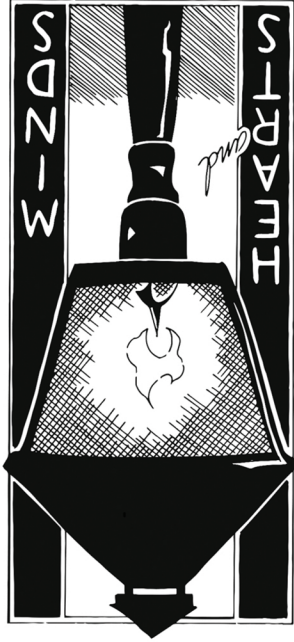


compromised pressure-valve events called “elections,” while their media roadies belly us into believing we live in a democracy.

Behind the scenes, though, this permanent unelected power establishment lurks, one that spies on us, maintains the largest population of prisoners in the history of the world, ensures that 28 million people go without healthcare, wages eternal war, escalates the militarization of murderous domestic police forces, widens the already yawning divide between the uber-rich and everyone else, and continues to profit off of fossil fuels as it tricks out its luxury bunkers in preparation for the impending devastation that will come with climate change.



This vision is hard to take. Some people, understandably overwhelmed, prefer to zone out and nod along to the pundits blaming Trump. Rather than acknowledge that this crisis is complex and long in the making, they point fingers at the obvious buffoon.

Conspiracy theorists take things in the opposite direction. They obsessively research and seek connections, looking to predict our elusive overlords’ next moves. At the most outlandish end of the spectrum, Bohemian Grovers are secret lizard people who stalk through the forest hunting sex slaves. As nutty as such stories may sound, they at least hold some metaphorical truth. These men do not have our best interests in mind. The depths of their callousness and narcissism put them well into the realm of psychopathy. As the world collapses around them, they single-mindedly seek to feed their voracious egos and already overstuffed coffers. How best to explain? This is a death cult you see meeting between the trees, and yes, their rabid inhumanity means they’re not quite human.

They want you to shut the fuck up.

John of Nepomuk is not just shushing members of this cabal, though. He’s also shushing you. As more and more people wake up, the media scramble to silence subversive narratives and push forward a sort of respectability politics of information. Their psy-ops are escalating: they don’t just withhold key facts and fabricate fearmongering plotlines, they smear those who counter their lies. Increasingly these elites look like the conspiracy theorists they denigrate, inventing nonexistent associations, as seen in a term like “Russian Wikileaks”—a phrase that unites two entities despite a glaring lack of proof that they’re connected. Meanwhile, they demonize whistleblowers, leakers, independent journalists, and others who contradict corporate media lies, as they slyly advocate for censorship by inventing alarmist terms such as “weaponized information” and “fake news.”



So keep talking, and even if it sounds like gossip, just remember they’ve driven us to it with their relentless deceit. Gossip is traditionally seen as a woman’s vice in part because it can serve as a corrective, one that threatens an exclusionary patriarchy seeking to keep feminine energy at bay. Even if Bohemian Grove is not a sex-slave hunting ground, it’s a place where plutocrats form and strengthen bonds that keep us hoi polloi out. The way we doom these men to irrelevance is to make sure we’re vicious and to make sure we’re heard.

Bohemian Grove, now in its 139<sup>th</sup> year, looks to John of Nepomuk as its patron saint. Icons of the saint, who was martyred for refusing to divulge the Queen of Bohemia’s confessions, sometimes depict him with his finger on his lips. This is the perfect image for a clandestine meeting between politicians, CEOs, military contractors, corporate lobbyists, members of the intelligence community, and media barons—in other words, the men who run things.

We live in an oligarchy where the people in these positions of authority meet in secret to make the deals that affect our lives. Their actions are not just lacking in transparency, they’re scornfully obscurantist. Meanwhile they run their celebrity surrogates in traumatically manipulative personality battles known as “campaigns” and hold deeply

What is a conspiracy theory?

It’s a fear-based narrative of sinister collusion between powerful individuals and/or entities normally portrayed by mainstream discourses as discrete. “Conspiracy theorist” is often used as a pejorative: either you’re overconnecting the dots—a symptom of paranoid delusion—or you’re a deftane purveyor of “fake news.”

An example: Every July a group of elite men furtively meet in a northern California redwood grove where they engage in two weeks of summer-camp-style recreation. A conspiracy theory might take this impenetrable events more bizarre details (Druidic ceremonies beneath a mammoth owl statue) and salacious hearsay (homosexual frolicking), and organically build on them. This is storytelling. Storytelling is human. Perhaps much more human than the men who convene each summer in Bohemian Grove.

