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Matthew T. Witt¹

Abstract

This article opens with an inventory of how popular culture passion plays are homologous to the stampeding disenfranchisement everywhere of working classes and the emasculation of professional codes of ethics under siege by neoliberal initiatives and gambits. The article then examines a recent example of contemporary, “deconstructive” scholarly analysis and inventory of presidential “Orwellian doublespeak.” The preoccupation among contemporary critical scholarship with “discourse analysis” and language gambits is criticized for displacing interrogation of real-event anomalies, as with the porous account given by the 9/11 Commission for what happened that fateful day. The article concludes by explaining how critical scholarship consistently falls short of unmasking Master Signifiers.

Keywords

neoliberalism, poststructuralism, racism, discourse analysis, 9/11, habeas corpus, thermodynamics

[Cardinal] BELLARMIN [to Gallileo]: Science is the legitimate and beloved daughter of the Church. She must have confidence in the Church.

GALLILEO (*infuriated*): I would not try confidence by whistling her too often.

—From Scene Six, *Gallileo*, by Bertolt Brecht

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Ablata causa tolluntur effectus¹ **(When the Cause Is Absent, the Effects Thrive)**

From *The People's Court* and Judge Judy (not to mention Judge Christine, Judge Joe Brown, Judge Lynn Toler, *Extreme Justice*, *Texas Justice*, and so on) to *American Idol*, *Who's Hot/Who's Not*, and *Elimidate*; from Dr. Laura to Jerry Springer to Maury Povich; from Oprah to Dr. Phil: Over the past decade, these and similar programs have brought an unprecedented banality to broadcast television. The programs are popular because they are essentially Hegelian passion plays of the Master-Slave dialectic, where We, the American People, gather ritualistically to be reassured of our place in the social order of symbolic signification. Here is the charade and spectacle where we are judged but never tried, diagnosed but never helped; teary mea culpa you can set your watch to performed before this or that pretentiously benevolent Master and Expert Signifiers (all authority figures, most marquee with first names only); melodrama bookended by commercial breaks punctuating this streaming symbolic order every 12 minutes or so, at higher frequency closer to the end of the hour.

Many would claim the rise of so-called "reality TV" is the conjunctive by-product of so many "transgressions against modernism" (cf. Baudrillard, 2002; Jervis, 1999), whereby broadcast banality has become the central ring and, ipso facto, midwife of an ascending symbolic order; the headline act for instantiating otherwise untethered, floating signifiers bracketing the social construction of reality de jour, a streaming hyperdrama of Baudrillardian simulacra; infinitely regressive copies of nothing real. Media insiders would, in a candid moment, insist that reality TV is actually the by-product of far less exotic, prosaic market algorithm: Requiring no paid actors and minimal production costs, reality TV is a simple formula for recovering media profit margins in an expanded cable broadcast market under increasingly narrowed and centralized media ownership.

The role played by performance art in constructing and contesting the symbolic order is hardly new, or newly discovered. Street theater was around long before rap idiom; vaudeville was a site of cultural contest and symbolic assimilation long before critical theory or poststructuralism. Blackface minstrelsy originated as a venue for lower class Whites to instantiate their place in America's wickedly illusive class hierarchy (Cullen, 1996/2002). As James Scott (1990) diligently chronicles, "domination and the arts of resistance" are as old as the hills.

What *is new* within today's symbolic order is the quickening of consequences from the globalization of economic, political, and cultural forces that are now unleashed and ascendant. This is the portion of "the spectacle" eclipsed by the fictive claims of "reality" television that intensify rather than deconstruct the Master's dominance over popular constructions of *the real*. Thus, reality TV stages a passion play homologous to a New World Order where massive employment dislocation, flight of capital, and cartel leagues among state and corporate actors all stage the stampeding disenfranchisement of working classes and emasculation of professional codes of ethics everywhere (Chossudovsky, 2003; Keen, 2007; Sassen, 1998). Displaced and divested from their

communities and systematically weaned of hope for self-determination, the masses predictably gather to bear witness to caricatured enactment of their plight, where *there but for the grace of a higher power* they would find themselves. Gone begging for more insight is how the ritualized bearing-of-witness to these charades intensifies the impulse to pin upon a disparaged *other* why our collective fate is somehow forestalled or upended. “Look at those idiots! Can you believe how stupid they are? What a mess!”

