. When one clicks the link after ‘the woman,’ they are not led to an image of Abramovic, but to a

pages from a books she created. The book contains several esoteric phrases and grotesque images with occult meaning (*Spirit Cooking*). The actual URL acts as a ‘link’ between the community and their own views of women. It is a grotesque figure that sparks a deep emotional response due to its unconscious association, confronting their anima in all her twisted glory.


After recognizing Abramovic’s position as the contra-sexual anima, one can begin to examine the nuances of her representation on /pol/, which reveal the deep psychological troubles the community has towards women. The following post occurred three hours before the previous example but serves as the framework for all other discussions of Marina Abramovic. Occurring days before the election, the find was thought to be a confirmation of all their beliefs. The user posted:



1MiB, 2998x1678, Zy4JoxM.jpg



Anonymous ID: cd8KJAGx Thu 03 Nov 2016 15:03:46

No.95939977 

View

Quoted By: >>95941944 >>95943027 >>95943032 >>95943513 >>95943920
 >>95944570 >>95945168 >>95945357 >>95945699 >>95945996 >>95946416
 >>95947881 >>95948581 >>95948917 >>95949095 >>95949212 >>95949375
 >>95949487 >>95949591 >>95950110 >>95950633 >>95951007 >>95953644
 >>95955021 >>95958585 >>95958761 >>95962811 >>95964180 >>95964341
 >>95964406 >>95964928 >>95966166 >>95966723 >>95986539

FREAKISH WIKILEAK

The email: <https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/15893>

The woman: <http://www.editionjs.com/img/abramovic/>

The "spirit cooking" ritual: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EsJLNGVJ7E>

In the Ritual, written in blood:

"Mix fresh breast milk with fresh sperm milk"

"With a sharp knife cut deeply into the middle finger of your left hand. EAT THE PAIN"

"Fresh urine sprinkle over nightmare dreams"

"Spin around until you lose consciousness try to eat the questions of the day"

They pour blood over a child dummy in the corner of the room.

WHAT THE FUCK!?!?!?!?!

Fig. 10. Introduction of Marina Abramovic into Pizzagate²⁵ from: Anonymous. "Freakish Wikileak." *4plebs*, 03 Nov. 2016, <http://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/95939977/>. Accessed 23 Dec. 2018.

Psychologically, scholars have accurately connected these accusations to anti-human archetypes that have been used to villainize people for centuries through conspiracy theories. In “The Archetypal Dimension of a Conspiracy Theory, Kline traces the development of these anti-human accusations from as far back to the 15th century (118). Kline writes,

The reason for the enduring potency of this conspiracy motif is that it expresses a cluster of the most anti-human of all actions, ones fraught with taboo, and therefore also fraught with fascination and numinous energy: cannibalism, infanticide, and such sexual acts as incest and bestiality (119).

These anti-human acts are so universally taboo in all minds that it cannot help but evoke an emotional response in the reader. /pol/’s choice of the witch archetype, through this lens, would come as no surprise, since it is ‘the witch’ who has been a conduit of similar anti-human accusations of “cannibalism, magical powders and ointments, night flying, and sexual orgies” for centuries (Garret 463). The post contains a list of taboo subjects and anti-human imagery to discredit the moral of the Abramovic: self-harm, blood²⁶, misuse of semen/breast milk, children. Kline then argues that the impetus for conspiratorial thinking can be tied to issues of the Jungian Self. The Self, according to Jung, is the “unifying center of the total psyche (conscious and unconscious) just as the ego is the center of the conscious personality” (189). He theorizes that if one remains unaware of the Self within their own psyche, conceiving the ego as the prime interpreter of the world, then one can easily begin to believe in conspiratorial thinking that suggests there is an overarching power in control of the world. Therefore, since one denies the unconscious within themselves (that which is prone to anti-human thoughts and behaviors they project it) onto those around them, resulting in conspiracies. While Kline goes to great lengths to explain the psychological flaw that creates conspiracy theories, Kline barely touches on the nuances of these accusations found in Pizzagate. The ways in which these anti-human archetypes


manifest and the behaviors given to them are never completely similar in each conspiracy. Since Pizzagate is a conspiracy that has been born from a unique community with its own values and ideals, then one must observe the way these anti-human archetypes appear in the conspiracy to gain an insight to the community's pathology.

