

Daniel Gerould

Witkacy and Conspiracy Theories

Introduction

In Witkacy's plays and novels, as well as in his philosophical writings and his paintings, drawings, and photographs, the lonely protagonist – a vulnerable and embattled individual – is confronted by encroaching worlds of otherness, concentric circles of constraint and encroachment, in the form of the cosmos, political and social order, family, and self (where malevolent doubles lurk).

At the heart of Witkacy's work, at the very centre of those concentric circles, lies the quest for identity on the part of a creative personality in the face of entropic and mendacious social orders that thwart the individual's attempts at self-definition and authenticity.

The individual's troubled relation to society is the centre-piece of Witkacy's analysis of the predicament of modern man. At one end of the scale is the individual's position within the cosmos, at the other the individual's relation to the hostile and alien forces that lie within. Humankind's existential status at these extremes occupies much of Witkacy's attention – here are the sources of our feelings of the metaphysical strangeness of existence.

But at the centre are found the individual's connections to society – in the form of social institutions such as the family, the tribe or community, and the state. And it is this aspect of Witkacy's work that has attracted the most attention during the years that Poland was part of the Soviet bloc. From 1956 to 1989 it seemed that his plays and novels were above all anti-communist. But the anti-utopian, anti-ideological fears expressed by Witkacy's protagonists are directed toward all manifestations of mass regimes, whether liberal democratic, collectivist communist, or fascist corporate.

What in fact renders Witkacy's portrayal of the familiar romantic opposition between the individual and society innovative and contemporary in sensibility is the pervasive ambiguity with which society in his plays and novels is perceived. Society as experienced by the Witkacian protagonist is no longer a fixed knowable entity. Above all in its institutional manifestations as the state, society as portrayed by Witkacy is a many-layered fraudulent hoax constantly undergoing duplicitous and unfathomable metamorphoses. Oppression by and resistance to the state is no clear-cut ideological battle, but an enigma and a "rather nasty nightmare."

Witkacy is a pioneer in the theatrical and fictional use of what has become known in the late twentieth century as conspiracy theory and dietrology, "the science of what lies hidden behind the event." Humankind can no longer be sure who is actually running the show. Here is the foundational premise of the conspiratorial view of the world, which profoundly colours Witkacy's dramatic and fictional universe.

In a social order in which there is an inherent discrepancy between appearance and what lies beneath, disbelief in objective truth is bound to prevail. Where does the real power reside? In their search for identity in themselves and in their worlds, the heroes of Witkacy's plays and novels confront masked power structures and develop paranoid fears of secret societies, buried plots, and disguised tyrannies.

In such a duplicitous world, the individual lives in constant dread of hidden power structures whose real identity and operation are unknowable, given the manipulation of appearances by sinister and mysterious conspiracies. Anxiety, mistrust, and suspicion about government give rise to ingenious theories.

Before looking more closely at Witkacy's dramatizations of conspiratorial thinking, I wish to consider briefly the nature and history of CONSPIRACY THEORY.

Conspiracy Theory

CONSPIRACY THEORIES utilized to explain historical events have existed since ancient times, and they have flourished at times of crisis, social change and upheaval, during wars and revolutions, invasions, and foreign occupations when nations, social groups, and individuals have felt threatened and overwhelmed by inexplicable disasters and perils. No longer certain of providential guidance, suspicious of the state, and mistrustful of official interpretations of history given by the authorities, entire nations or groups within nations have found in hidden plots logical and satisfying explanations for the distressing and incomprehensible collective experiences confronting them. Individuals too may engage in private conspiratorial thinking to explain why they are singled out and persecuted. Conspiratorial thinking detects labyrinthine plots and finds individuals or, more often, groups that can be held responsible for menacing social changes.

The Romans suspected the early cave-dwelling Christians of hatching plots to overthrow the established order. Once installed themselves as the ruling power, the Christians accused Jews of kidnapping and killing their children as part of a religious ritual – the so-called blood libel. In the fourteenth century lepers were accused of seeking to seize power by poisoning the water supply; later this suspicion was extended to Jews and to sorcerers.

Political extremists, members of the lowest social classes, and racial minorities and pariahs, have traditionally been singled out as members of cults or secret societies seeking to seize power by covert means. But also powerful individuals – princes, monarchs, and dictators – and elites, sheltered branches of government, and the state itself have also been viewed as conspirators by those out of power who feel oppressed and wish to challenge the insidious ruling clique.