And so the laboring masses are ritualistically subjected to messages pinning consequences entirely beyond their control to their own missteps, gullibility, or low character (e.g., blaming the poor who lived below sea level in New Orleans) while they are simultaneously being bombarded by evocations of an exotic external threat (terrorism) whose magnitude is inversely proportional to how remote and murky is its animus and location. While this farcical inversion of Old Testament morals drama replays interminably, those who transgress the moral order higher up the chain of signification are permitted to do so with impunity, magically beyond the glare of judicious (aka “professional”) scrutiny. Scandalously reckless mortgage lending and predatory loan sales (targeting mostly poor people of color) triggering a world financial crisis are permitted free plays while public administrators and policy makers (never mind scholars) claim they never saw the consequences coming until after the fact. Curious, then, that Eliot Spitzer, recently defrocked governor of New York, formerly that state’s attorney general, had in 2003 joined 49 other states pressing litigation against scores of major subprime lenders underwriting predatory lending practices. Several state legislatures enacted laws intended to curb these practices. According to Spitzer in an op-ed piece written for the *Washington Post* February 14, 2008, the Bush administration did not merely do nothing in the face of the rising crisis, “it embarked on an aggressive and unprecedented campaign to prevent states from protecting their residents from the very problems to which the federal government was turning a blind eye” (Spitzer, 2008, p. A25). Moreover,

In 2003, during the height of the predatory lending crisis, the OCC [Office of Comptroller of the Currency] invoked a clause from the 1863 National Bank Act to issue formal opinions preempting all state predatory lending laws, thereby rendering them inoperative. The OCC also promulgated new rules that prevented states from enforcing any of their own consumer protection laws against national banks. The federal government’s actions were so egregious and so unprecedented that all 50 state attorneys general, and all 50 state banking superintendents, actively fought the new rules. (Spitzer, 2008, p. A25)

So much for compassionate conservatism; hello, no-holds-barred *neo*conservatism. Little wonder, then, that concurrent to this shock and awe of a nation’s most vulnerable there are now occurring flagrant transgressions against civil liberties and federal law, abetted by American public administrators in league with telecom companies (recently granted retroactive immunity by Congress) with scarcely a rebuttal from American media, much less academia (cf. Manwell, this symposium; Wolf, 2007). Blatant, brazen

lying leading to war, death, and destruction are marked by no shame, much less prosecution. And so consequences are made always to cascade downward from a shadowy overlord, increasing at an accelerating rate. Here *hope* itself is reduced to a game of chance in the form of state-sponsored lotteries, a neat trick for simultaneously divesting the public sphere of moral voice while instantiating the otherwise free-floating signifier that “chance and luck (not diligence, perseverance, credibility, sacrifice, and cooperation) determine fate in life,” notwithstanding the fatuous, bloated piety of well-fed, interminably broadcast bullies like Bill O’Reilly and scores of other hired guns of the Fox News syndicate.

Tethered and unrequited for decades after the New Deal, neoliberalism is now poised to midwife a new symbolic order (cf. Harvey, 2005; Leiva, 2006; Prash, 2005; Thorne & Kouzmin, 2004, 2006) and attendant “natural” disasters (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2007). Long-wave business cycles once amenable to Keynesian tweaking have been morphed into “bubbles” that balloon and burst on much shorter, high-frequency intervals because of the transnational institutionalization of debt risk (Janszen, 2008; Phillips, 2006). In like fashion, the long-wave expansion of civil liberties franchise, unfurling since Enlightenment, claimed at eve of millennium by moralist and conservative, intellectual luminary of “bureaucracy,” James Q. Wilson, to be the “universal quest of humanity” (Wilson, 1993), has been dramatically truncated by gambits now waged by the putative scion of such liberties, the United States itself, to which the preceding papers assembled in this symposium give diligent account.

Cascading and recursively complex ecological crises, from global-warming-induced super hurricanes to incomprehensibly complex shifts in ocean currents promise to unleash as much anxiety as real consequences. Meanwhile, malarial mosquito have moved to higher altitudes (as with the teeming metropolis of Nairobi, previously safe from malarial outbreak), instantiating what poststructuralist, political theorists dub *the Real* with microscopic prick of epidermis while low-lying coastal plains are in peril of disappearing within decades, displacing tens if not hundreds of millions of human inhabitants worldwide. The “public” is now become so inchoate, fragmented, and shape-shifting that no administration thereof is able to keep up. Into this breach between deracinated need and uncoupled agency has rushed doctrinaire “new public management,” signed, sealed, and delivered by a monolingualistic (Candler, 2006) American public administration syndicate, packaged for unbundling on delivery to one after another of shocked and awed economies plundered like clockwork following predictive “insurgent” unrest (cf. Chossudovsky, 2003, 2005; Juhasz, 2006; Klein, 2007).