A closer examination of Abramovic's witchy characterization reveals that her anti-human behavior manifests itself in striking corruptions of female domesticity. Mythologically, the true Abramovic's true crime in Pizzagate is her negation of the Divine Mother archetype. When describing the ritual, the poster first emphasizes the use of breastmilk and sperm. Both of these fluids are important, since they are a part of the flow of life. Instead of acting like the divine mother, who participates and contributes to this continuous cycle, the witch wastes these fluids through ritual. In direct opposition to the natura allegory, the witch's breast milk is not being used to feed the world, which she holds close to her bosom, but instead for her own gain.



However, the natura allegory is still kept alive in a vastly perverted pull-quote: "fresh urine sprinkle over nightmare dreams." The image of the mother showering the world finds a strange new twist here. Instead of exhibiting gracefulness through providing substance for the world, the witch shares her urine. Unlike breastmilk, urine is the expulsion of excess water and salt found in the food one has eaten with no nutritional value. It is the antithesis to a substantive mother's milk that is shared with the world. Here, waste is shared with nightmares. Since one cannot physically interact nightmares, this distinction hints at Abramovic's metaphysical nature as a witch, implying that she has access to both the unconscious dream world and the physical world.

The perverted domestic is further emphasized in the name of the ritual itself: spirit cooking. In the post, the hyperlink following "spirit cooking ritual:" sends the reader to a

YouTube video in which Abramovic participates in a mock occult ritual as performance art. Out of context, the imagery from the two Abramovic links are grotesque, but once one understands the artistic context of the images, they are no more than dangerous than the most provocative performance art. The following post, uploaded hours after the previous example, best illustrates the domestic implications of 'spirit cooking:'



1MiB, 1269x821, laXELrZ.png

 **#SpiritCooking Anonymous** ID: 6MfQ8RWP Thu 03 Nov 2016 23:08:25
No.96010412  View

Quoted By: >>96010670 >>96010706 >>96011106 >>96012582 >>96015428
>>96021505 >>96022199 >>96023361 >>96025531 >>96027288 >>96027663
>>96028579 >>96028676 >>96029834 >>96031189 >>96032935 >>96033769
>>96034187 >>96034365 >>96034613 >>96034635 >>96034720 >>96035127
>>96035182 >>96035257 >>96035419 >>96036162 >>96036422 >>96036489
>>96036593 >>96036791 >>96036864 >>96037013 >>96037552 >>96037811

#Spirit Cooking

Here's an Email between Tony Podesta and Marina Abramovic
<https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/15893> In it, they invite Podesta to a "Spirit Cooking" dinner that's happening at Tony's house.

Looking up the woman, gets you her webpage and a graphical book she created about "Spirit Cooking" and what rituals it involves. <http://www.editionjs.com/img/abramovic/>

And a youtube link on what "Spirit Cooking" actually is, by Marina Abramovic.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EsJLNGVJ7E>

Now, we got this to the front page of Reddit for mass normie redpilling, it's absolutely making people vomit left and right, people are suddenly believing that all these pedo accusations could actually be legitimately true, and mostly it's just the kind of chaos we want.

So we have to extend this campaign, Twitter, we need to get #SpiritCooking trending at least to some extent. Spread it across as many demographics as we can.

Fig. 11. Spirit Cooking Post from: Anonymous. “#SpiritCooking.” *4plebs*, 03 Nov. 2016, <http://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/96010412/>. Accessed 05 Aug. 2018.