At the present time it is often as a form of collective thinking on the part of fringe groups of the right or left that conspiracy theory gains notoriety and comes to occupy a visible position both in popular culture and in journalistic analysis of radical political movements.

Conspiratorial thinking reduces all complex historical events to the consequence of hidden plotting. It pits different groups, races, and classes against one another. Through conspiratorial lenses, the masses of people are seen as easily misled by sequestered elites or subterranean gangs who manipulate appearances in order to seize and secretly wield political power.

Conspiracy came to the forefront of political philosophy in the Renaissance, when its master theoretician, Machiavelli, anatomizes the subject in

The Prince and *Discourses*, without making clear if he is providing the prince with strategies to use against the people, or if he is rather forewarning the people against the prince's devious maneuvers. In his analysis of conspiracy, Machiavelli remains ambiguously conspiratorial.

In volume II of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* the Austrian philosopher Karl Popper dismisses conspiracy theories as ineffectual. While admitting that conspiracies may in fact exist, he argues that they usually fail because they are based on the false assumption that all actions are the results of deliberate plans that produce predictable results, whereas in Popper's view nothing works out as planned and the consequences of actions are not predictable. Conspiracy theory is therefore a simplistic view of historical causation. However, this reductionism is precisely the reason why it has such a tenacious hold on the popular imagination. No matter how false conspiracy theory may be, it has proved influential on the masses and useful to dictators and demagogues.

Conspiratorial theories may be perpetuated by the regime or power-wielding ruling establishment to defend the status quo, or they may be originated by out-of-power minorities to challenge the legitimacy of the de facto order. The most devious and tenacious have been those accusations of conspiracy invented by secret plotters and attributed to "suspect" others, such as Jews, communists, capitalists, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Catholics, and masons.

Conspiratorial thinking becomes a stimulus for the imagination of the masses, for whom it offers the gratifications of myth. Lying outside officially sanctioned sources of information, conspiracy theory is an alternative way of understanding and interpreting history that makes the world more vivid and interesting.

It has been suggested that conspiratorial thinking is central to post-modern sensibility, and that we can expect a proliferation of paranoid conspiracy narratives in an age marked by the disappearance of grand explanations. Conspiracy theory thrives not only under tyrannies, but also under liberal democracies. The decline of traditional societies and their age-old institutions giving a sense of consensus creates a breeding ground for cognitive relativism, distrust of official channels of communication and of any unified belief system, and fragmentation into subcultures, producing conspiratorial thinking as rabid as under totalitarian regimes and now granted the freedom to expand unhindered by censorship.

Modern conspiratorial thinking begins after 1789. A seemingly spontaneous popular movement such as the French revolution is revealed, on the contrary, to be actually the covert seizure of power by a secret society or

organization. Nothing can be what it seems to be or happen by accident; everything is the result of a hidden plan whereby the most disparate events are interconnected in a covert fashion.

By the end of the nineteenth century, with the rise of international Zionism, Jewish conspiracies for world-wide domination were seen everywhere. Jews made responsible for the Dreyfus affair, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the economic crash of 1929.

But at the turn of the century a menacing invasion of races from the East moved into the sight-lines of European conspiracy theory and rivaled the Jews as a sinister threat to Western civilization. Believers in the yellow peril, as it was called, which was given imaginative immediacy in many works of fantastic fiction, religious polemics, and political caricature, found convincing historical evidence in Japan's rise as a world power, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, the overwhelming defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, and then in the violent anti-colonial Boxer Rebellion of 1908.

In his poem *Pan-Mongolism* (1884) the Russian poet and religious thinker Vladimir Solovev forewarned of a new Mongol horde gathering strength in the East, ready to sweep over Russia and bring an end to Western civilization. In *Stories of the Anti-Christ* of 1900, he predicted Japan's uniting the peoples of Asia who would then conquer the world and usher in the reign of the Antichrist.

Under the influence of Solovev, the modernist Andre Bely wrote two apocalyptic novels, *The Silver Dove* and *Petersburg*, in which sinister conspiracies emanating from the East spread nightmare and terror: "The yellow hordes of Asians [...] will encrimson the fields of Europe in oceans of blood."¹ Alexander Blok's poem *The Scythians* continued to develop the idea of an Armageddon between Asia and Europe.