The quest for a “strong democracy” so forcefully conveyed by academic communarians like Benjamin Barber (1984/1988) a generation ago seems now quaint piety in a world where McWorld squares off against Jihad into the foreseeable future (Barber, 1996); where slipshod, made-to-order doctrine passes as intellectual tour de force, as with the “clash of civilizations” thesis/hyperbole (Huntington, 1998). Academic inquiry is vested the sacrament of tenure to examine cause-and-effect relationships that may impugn or otherwise compromise fortunes and fates of the powerful, or merely “problematize” the otherwise hermetic, self-sealing intellectual fad. What role, if any, does/

should such scholarship play vis-à-vis the global spectacle now emerging? If, as McSwite (1997) contends, public administration and allied *theory* is useful only to the extent it disrupts too comfortable power relationships, then how well have democratic public policy and administration theorists done their/our job? Have we earned our privileged, tenured status? Do we now face a crisis as chimerical as it is predictable (based on historic precedent)? Haven't we been here before?

Talking the Talk

A recent (2007) symposium in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (*PSQ*) features learned exegeses of “Bushspeak” and how this quizzical lexicon whistles up Orwellian double-speak and fascist propaganda tactics. As with so much of other contemporary scholarship offering deconstructive analysis, this one does not disappoint so far as it promises. The central line of reasoning among the symposium’s assembled pieces posits the utility of a kind of ex post facto intellectual forensics, deploying discourse analysis to reveal clear lines of deception ranging from nimble manipulation of nebulous symbols (“liberty,” “freedom,” “progress,” and the like) to deft deployment of the “Bold Lie” and its more exotic counterpart, the “Brazen Lie.” The Bold Lie is the claim that WMD exist in Iraq currently (they do exist in the United States, which once did make them available to Saddam Hussein). The Brazen Lie is the repeated denial of comments already caught on record, as with Dick Cheney’s seeming compulsion to lie about lying even when the lie is clearly evident, or Donald Rumsfeld’s repeated and petulant dismissal that he ever claimed to know the location of Iraqi WMD while videotaped evidence bears indelible witness to the contrary. The *PSQ* symposium editor cues up the central moral challenge posed by and for those disclosing lying in high places:

If the president’s rhetorical misappropriation of human rights was achieved strategically [as contributors to the symposium] have determined, one can only assume that it can and should be corrected rhetorically. . . . It would be contrary to a productive notion of political rhetoric to assume that we have fallen into an era in which dark shadows must be projected in demonizing rituals and that there is no humanizing aesthetic for us to discover or discursive positions to refine. To submit to such an assumption surely would portend the impending death of democracy in America and signal the ascendancy of executive rule. Thus, we are all invested in continuing the conversation featured in this special issue of *Presidential [Studies] Quarterly*. (Ivie, 2007, pp. 578-579)

The syllogism implied seems to be as follows: Democracy suffers from rhetorical duplicity and manipulation; ergo, the antidote to this pathology must require counter-rhetorical strategy. Thus, H. L. Mencken’s legendary “the cures for the evils of democracy is [*sic*] more democracy” is vested a discursive spin. Symbolic communication and the decoding of its uses becomes the necessary, if not sufficient, means for marshalling democratic renewal.

The pieces assembled in the *PSQ* symposium feature learned, cutting analyses of the rhetorical cleavages denoting American imperial gambits occurring lately and, thus, feature powerful methods for ex post facto forensic interrogation of crypto-fascist, rhetorical gambits and invidious claims of fact and truth. The inventory of real-time high crimes and misdemeanors, however, eludes these ex post facto tactics. The rhetorical jujitsu these scholars offer also bears worrisome correspondence to the kind of hubris that once lured medieval scholastics: Like so many nimble and elusive angels dancing on heads of pins, this or that pernicious and invidious “ideograph” or other devious rhetorical ploy by powerful agents offers to the attentive scholar something to measure, something to isolate and give empirical account, something by which to strut intellectual daring—only the scholar must accept certain terms for the publication of her/his brilliance: It must occur after the fact of its relevance.

The Bold/Brazen Lie skillfully inventoried in the *PSQ* symposium is made over as a disembodied presence dominating the continuous present that is divested of any clear historic trajectory or pedigree. Gone begging is any forensic analysis of the pattern of incidents that prestaged this or that rhetorical lie and evasive ideograph in the first place: This or that mysterious sinking of a battleship (e.g., the *Maine*), substantiated foreknowledge of the Pearl Harbor attack, the analogously false flag scheming that made permissible congressional authorization of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, and countless similar *real* events that have enacted—not merely proclaimed—a lie (deHaven-Smith, 2006; Tarpley, 2005).

Discourse analysis incorporates historic examples to substantiate its astute and perceptive claims, but this analysis is disjunctive. We all know Hitler told one Bold Lie after another. But overemphasizing the Big Lies of misty history mostly eclipses how these lies stage what are permissible and impermissible agendas across countless more mundane venues, from PTAs to school boards to special advisory commissions every day, every week of the year across America, this greatest of great democracies, where the plight of countless people of color and poverty goes either displaced or entirely unseen and uncommented upon, tenure privileges notwithstanding. Why? Because the Big Lie claiming that market forces determined housing choices at the mid-20th century was made hermetic, impervious to challenge once Congress passed legislation either permissive of racist mortgage lending or inadequately routing it out (Massey & Denton, 1993; McKenzie, 1994; Roediger, 2005).