In this second sensationalized post, the subject of this post points directly to the occult name of her art piece: Spirit Cooking. Examining the phrase, spirit cooking, however, highlights the

domestic nature of the accusation. The act of cooking is traditionally tied to the mother figure. A mother cooks food for their child in order to provide them with the nourishment they need to grow. The food, since it is cooked, is warm and comforting to the child. Looking at Jung's *four stages of eroticism*, the nurturing image of the female is tied to a childish anima relationship. He writes, the "four stages of eroticism were known in the late classical period: Hawweh (eve), Helen (of Troy), the Virgin Mary, and Sophia" (*The Collected Works* 16). Each stage helps the individual achieve full realization of their psyche. For this study, only the first two are of interest. The first encounter one has with their anima is Eve: one of a nurturing mother. The next stage, Helen of Troy, is the sexualization of women, in which the individual seeks sexual conquest without the ability to form long lasting relationships²⁷.

However, in Pizzagate, the depictions of women seem to be stuck in a corrupted first stage of anima development. Eve serves as an idyllic representation of domestic life, which can become corrupted unless one realizes the duality of eve and moves on to the second stage of sexual development; however, this realization does not occur in Pizzagate. The potency of the conspiracy lies in this depiction of an anima that mirrors /pol/'s views of women. /pol/ users constantly post about their disappointments with the modern woman, yearning for the simpler days of well-defined gender roles²⁸. A woman of their standards would fulfill the qualities found in Eve, a caretaker, not only for them, but for their family. Daily, their first stage erotic image of the anima is constantly looking for a woman to project the caring Eve onto, however, in the modern world their image of quaint idealized domesticity does not exist. As a result, their eve has been repressed and turned hostile, now manifesting itself as a witch, who acts as the perversion to these domestic ideals they hold dear. Abramovic is a successful single female artist with no children of her own. She is not using her 'breastmilk' to feed the world, as the maternal

anima would, but using it to perform unholy rituals. She is not cooking to feed her children, but instead hosting spirit cooking dinner with influential members of political parties. The power inherited in woman is being used for perverted purposes. These inversions of traditional femininity are a common motif in the Pizzagate narrative, serving to highlight the arrested sexual development of /pol/ community. Metaphorically, the consequences of the bad mother archetype also fall on the children, which are a central part of Pizzagate.

IV. Final Archetypal Considerations: Children and the Fractured Psyche of /pol/

When discussing Pizzagate, it is always surprising to hear the moral justification for the accusations against the Clinton and Co., since 4chan has a history of rejecting traditional morality²⁹. The community seems to revel in behavior that shocks the general public, taking pride in their twisted hedonistic style of humor and culture. Then why does the community seem to have such a humanitarian affection for saving children? Of course, the inclusion of endangered children in a persuasive narrative serves a rhetorical purpose, evoking a protective emotional response in the reader. Since children cannot care for themselves, their exploitation is that much more believable and despicable. These are the same “anti-human” behaviors that drive a strong resentment towards the perpetrators to convert people to join the cause of the accusers (Kline 188). However, these supposed victims of Pizzagate, do not exist. There is and never was direct harm towards children, as the narrative outlines it. In fact, narratives of true child trafficking are exploited by Pizzagate to justify its unsound claims. Therefore, the children are not members of the material world, but serve an archetypal significance. Through a close examination of Pizzagate’s children, the unconscious desires of /pol/ are revealed, as a

community not only wanting to conserve their traditional past, but gain a sense of belonging in America.

Mythologically, the child is a temporal syzygy, embodying both past and future. According to Carl Jung, when used in stories, children can serve as a metaphor for the inherent tensions between the ‘primitive’ past and ‘progressive’ future of one’s psyche (*The Archetypes...* 163). Psychologically, children are individuals who have yet to fully develop their ego and superego, which help control one’s behavior. Due to their underdevelopment, children operate off a more instinctive nature than adults, containing, what Jung calls, a “primitive” quality (*The Archetypes... 163*). They act on their emotions without much self-control or experience to exercise restraint. As one grows older, one’s will represses the primitive instinct, opting for a more rational informed decision making (*The Archetypes... 163*). Jung calls this desire for growth the “progressive” instinct. While both sides of one’s psyche are necessary for growth, they both have their negative effects³⁰. To live a healthy life, Jung argues there must be a balance between both sides of one’s psyche, a struggle that is re-contextualized in Pizzagate.