In the West, the British novelist M. P. Shiel – a pioneer in science fiction – had already written his *Yellow Danger* in 1898. But it was G. G. Rupert who first used the phrase "yellow peril" (purportedly coined by Kaiser Wilhelm II) as the title for his *The Yellow Peril, or Orient versus Occident*. The symbolist playwright Maurice Maeterlinck voiced his fear that Oriental countries would end up dominating the world because their political philosophy included psychic partnership among the dead, the living, and those on the brink of the grave.

¹ A. Bely: *Petersburg*, trans. R. A. Maguire and J. E. Malmstad, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1978, p. 65.

The yellow peril, as well as having a highbrow literary vogue, became a popular motif in the pulp novels, science fiction, and horror genres of the early twentieth century. Fear of Asiatic culture engulfing the world was shared by many writers including H.P. Lovecraft and Jack London, whose *Unparalleled Invasion* tells of a take-over of the West by the Orient. In Philip Francis Nowlan's novella *Amageddon 2419 A.D.*, America is occupied by cruel invaders from China.

Russia, the Soviet Union, and its satellites were prime breeding ground for conspiracy theory. Conspiratorial thinking has for centuries flourished in Russia and Russian dominated countries. Closed, secretive tyrannies rely on conspiracy as a means of governance, masking their own machinations while accusing others of being anti-state conspirators. At the same time, such regimes create feelings of fear and mistrust of all social institutions in their citizens, thereby fostering conspiratorial thinking. Distrusting their own rulers, those living under Fascism, Communism, and right-wing authoritarian regimes, are suspicious of all official explanations. Because egregious manipulation of public information in totalitarian societies destroys belief in the regime's honesty, whispered suspicion of social institutions and need for conspiracy theories become ubiquitous.

Paranoia and perception of pandemic cheating prevail. Poland, having recently recovered its national identity, feared conspiracies could undermine it.

Witkacy's Dramatization of Conspiracy Theory

Witkacy's first play, *Maciej Korbowa and Bellatrix*, written in November 1918 a few months after the ex-tsarist officer's return from Russia, takes as its subject the activities of a secret society dedicated to resisting the growing mechanization of life taking place in the larger surrounding society, which is heading toward revolution, mirroring the February and October uprisings that bring first the Provisional Government and then the Bolsheviks to power.

But in Witkacy's drama nothing proves to be what it at first seems. The leader of the secret society, Maciej Korbowa (known to his disciples as the Master), is revealed at the last moment to be Comrade Mangle, a double agent working conspiratorially with the Revolutionary Sailors of Death, seemingly his ideologically enemies, but actually his allies in the seizure of power from the defeated Centralists. As the play ends, at Comrade Mangle's

bidding the Revolutionary Sailors of Death slaughter all of Korbowa's former disciples. The clandestine betrayal has achieved its goal.

Witkacy's second play, *The Pragmatists*, is an intimate chamber work, where the five characters seem to be players in a private game. The theatrical impresario (and former drug czar) Franz von Telek appears to wield the ultimate power and literally to run the show in which his friends Plasfodor and Mammalia are to appear as cabaret artists. But in *The Pragmatists*, as in all Witkacy's dramas even the least political, "society is masked," and nothing is what it seems. The social institutions that von Telek represents are bizarrely concocted frauds. By the end of the play, the Chinese Mummy is revealed to be the strongest of all, able to control both the living and the dead. Here Witkacy offers a passing glimpse at the "yellow peril" conspiracy theory that he will develop fully ten years later in his novel *Insatiability*.

In *The New Deliverance*, Richard III is a borrowed character from Shakespeare's history play, now held captive by two Murderers in a gothic chamber that occupies half the stage. One of Witkacy's Shakespearean favorites, Richard III is alluded to as a feudal lord in several of his works of drama and fiction. Above all, Witkacy remembers Richard as a master practitioner of conspiracy, who, claiming he could "set the murderous Machiavel to school,"² seizes power by means of theatrical plots and counter-plots, while at the same time accusing his opponents of conspiring against him, for which they are ruthlessly exterminated. Despite his unbroken record of perjuries and betrayals, in *The New Deliverance* the aristocratic Richard, however, cannot tolerate the present-day breed of conspirators who are bringing about a new tyranny of mass society over the individual; the disgusted monarch stalks offstage as the dictatorship of the proletariat is inaugurated.