Also gone begging is any interrogation of the material evidence of the *Real*: how FBI obsession with Communism made convenient and permissible the harassing of civil rights initiative in and outside of governmental agencies (cf. Freund 2004; Hirsch, 2004; Johnson, 2004). Fast forward: No author of the *PSQ* symposium challenges the many official ellipses of evidence surrounding 9/11; rather, these authors strive only to situate politics ex post facto 9/11 within a pattern of lying, not to interrogate the copious material evidence making plausible (and therefore warranting judicious attention) that the 9/11 event *itself* might have precipitated an epochal lie of massive symbolic relevance (Ahmed, 2005; deHaven-Smith, 2006, 2008; deHaven-Smith & Witt, 2009; Griffin, 2004, 2007; Griffin & Scott, 2007; Jones, 2008; Marrs, 2006).

Poststructuralist political theorist Slavoj Žižek (2000) finds that such preoccupation with language and language games—as which the *PSQ* symposium features—mostly rearticulates the Hysteric’s discourse, demanding of the Master: *Admit that you were lying!!* Closer to home of public administration/affairs scholarship, McSwite (1996) issues the same claim, finding that the exhortation “Be Good!” pushes an “agential perspective” that distorts and displaces discursive opportunities:

The agential perspective ultimately amounts to the same exhortation to “Be Good!” that Schubert [1957] found in the school of public interest thought he dubbed idealist. The implicit presumption that the idealist position must make to justify its central premise that values can guide or control the administrator is: Values can carry meanings that will be clear and unambiguous to all the parties that wish to apply them and in all the possible situations that they will encounter. Testimony that this premise is not convincing can be found not only in philosophy, but in the skepticism that the average citizen manifests when exhorted by those in positions of power to “Trust us, we’re professionals who have your interests at heart [. . .]” and so on. Long and well-documented experience with all types of professions and leaders has disabused even the most naïve of the belief that they can rely on such assurances. (McSwite, 1996, p. 205)

McSwite’s (1996) repudiation of the “agential perspective” does not make clear, however, when academic or public administrative witness to unfair play, much less high crimes, is warranted or demanded. American public administration scholarship made invisible to itself and any onlookers of its canon how an American apartheid was made indelible as a result of mid-20th-century captured and corrupted housing legislation, policy making, and administrative conspiracy to defraud mortgage holders of color; contravention of civil liberties including due process rights for a discernable class of individuals; and other vagaries of institutionalized racism etched into the policy landscape under the banner of *New Deal* (Katznelson, 2006; Witt, 2006). In short, the skepticism towards public servants claiming to have “your interests at heart” that McSwite finds so plausible as a free-floating signifier transecting the continuous present is, in fact, grounded in *actual* historical instances of double dealing to which McSwite gives only passing reference. As Charles Goodsell (1990) gives succinct account: Into the breach between obvious wrongs and overwhelming academic quiescence in this matter there rushed the intellectual gainsaying of a shared and common (public) interest, like which Glendon Schubert issued in 1957 from political science, claiming the “public interest” was a phantom concept leading academic inquiry down one deontological dead end after another (Goodsell, 1990; Schubert, 1957).

No public administration scholar gave any diligent account of racist public administration at the time that doing so might have been relevant or may have curbed the catastrophe of ghettoization that ensued, despite overwhelming evidence and warrant for doing so. The flagship journal of American public administration, *Public Administration Review* (*PAR*), essentially ignored matters of race from its founding in 1940

through the 1960s, three critical decades for the formation of institutionalized racism in the United States (cf. Witt, 2006).

Thus, there seems in this instance a tacit and (that much more) powerful quid pro quo: Policy makers pretend not to act, academics pretend not to see or hear, except at some safe temporal distance with always clean hands. Moral transgressions in high public places are meanwhile neatly circumscribed as “anomalies” (if ever they are examined) that prove the rule. The mysterious ransacking of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development revenues intermittently during the 1990s and subsequent scapegoating and cover-up of malfeasance would seem to be criminal (cf. Ruppert, 2004, pp. 152-174). But these crimes occur against the much larger backdrop—not examined under any academic venue until decades after the fact—of the prevailing fiction at mid-century that the market determines housing choices, an article of unexamined faith shadowed by similarly unsubstantiated faith that the public interest would evolve as the result of pluralistic exchange of myriad preferences; ergo, if and when a “taste for segregation” changes (Downs, 1981; Smith, Downs, & Lachman, 1973), then the market will reflect this prevailing shift in “values.” Never mind how “taste” becomes a “value.” The analogously dubious claim was made regarding industrial pollutants: Their dilution into the environment guaranteed their detoxification. In the quid pro quo between Expert (i.e., scholarly) and Master (political rhetoric) claims of truth and value, black box theorizing along with the discounting of “externalities” as merely “inconsequential” or “too-lumpy-to-quantify” all neatly cordon and sandbag profound and well-founded doubt and looming dread. The “people” don’t merely distrust public servants because the people are not fools; the people distrust public servants because, in actual occurrences, public servants have screwed the people over.