Metaphorically, the concern for children in Pizzagate mirrors /pol/’s concern for conservative ideals in the face of progressive politics. /pol/ strongly decries the accomplishments of progressive politics on every issue: gender, race, immigration, education, etc³¹. Instead, they believe in a return to the cultural/political structure of the past. The past they idealize is never clear, but one of traditional gender roles, belief in capitalism and nationalist leanings (“Alt-Right”). Even the language of Trump’s political campaign plays with this vague desire; “Make America Great Again” merely signals a return to former greatness (Conway par. 1). This desire to retreat into the past is inherent within the child archetype. Jung writes:

the retarding ideal is always more primitive, more natural (in the good sense as in the bad), and more 'moral' in that it keeps faith with law and tradition. The progressive ideal

is always more abstract, more unnatural, and less 'moral' in that it demands disloyalty to tradition (163).

The 'retarding' ideal refers to an adult psyche's wish to act, as a child, purely on instinct, opposed to the psyche's progressive desire to change old patterns of belief. This conflict is similar to the struggle between conservative and progressive politics in America. For example, the conservative belief in traditional gender roles is a much more 'natural' binary to follow, if one is raised in a patriarchal society. Progressive causes, such as accepting those who do not subscribe to the gender binary, is a more abstract ideal to accept, since one must make an effort to learn and emphasize with others. For progressive causes to succeed, one must learn to accept new concepts and destroy those traditional values of the past. The desire to save conservative values from progressive destruction manifest itself within the children characters in Pizzagate. Since the child archetype can illustrate the regressive impulse of one's psyche, Pizzagate's children embody the regressive social impulses of /pol/. In the narrative, the ring leaders of Pizzagate are always tied to democratic candidates, who are accused of harming children. The democrat's actions in the narrative stand in for the constant defeats conservative values have been facing in America, due to political correctness³². Symbolically, it is up to /pol/ to save these children (conservative impulses) from the evil forces that wish to do them harm (democrats or progressives). The mythological potency of Pizzagate depends on the believer's complete dissatisfaction with the 'progressive' direction the country is headed, which is why Pizzagate most resonates with those from the alt-right and conservative back grounds.

Simultaneously, children can also represent a future potential for self-individuation or the failure to do so. Individuation is the process of regaining a sense of wholeness within one's psyche. To Jung, one's psyche (the self, the conscious, and the unconscious) is born whole, then fragmented by society. As an adult, it is then one's work to regain a sense of wholeness though

psychological exploration (*Man & His Symbols* 85). Ideally, the child archetype can function as a mediator of one's fragmentation, aiding the merger of one's psyche into a whole (*The Archetypes...* 164). In certain narratives, the child archetype plays this role to assist a character's individuation. However, the child archetype can also hint at a further fragmentation of one's psyche. According to Jung, when multiple children show up in a dream or narrative, it can suggest that "the personality (viz., the self) is still in the plural stage, ie, an ego may be present, but it cannot experience its wholeness within the framework of its own personality, only within the community of the family, tribe, or nation" (*The Archetypes...* 165). The tribalism Jung discusses is heavily potent among /pol/ message boards. Since the outside world rejects their regressive politics, /pol/ users can only experience wholeness within the framework of their online community, which only furthers fragmentation by design. Aesthetically, community websites, and, specifically, 4chan, contain fragmented topics and posts that encourage tribalistic behavior. Each board has its own 'culture' and forms of conduct, completely separated from each other. Through interacting with this platform, one begins to identify as a frequenter of a certain board, say /tv/, rather than another, /history/. This allegiance only breeds the psychologically unsound plurality of the personality: online or offline, then, once online, /pol/ user or /tv/ user. As a result, posters of /pol/ have formed a conservative political digital-tribe in the heart of 4chan³³.

