

Alterscience and Incompetency as Political Resources The Case of Conspiracy Theories

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Key word:

Alterscience – Incompetency – Political Resources – Internet – Outsiders – Fringe Scientists
("Cranks") – Rival-Associates

Abstract:

Lyndon LaRouche as an "economist" (the "greatest of the 20th century" according to his supporters), Alain Soral as a "sociologist", Edward Epstein as a "medical examiner", Jim Inhofe as a "climate specialist" or Richard Gage as a "civil engineering expert" and many more, this communication aims to demonstrate how incompetency and alterscience (claims made by peoples without scientific background and knowledge – or very few –, "cranks" or fringe scientists that pretend to be "genuine" science but that use nonscientific evidentiary processes) are turned into political resources by some leading conspiracy theorists. Without any legitimate competencies, diplomas or recognition in the field they claimed to be experts, they manage to challenge established and academic knowledge and organize new standards of legitimization particularly through the Internet. "Official" truth, knowledge, social or hard sciences and institutions are presented as forgeries, covers-up or dissimulations operated by the hidden hand of so-called conspirators: Jews, Illuminati, Freemasons, governments, U. N., elites, etc. Consequently, if science is wrong and manipulated nothing can be trust but the hypothesis of a large scale conspiracy led by evil elites, evil scientists and/or evil others in which science is a tool for their unlawful domination. Not only is it necessary not to trust scientific paradigms but it is also required to create new ones based on direct observations, good or common sense and minimal education. Facts, direct observations and counter-examples must be trusted when experimentations, modellings and theoretical evidentiary processes are necessary biased. A perfect recent conspiracy-based example has just been given by President Trump's tweet making confusion between a cold and snowy weather and global warming: "*In the East, it could be the COLDEST New Year's Eve on record. Perhaps we could use a little bit of that good old Global Warming*" he wrote (12/29/2017).

Starting from there, I will show thought many examples from different fields (civil engineering, economics, social sciences, climatology or vaccines) how some social actors (*Outsiders*) with a certain charisma develop strategies to contest established knowledge in both an anti-intellectual and a populist perspectives. To enlighten this phenomenon I will use the analogy/structural homology between "detectives" (Boltanski 2012) or "citizens sleuths" (Olmsted 2009, 2011) who lead investigations without any official mandates and policemen as the incarnation the legal-rational domination of the State. They are all engaged in a competition where detectives always win thanks to their special capacities, skills and "tricks". The rejection of science and established knowledge by *folk lore* let those actors to acquire a higher legitimacy not only in the conspiracy theories field but also, for instance, in politics where challenging deep-rooted structures and divides constitutes a huge resource for originally outsiders whatever they are professional conspiracy theorist or not. Finally, I will stress that this competition to challenge established knowledge and science turns conspiracy theorists into "rival-associates"; each one trying to improve his/her own position by ridiculing or mocking other theories not through science but through his own alterscience which is supposed to be the one and only "true truth".