The featuring of a symposium about Hurricane Katrina in *PAR* in a special, December 2007, issue proves the rule that doubt and dread go systematically begging in American public affairs scholarship. As if indicative of a timely soul searching from within American public administration by its flagship journal, the symposium’s more dire indictments of public administration (made with well-founded and articulated claims by its many capable and earnest contributing authors) beg questions that 68 years of scant scholarship can only murmur to in response. Karl Marx’s dictum that history repeats twice—first as tragedy then as farce—seems apropos in this instance; only, in the case of American institutionalized (public-administrationist-sanctioned) racism, the farce seems never ending.

To conjure that farce now elicits more scorn than solemn recognition: To fail to learn tragedy more than once makes conjuring it again virtually impossible in any way other than this or that symbolic castigation or displaced summons, the province of stand-up comedians and playwrights of tragedy, not “scholarship” as it has been socially constructed and ethically emasculated. Even decades after the fact, as Jennifer Alexander (1997) makes clear, “avoiding the issue” of race and racism in America is a pervasive fact among public administration and allied scholarship. Ten years after its publication, Alexander’s piece received its first (and as yet only) citation in public administration journals: the *PAR* special symposium on Katrina (Stivers, 2007).

Candler (2006) offers to American public administrationists a clarion call to linguistic competence backstopping the ironic preoccupation with “discursive competence” that has transfixed the kind of scholarship hosted in the *PSQ* symposium cited above. In a survey netting 77 National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) accredited Masters of Public Administration programs in the United States, Candler finds a startling lack of international linguistic competence: 12% of faculty who are bilingual, 16% of faculty doing significant non-U.S. research, 17% of programs advertising an international concentration or focus, 10% requiring international courses in their programs, 1% requiring second language competence for entering students.

Citations among leading public administration and policy journals with other than American journal references are similarly scant: Among 331 citations from six leading journals sampled from 2001 to 2002, 304 cited only American sources. Of those American journals sampled, 60% of articles feature less than 5% references in languages other than English, whereas less than 20% of French and Brazilian international/comparative articles feature less than 5% references in languages other than their own (and also English). Candler (2006) comments:

So given that multi-lingual Brazilian and French scholars have found work worth referencing outside of both their own, and the dominant language; that Americans rarely cite anything not written in English would appear to be a result of mono-lingualism—the failure to develop linguistic research tools critical for cross cultural research—rather than the lack of relevant work in other languages. (p. 551)

Transfixed by angels dancing on the pins we choose to see in the only language we understand, what inquiry otherwise eludes us? Two implacable, Australian observers of American public administration theory, Thorne and Kouzmin (2007), comment,

It is of never ending fascination, and more often a matter of concern, to witness, as more than an interested observer, public administration debates in the U.S. . . . One experiences fascination for its frequent vigor, concern for its continuing and calculated indifference to comparativist strains and sheer frustration with its persistent ability to *clone* generations of scholars naively unaware of *foreign* and comparativist scholarship in the field. (p. 43)

Thorne and Kouzmin here condescend to holding a blow-dryer to an iceberg hoping to conjure among others the same; the thaw they beckon—that American public affairs scholarship disentrall itself *of* itself—is a long time coming and overdue.

Still, It Moves

Language interpretation is an imperfect science and humbled art in nearly every instance but one, mathematics, at least; so most people would assume prior to September 11, 2001. But as author Lance deHaven-Smith (this symposium) has diligently assembled,

the material evidence delineating the long shadow of 9/11s present and past does not merely warrant, but demands scholarly diligence that has been woefully lacking.

But then, policy scholars similarly failed to monitor warning signs of American, “neoconservative,” imperialistic ambitions for which there exists no lack of gainsaying after the fact of fiasco, death, misery, and destruction in Iraq. Copious materials were available for policy and public administration scholars to sift and interrogate prior to 2001 or 2003, including the “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” published by the Bush administration in September 2002, which asserts for the United States the right to use military force against any country it believes poses a threat to U.S. interests. Five years previously, “Vision for 2020” was published in February 1997 by the U.S. Space Command, claiming in its mission statement: “US Space Command—dominating the space dimension of military operations to protect US interests and investment.” The document further specifies how the increasing range of “haves and have-nots” as a result of economic globalization will further threaten U.S. interests, warranting increasing effort to keep the have-nots in line (Griffin, 2007).