Psychologically, saving the children in Pizzagate would begin the process of self-individuation for /pol/. Pizzagate's followers believe the children could only be saved, if Donald Trump is elected as president. Once elected, /pol/ trusts that Donald Trump will 'Drain the Swamp' of Pizzagate's evil democrats and expose their corruption (Garcia par. 1). While Pizzagate's targets will never be exposed of their corruption, since Pizzagate is a fabrication, a

Trump victory would instead have a positive psychological effect on the believers. His victory would signal a mainstream acceptance of /pol/'s values. Their 'tribe' would grow into a larger one, where they could feel more comfortable expressing their views away from the computer. They would finally experience accepted in the outside world, rather than rejection. With the new-found affirmation, Pizzagate believers would be able to experience their ego in mainstream society, resulting in a greater sense of psychic wholeness. Therefore, to save the children in Pizzagate is not only to save conservatism but reach a sense of acceptance through the election of Trump. It's potency as a narrative depends on several or all these characterizations resonating with its intended audience. Once the narrative connects to a reader through its use of archetypal imagery, conspiracy narrative is self-sustaining, since believers will then add to the narrative through their 'research' and 'investigation.'

V. The Final Slice

As Pizzagate demonstrates, conspiracy theories are evolving. Where traditional conspiracies sought to explain historical events, new conspiracy narratives fabricate events to justify their research projects. Through their pseudo-research, conspiracy believers actually partake in a creative process in which they collectively craft a narrative entrenched in their values and beliefs. The social aspect needed to spark this evolution has been expediated through the emergence of online communities, where there lies a greater opportunity than ever before to grow niche societies with unique values. If a community is heavily active and steeply ingrained in alternative ideals, such as /pol/, it can create unique narratives to formalize its subversive world-views. For a niche political community, conspiracy narratives offer a great vehicle to contextualize shared ideologies into a palatable story.

To transform values into a mythology, conspiracy narratives exploit mythology's semiotic process to make their alternative histories agreeable to their intended audience, who connect to them through their archetypal significance. The abuse of mythology's semiotic form and concept relationship that Barthes feared is fully realized in conspiracy narrative. Since conspiratorial forms are not arbitrary, the creators can easily insert their biases into a narrative. The forms and concepts therein are designed to exploit the psychology of the intended audience, whether it is a conscious choice of the creator or an organic occurrence in a collectively created narrative. Thorough careful analysis of the narrative, the choice of forms and archetypes used can reveal the anxieties and complexes of the community. In Pizzagate, the appropriation of the witch archetype reveals /pol/'s tumultuous relationship with their anima. When looked at closely, one can see that the witch-like evil behavior Clinton and Abramovic commit is merely a subversion of women's traditional domestic role (or the divine goddess archetype). /pol/'s obsession with woman's as caretaker reveals their arrested erotic development. Their psyches are stuck within the Eve stage of erotic development, where one views women as a source of nourishment. In this stage, if the desire for nourishment is not being fulfilled by whomever an individual projects their mother figure onto, then one's anima becomes hostile and can manifest itself in the image of a witch. Moreover, the children of Pizzagate reveal not only a desire to protect their conservative values, but also the fragmentation of the community's psyche as a whole. It is from these layers of archetypal significance that Pizzagate unconsciously connects to its readership on deep psychological level, resulting in a strong belief in the narrative.

Despite understanding the function of these conspiracies as a narrative, the question of how to combat them still remains. When confronted with conspiracy narratives, debunking alone does not aid in dismantling their mythological power. It is from this mythological power that

these conspiracies gain their ability to have an epistemic effect on those who consume them: creating or reaffirming one's knowledge of the world, despite their lack of factual basis. Mainstream epistemic authorities can only do so much when battling conspiracies, since conspiracy narrative gains its credibility through bogus epistemic authorities who exploit language and the psychology of their readers; however, this issue only mirrors the current state of American political discourse, in which political parties themselves have different epistemic authorities. Given the context, it seems that these conspiracy narratives are a symptom of a greater post-modern issue of political fragmentation. Faced with this new era, one must work to dismantle the fragmentation that surrounds political communities by venturing into these marginalized communities and attempting to understand them.