In 1995, President Bill Clinton issued a Presidential Directive specifying protocol for the “extreme rendition” of terror suspects for interrogation by foreign officials. Clinton issued the directive declaring that terrorism was “a potential threat to national security” and that the United States would “pursue vigorously efforts to deter and preempt, apprehend and prosecute” terrorists (Amnesty International, 2006). Abuses pursuant to this directive have subsequently been brought to light, indicating the cavalier indifference taken by the Clinton administration regarding the torture and detaining of suspects never charged with crime. Six years prior to 9/11, there was indelible indication that U.S. violation of the United Nations’ Declaration of Human Rights and Convention Against Torture and also U.S. law was being carried out under presidential decree and auspices; still, nary a peep among public affairs scholarship.

There is, arguably, nothing more prophetic and indicative of the failure of American public administration and policy scholarship to interrogate matters of vital public interest than the failure/refusal to challenge the suspension of habeas corpus pursuant to PATRIOT and allied legislation, including the U.S. Detainee Treatment Act 2005 and the Military Commissions Act of 2006, the latter of which specifies that anyone, including U.S. citizens, may be detained and barred (the hitherto ancient) Writ of Habeas Corpus permitting detainees of any magistrate the right to state their case in person and issue demands to review material evidence before tribunal and petition for legal defense. While legal scholars have taken up debate on PATRIOT, habeas corpus, and related legal issues, profound matters pertinent to this truly historic transgression of democratic first principles have received no substantive intellectual inquiry from public administration and/or policy scholars (Thorne & Kouzmin, this symposium). Where there is, literally, “no body” to be indicted, then *any* inquiry requiring interrogation of controversial material evidence is suspended in ontological limbo indefinitely (cf. Witt, 2008; Witt & deHaven-Smith, 2008).

The eerie correspondence between (a) the evacuation of material evidence at Ground Zero prior to complete forensic investigation and (b) the similar evacuation of detainee

right to present “the body” before independent magistrate, coupled with transgression by the United States of United Nations laws prohibiting violation of sovereign bodies (and states), has garnered no substantive analysis and/or commentary among policy analysis and public administration scholarship investigating the relevance of civil liberties to democratic public administration and policy making. Perhaps noteworthy in this regard, the putative scion of radical left intellectual journalism, *The Nation* magazine, mostly only disparaged the 9/11 Truth Movement, pinning it only derisive, high-handed insinuation of paranoia (cf. Hayes, 2006). The same was carried out around the same time by *The New Yorker* magazine (cf. Lehmann, 2006) upon mounting demands for greater investigation into the events leading to and after the 9/11 incidents, demands called for by, among other parties, families of the Towers’ victims.

Meanwhile, neither *The Nation* nor *The New Yorker*—both otherwise devoted to formulaic left-wing gainsaying of the Bush administration and the Iraq War, and therefore useful straw edifices for right-wing punditry—have made *any* call for investigation into the myriad questions go begging as a result of official equivocation and obfuscation. Like the U.S. National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), these journalistic venues have likewise simply ignored questions that could be subjected to definitive falsification. As Laurie Manwell alludes to in this symposium, as early as October 2006, a *New York Times*/CBS News poll found that 84% of Americans then either believed the Bush administration was “hiding something” (53%), “mostly lying” (28%), or were otherwise skeptical (3%) about the official account of 9/11 (see http://www.angus-reid.com/uppdf/ NYT_October2k6.pdf). What sad and pathetic irony it would portend if “average citizens” brought more imagination to inquiry into matters so grave and troubling to a free people than do the experts they count on to differentiate hearsay from plausible evidence. With such woefully lacking diligence by “experts,” it is no wonder that public doubt and dread are passed off, with typically cavalier indifference by academia and media elite, as “conspiracy paranoia”: a neat dodge for (ourselves) avoiding prickly questions.

Denouement: Of Science, Fictions, and Silence

In their *Public Administration Theory Primer*, authors Frederickson and Smith (2003) specify the three meanings of formal “theory” to include, first, the “rigorous testing of predictive theorems or hypotheses using observable and comparable data,” as in the natural sciences, where theory “can claim considerable accuracy in representing reality because the classification of order in the physical world is advanced, as are the capacities to recognize and measure natural phenomena” (pp. 6-7). Frederickson and Smith claim that theory, for the social sciences (as with also public administration), requires “the ordering of factual material (history, events, cases, stories, measures of opinion, observation), so as to present evidence through definitions, concepts, and metaphors that promote understanding” (p. 7). Finally, and particularly pertinent for public administration, according to Frederickson and Smith, theory “is normative—theories of what ought to be. These theories form the bridges between public administration,

political science, and philosophy” (p. 7). If we take this various schemata of theory to be communicative, then the normative theory of public administration is inextricably linked to the production of theory in the social and physical sciences. Thus, if the “pancake theory” of the World Trade Center Towers’ collapse espoused by FEMA, NIST, and the 9/11 Commission resists falsification (provides the most robust account of the Towers’ collapse, based on known science), then it would follow as a result—at the mundane level—that the specifications of design for all skyscrapers *ought*, in the public interest, to be subjected to major review. No one, anywhere, has responded *scientifically* to this obvious crisis.

At a less mundane level, the physical laws specified above would have to succumb, at some point, to the theoretical claims purported to explain the Towers’ collapse: New laws determining when steel melts and the phases at which such material loses its tensile strength would have at some point to replace existing science-based presumptions. In other words: If the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers on 9/11 represents an anomaly to known materials science, then what, *precisely*, are the parameters of that anomaly? How, indeed, did engineering science get to this point operating under such specious presumptions? If science is really the neutral arbiter in this matter, then why not subject the hitherto undisputed natural laws pertaining to heat and steel indicated above to rigorous testing? If NIST, FEMA, and the 9/11 Commission refuse to reveal the load parameters used to model the World Trade Center Towers collapsing according to the “pancake theory,” then why should Steven Jones and others calling for falsifiable scientific inquiry (cf. Reynolds, 2007; Ryan, 2007) be subjected to considerable pressures for them to keep their scientific curiosity to themselves?²

Frederickson and Smith (2003) do not account for a critical feature of all scientific inquiry: For facts to acquire their prestigious status, they must be subjected to judicious peer review. Once “science” is stripped of its mystique, it signifies only one thing: *consensus, among otherwise dissenting parties, based on shared methods of inquiry (i.e., agreed upon procedures for falsifying empirical claims) and valid communication*. Science, like democracy, requires for its legitimacy the ongoing, *robust* exchange of truth claims founded on the transparency of all empirical claims of fact and relevance. Perhaps public administration theory needs to provide better account of the correlation between (a) refusals by powerful agencies to submit their claims to judicious review and (b) the magnitude of “blowback” that could be expected should those agencies’ presumptions and claims of fact not hold up to the light of *judicious peer review*.

Professor Steven Jones found himself forced out of tenured position for merely reminding the world that physical laws, about which *there is no dissent whatsoever*, contradict the official theory of the World Trade Center Towers’ collapse. Jones could have followed another tack, as would appear to be one taken by Van Romero, now vice president for research at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (NMIMT). Upon first reviewing videotape of the 9/11 attack on the towers, Romero told reporter Olivier Uyttebrouck of the *Albuquerque Journal* on September 11, 2001, “My opinion is, based on the videotapes, that after the airplanes hit the World Trade Center there

were some explosive devices inside the buildings that caused the towers to collapse” (Uyttebrouck, 2001).

Considered a leading expert in explosives and demolition, Romero was previously director of the Energetic Materials Research and Testing Center at NMIMT, which studies explosive materials and the effects of explosions on buildings, aircraft, and other structures. Ten days after his first comments to the press, Romero changed his professional opinion: “Certainly the fire is what caused the building to fail” (Fleck, 2001). For this conclusion, Romero produced no substantiation or any material evidence. Public administration theory has a very well-tread path regarding plausible (if even only apparent) conflicts of interest and their caustic effect on public service agency. For that matter, the fact that Romero netted \$15 million in federal money for antiterrorism research perhaps *ought* to garner some attention, scholarly or otherwise. Public administration scholarship might also examine the claim made by Morgan Reynolds, formerly chief economist at the U.S. Department of Labor under President George H. W. Bush and director of the Criminal Justice Center at the National Center for Policy Analysis in Dallas: “Anyone who penetrates the fog of state deception to the truth, the reality behind the false appearances, effectively desanctifies [*sic*] the state in the eyes of the previously deceived public” (Reynolds, 2007, p. 114).

Meanwhile, other than a peep from the American Association of University Professors in support of Steven Jones, there has been mostly an awesome silence from among those of us who otherwise claim the mantle of intellectual relevance to public affairs. And still, there are those among us public administration, political science, and policy scholars who self-righteously denounce those others among us for not being sufficiently rigorous or empirical in our research and intellectual contribution, which elicits an altogether misplaced (and sometimes equally imperious) denunciation of the parties of the first part for being mired in “traditionalism” and the like.

There is no gainsaying the relevance of the 9/11 incident to public affairs into the foreseeable future. Claims made and interminably repeated by public officials (dutifully never challenged by the media or by most scholarship) that the 9/11 catastrophe constituted an “act of war” have indelibly shaped the public administration response to that event. Had that incident been instead framed as a *criminal* (not espionage) act, the consequences for the United States and world would have been different on an epic scale. And while we see public administration programs winnowed and narrowed across the country; membership in American Society of Public Administration (ASPA) at record low and dropping; the pertinence of public administration called constantly into question by gainsaying political scientists on one side, snide business management academics on the other, we public affairs scholars take solace that maybe once a year at conferences we will join kindred spirits examining really important matters of vital public interest. What is there that we intend to share amongst ourselves against the backdrop of a post-9/11 world that is so precious and pertinent? What is it, *precisely*, that is of such grave relevance to democratic public administration and policy making that we public affairs scholars intend to *measure* and give account with our so very refined methodologies?