Too often are conspiracy narratives debunked and dismissed. There is little search for subtext or a deeper understanding of what the narrative is trying to convey and how it does it. Of course, when confronted with a narrative like Pizzagate in all its grotesque nature, one's natural inclination is to debunk and ignore it; however, if understanding these phenomena can help stop another Edgar Welsh from storming a public venue with guns in hand, then one must not avert their eyes from these grotesque narratives, but rather sit and mediate on them to understand how they operate as fiction. When viewed this way, conspiracy narratives can serve as a roadmap into the psyche and soul of those who create and believe in them, where one can find their desires, fears, and anxieties. Since the study of English is founded on a desire to build empathy and understanding through examining narratives and stories of those who are often dismissed in society, no narrative should be left unexamined; not even conspiracy.

Notes

¹ The phrase plays on the over-used naming convention started with Watergate. For more on “-gate” scandals, see, Maier.

² John Podesta is a political consultant, who served both Hillary and Bill Clinton in their careers. In 2016, he was the chairman of Hillary Clinton’s failed Presidential campaign (Aisch par.1).

³ See, Dainszewski. The term ‘alt-right’ is short for the alternative right wing, whose views skew towards extreme forms of white-supremacy and white-nationalism. It became popular during the 2016 American Presidential election to describe radical online Trump supporters much like those found on 4chan’s /pol/.

⁴ 4plebs is a community ran archival project for numerous 4chan boards including /pol/. Their archival process relies on a fetch program called Asagi to capture content from 4chan in real-time. Through cross-referencing with other archival projects, it becomes clear that 4plebs /pol/ archive is a credible source for posts dating back to 2013 (“Frequently Asked Questions”).

⁵ The word ‘sign’ foreshadows the development of semiotics centuries later.

⁶ During Enlightenment, rationalism affected both antiquity literature and later conspiracy theory. With a new focus on empiricism and scientific discover, mythology was completely dismissed based on the fact that it was fiction. Instead of using a religious justification to dismiss myth, they settled on the religion of the time: reason. Rationalists believe that only through scientific theory and empirical research truth can be found; unexpectedly, it is a misunderstanding of this scientific theory justifies conspiracy narratives.

Scholar Steven Clarke believes that conspiracy theories operates off a similar research program as many scientific endeavors. To Clarke, “a research programme is a research tradition

that is developed around a ‘hard core’ of explicit theoretical commitments” (167). Only conspiracy communities that have an active membership are capable of becoming research programs. In those communities, they have an implicit tradition of values and research. They are theoretically committed to their own version of the truth. “[Conspiracy] proponents advance the case for the hard core by modifying the ‘protective belt’ – which contains initial conditions and auxiliary hypotheses – in light of new evidence” (Clarke 167). Like scientific notions, conspiracies begin with a hypothesis that must adapt to new found evidence. Many theorists consider themselves researchers that “tend to follow the rules of empirical logic” (Yarbrough 3). Despite their validity as research projects, they must still be judged as either ‘progressive’ or ‘degenerative.’ A progressive research project is one that can accurately predict future events, such as, Al Qaeda theory and Watergate. Both of these theories started as conspiracy theories, but the more evidence that came in the more it aligned with the theory. Once a theory is accepted by the community at large it becomes, what Clarke calls, the “received view” (168). Conspiracy theorists usually reject the received view and continue their research projects, which, at this point, are highly degenerative because they do not make predictions that are successful.