According to biographer Albert Bigelow Paine (1912), when asked why he resisted publishing his “War Prayer”—testament to the folly and moral turpitude of the Spanish American War—Mark Twain limned, “Only dead men can tell the truth in this world.” Literary artists rummage in the province of myth and poetry, drawing inspiration from their quarry of noumenal realms. Scholars traverse “the real” by quarrying the phenomenal world: the realm of substance knowable by empirical causation discernable through our senses, abiding the dicta of scientific inquiry. Pondering a world that once trembled before the truly historic, cavalier recklessness of neoliberalism-gone-wild, historians will most likely deride the relevance of everything today’s scholars have done and said if, by our quiescence, we so demure that $2 + 2 = 4$. What influence we will have had upon such future scholars—as with the kind of relevance we today attribute to the enumeration of angels dancing on pinheads—is matter we might, ourselves, now consider limning. The alternative, of course, is to imagine ourselves signatories of a *fait accompli*; those who ratify fatuous and bloated intellectual pieties like “the end of history,” “the world is flat,” and “the clash of civilizations,” or formulate clever deduction for why this or that Hitler got away with what he did. The choice, for a bit longer, still, will be ours to make; thereafter, we will by default sanctify consequences etched, like so many carbon footprints, deeply and profoundly into both noumenal and phenomenal realms, free-floating but toxic signifiers of choices not made.

The depleted intellectual and social capital accruing to all of this iteratively depends upon and fosters a “hazing” ritual not unlike that practiced so faithfully by secretive societies everywhere: instantiating everything otherwise deemed such anathema to intellectual inquiry. Young, promising scholars learn quickly what can and cannot be authored and submitted for publication. The inscrutability of most of what passes for so called “blind peer review”—terse, often scornful and even caustic, not to mention grossly unprofessional and/or simply idiotic appraisal—is routinely passed on as if judicious scholarly oversight, but which more often than not shills for editorial imperiousness and gate-keeping against otherwise streaming inconvenient truths. Sterilized intellectual inquiry and emasculated moral ingenuity thus sprawl across countless pages of academic screech, where drab and hollow incantations parrot (far more than parse) torrents of fatuous and/or circular claims of truth and relevance; whether these be mired in “positivist” or “postmodernist” conceits, it is of no consequence. When questioned why Joseph Goebbels purged Germany’s academic institutions of scientists defying the Nazi Party line, Hitler reputedly retorted that society could do without a hundred years of science. Scholars who demure that $2 + 2 = 4$ (i.e., the awesome intellectual silence making permissible the blithe dismissal of more than one law of thermodynamics in the World Trade Center Towers’ collapse) in fact serve a vital purpose: obscuring from *judicious, democratic public review* the arbitrary wishes of shadowy mandate and power. We may never know who or what, really, was responsible for 9/11, the Reichstag Fire, and like littered legacy of deception. But we will surely know who is responsible for not even trying to find out, for not safeguarding the secret doctrine that $2 + 2 = 4$.

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Notes

1. This passage is drawn from *Jacques Lacan's Seminars: Book XI*, appearing in Žižek (2008, p. 1). The author wishes to add that a little bit of Latin goes a long way.
2. Reynolds went public with his suspicions that 9/11 was a false flag operation in June 2005, garnering publicity in the *Washington Times*, *UPI*, and *The Drudge Report*. Doing so elicited a swift and terse response from Texas A&M University:

The following is a statement from Texas A&M University regarding recent news reports about the collapse of the World Trade Center on 9/11

Dr. Morgan Reynolds is retired from Texas A&M University, but holds the title of Professor Emeritus—an honorary title bestowed upon select tenured faculty, who have retired with ten or more years of service. . . . Any statements made by Dr. Reynolds are in his capacity as a private citizen and do not represent the views of Texas A&M University. Below is a statement released yesterday by Dr. Robert M. Gates, President of Texas A&M University:

“The American people know what they saw with their own eyes on September 11, 2001. To suggest any kind of government conspiracy in the events of that day goes beyond the pale.” (Cited in Reynolds, 2007, p. 102)

This statement has since been removed from the Texas A&M Web page. It can be found at 911blimp.net/cached/DrGates-stmtTAMU.htm. Robert M. Gates is longtime Bush family ally, director of the Central Intelligence Agency under George H. W. Bush, made U.S. Secretary of Defense under George W. Bush following Donald Rumsfeld, and retained in that position by Barack Obama.

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