⁷To form a more complete definition of traditional conspiracy theory, one must account for the fact that most, if not all, conspiracies actively seek to disrupt a dominant narrative established by the epistemic authorities of mainstream society. In “Conspiracy Theories and the Internet,” Steve Clarke explains that with every event comes a “received view” (168). The received view is the official explanation of an event, which the conspiratorial view openly rejects in favor of their own. As Ryan Neville-Shepard suggested in his essay “Subtextual Form in Modern Conspiracy Rhetoric,” the subtext of conspiracy theory is “fundamentally anti-establishment” and must

oppose the “dominate national myth” (122). Therefore, Mandik’s definition would be more accurate, if it reads: an *alternative* explanation of historical events in terms of conspirators who, among other things, intended the historical events to occur and keep their intentions and actions secret.

⁸ Pizzagate began with one photo in Podesta’s email labeled: Pizza.jpg. The photo had two children in it, eating pizza, with women by their sides. It included a message from a man named John Band that read “it doesn't get any better than this” (Band). A day later, Podesta replied, with a simple, “nice” (Podesta). The members of 4chan attempted to explain the picture by linking its symbols to perverted concepts their community created years ago. On 4chan, the phrase ‘cheese pizza’ is code for child pornography (Aisch par.4). Therefore, to the alt-right, the image of pizza signifies pedophilia.

⁹ Since Pizzagate does not fit the definition of a conspiracy theory, one could argue that the theory then unraveled into, what some call, a super-conspiracy. According to Tim Leadbeater, super-conspiracists believe society’s power networks are infected with and controlled by a group of conspirators (231). For example, the belief that the government is run by lizard people from outer space, would fall into the first category. In it, the America’s political power network has been corrupted by a larger power, which aims to control humanity and effect historical events. In a second case, the illuminati or the ‘Jewish controlled’ media, conspiracy theory would also be apt examples. In these, the theorists believe that a larger group controls a source of political or social power in the country, in order to expand their influence. Again, Leadbeater does not offer a definition of super-conspiracies, but, using the previous definition of conspiracy as a model, super-conspiracies can be defined as an explanation of alternative power structures controlled by

an unknown group of conspirators, who intend to influence historical and political events, while keeping their intentions and actions secret.

Due to the international trafficking aspect of Pizzagate, one could argue that the alt-right were forming a super-conspiracy, but they would be mistaken, because the conspirators in Pizzagate do not aim to influence world-events. Super-conspiracies involve a group of conspirators, who are either in the process of infiltrating the world's power structure or have already infiltrated and created a secret power structure. What makes Pizzagate unique is that it is not offering an alternative power structure. The people involved in the conspiracy are not doing it to further their political power and control, but for their own fulfillment of taboo pleasures and ritualistic commitment (Tapestry par.2). The conspirators seem to operate as merely an idealized version of 'evil' that mirror a mythological understanding of the world rather than a conspiratorial.

¹⁰ This is the first use of the word "Pizzagate" to signal a conspiracy. The phrase first started trending on twitter in 2014, during the #Gamergate controversy (Belam par.7-9). For those who are unfamiliar, Gamergate was one of the first mass movements of the 4chan/reddit communities that would later be referred to as the 'alt-right.' Many claimed that this controversy was about journalism in the video game industry; however, it is layered with hints of misogyny against female/feminist videogame enthusiasts. During this controversy, the alt-right were surprised at their ability to get the hashtag #Gamergate trending on twitter. To show their strength in numbers many in the community started to tweet non-sense to see if they can get enough people to get it trending. The most popular of these phrases: Pizzagate. Pizzagate, here, refers, playfully, to the

debate over pineapple on pizza which many people love or hate. Thus, #pizzagate was born (“Like a Girl”).

¹¹ See Amselem, in which an email includes a flippant quip that references Moloch, the god of child sacrifice. The most the writer can be accused of is making a joke that was in bad taste. It does not automatically mean the writer/receiver of the email is guilty of a crime.

¹² See, “Podesta/Pizza Pac...”.

¹³ *Meaning* here refers to the literal meaning of the language object

¹⁴ Anti-human actions are “ones fraught with taboo, and therefore also fraught with fascination and numinous energy: cannibalism, infanticide, and such sexual acts as incest and bestiality” (Kline 189)

¹⁵ FBI Anon is an anonymous poster on /pol/, who claims to work for the FBI. Through his or her post, FBI anon fans the flames of conspiracy by giving vague hints about events that will occur, such as false flags, indictments, etc. Despite the lack of evidence proving his status as a government worker, many believe his accusations and look for his prophecies to be fulfilled (Collins par. 11).

¹⁶ The word ‘fact’ will be used here to define that which is known or proven to be true by a majority of people within the mainstream society. For example, the received view of most conspiracy theories.

¹⁷ She is most famous for her 1974 piece *Rhythm O*, in which, she placed 72 objects on a table next to her including a gun and knife. She then told the crowd that they would have complete control of her body for the next six hours, which climaxed with the loading of the pistol (Abramovic and Iles 192).

¹⁸ Many posters incorrectly connected ‘spirit cooking’ to Aleister Crowley, famed 20th century occultist. Infowars.com wrote that Spirit Cooking was a sacrament of Crowley’s religion, Thelema (Watson par. 1). However, there is no evidence that connects the two. Artistically, Spirit Cooking was most likely as a reference to the famous 1932 *Futurist Cookbook* by Fillipo Marinetti. The connection between spirit cooking and Thelema was just misinformation meant to villainize Abramovic and Clinton.

¹⁹ One can even purchase a pin from amazon.com with the image on it titled “See, Hillary Clinton Really is a Witch” (“See, Hillary...)

²⁰ See, “Why Does /Pol/ Hate Feminism” and Eordog.

²¹ According to 4chan’s Advertising page, their total userbase is ~70% male and ~30% female throughout the site (“Advertise”). Given the anti-feminist rhetoric and pejorative discussions about women that are frequent on the site, it is likely that the chasm between male and female users on /pol/ is larger.

²² See, “Positive Energy For Hillary Clinton” & “Hitlary [*sic*]Clinton Gets Elected...”

²³ See, Watson and Tapestry.

²⁴ The cyclical nature of this concept leads many ancient societies to depict it as a circle, which, as Jung explains is also a form of the Universal Mother Archetype. The circle acts as a symbol of the womb in which the mysterious cycle of creation begins for all (*The Archetypes...* 33).

²⁵ Since the post beings with the same three links as the previous example, it is safe to assume that the other posts were directly lifted from this post, disseminating the upsetting imagery and accusation to the community as a whole.

²⁶ Of course, the word ‘blood’ is a sensationalized phrase, since the liquid used in the video is not real human blood.

²⁷ For this study, only the first two stages of erotic development are needed. The other two are: the Virgin Mary (where in one sees the contra-sexual as independent from one’s own needs) and Sophia or Wisdom (where in one can form a partnership with the contra-sexual that helps reach individuation) (*The Collected Works* 16).

²⁸ See, “How To Spread Genes When Modern Women Are Trash?,” “Women Should Not Be Allowed To Vote,” “Why Can’t Women Into Logic,” and “Why a [*sic*] Women So Close Minded?”

²⁹ See, Dewey.

³⁰ It is this same progressive will their social technological achievements. Humanity has evolved from their ancient past to achieve technological progress through innovations. However, ‘progress’ is not always one-sidedly good. It is this progress that lead to the machine gun deaths in World war two, carpet bombing, and the capabilities to murder millions with the Atomic Bomb (*The Archetypes...* 163). To counterbalance this unstoppable train of ‘progress,’ the instinctual side of the one’s psyche remains.

³¹ See, endnotes 21 & 22

³² See, Weigel.

³³ Given the psychological fragmentation of the community, it is no wonder that /pol/ choose pizza as a symbol for this conspiracy. /pol/’s obsession with pizza speaks to the community’s fragmented psyche. Pizza begins whole, as all conscious does, but is then fragmented and consumed to quail an appetite. Those who follow the theory unconsciously relate to this image of

fragmentation, due to the state of their own psyche. The word 'Pizzagate' merely signifies a shared psychological condition between its believers.

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