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At the very end of *The New Deliverance*, the UNKNOWN SOMEONE enters with SIX THUGS, dressed as workers and carrying tools doubling as instruments of torture. While the curtain falls, the UNKNOWN SOMEONE, masked as had been the MURDERERS, starts torturing FLORESTAN with pincers and a blow-torch, as though it were a Grand-Guignol horror play. The guilt-ridden bourgeois weakling FLORESTAN screams in pain, while the brutal new totalitarian era has come to power by assuming the trappings of a working class movement.

² W. Shakespeare: *Henry VI*, Part 3, III.ii.193.

Continuing to dramatize governance as a masquerade, Witkacy makes conspiracy the principal theme of his next work. The title of his seventh play, completed in 1920, is ONI, or THEY, the third person plural pronoun written all in emphatic capital letters. Whispered with unease or uttered questioningly in dismay, the word THEY refers to a crazy band of imposters, a secret government within the government that has hijacked the state, taken over its police functions, and turned political repression into a flamboyant theatrical event, whose aim is to destroy art and suppress individuality. Ubiquitous and protean, THEY are the real power-holders, lurking behind those who only seem to be in control.

Reality has become entirely problematic. A group of madmen are revealed to be running the entire show, which takes the form of a farce *dell'arte* and is a theatrical ruse put on to discredit the theatre. The idea of government as a masquerade (an image that Witkacy could have found in Schopenhauer's *World as Will and as Idea*) gives *THEY* its brightly coloured hyperactivity as well as its unsettling tone of ambiguity and menace.³

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A bizarre gang of fanatics, adventurers, and playboys, led by Seraskier Banga Tefuan, Chairman of the League of Absolute Automation, *THEY* are a ludicrous yet sinister conspiratorial organization that plans to take over the government during a staged performance. In order to enforce conformity and order, *THEY* will reduce the social institution of theatre to absurdity.

On the other hand, their program for the total annihilation of art leads them to destroy the precious collection of modern masterpieces in the hero's private gallery, including his Picassos. Art, as the expression of human creativity that affirms the uniqueness of each individual, can no longer be tolerated in the automated regime of the future.

The hero renounces his previous artistic goals and confesses to a crime that he has not committed in order to go to the dungeons of the secret government, whose spies and agents are ubiquitous. Unable to escape from plurality into unity, he is divided against himself. A secret government of irrational forces and subconscious desires rules his own psyche.

Gyubal Wahazar, written in 1921, is Witkacy's most complex study of the modern totalitarian state and its inherently conspiratorial nature. In Act III

³ In Wole Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi* "the government is itself a conspiratorial secret society, a cartel created for mass exploitation and terrorization, implemented always by 'unknown soldiers.'" D. Wright: *Wole Soyinka Revisited*, New York 1993, p. 110.

of *Gyubal Wahazar*, while his victims languish in jail, WAHAZAR himself is shoved “by someone from above”⁴ through the huge, iron prison door and then rolls down the stairs to the prison floor. Across the different levels of conspiracy, where each layer of being grinds down the one beneath, there is an ascending hierarchy of oppression, rising from the personal through the social to the cosmic. Above even the topmost kicker, ready to kick him in turn, the presence of someone still higher can always be felt – whether it be the mysterious THEY who rule the world by secret conspiracy, or the still more enigmatic HE, the superkicker of the universe. The ending of the play, in which Gyubal’s glands are cut out and transplanted into Father Unguenty mixes Grand Guignol medical experimentation and fantastic Sci Fi in a grotesque apotheosis parodying the eating of the king in Frazer’s *Golden Bough*.

The anonymity of conspiracy found in governance by masquerade finds full expression in *The Anonymous Work*, which, in the form of a spy thriller, contains double revolution, the second within the first, causing the faceless masses to rise up and seize power from the leaders of a secret society – a strange political sect – who have deceptively manipulated them.

In *Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes* the alienated conspiratorial group lurking in the background is a seething Jewish mob which ultimately seizes power by devouring the reigning queen and providing a male to breed the future race. Fear of the procreative power of Jewish sexuality, which is regarded as more potent and fertile, has relegated this mass to a marginal status. This is a conspiracy of the id. The anonymous 40 Mandelbaums are a lumpen-proletarian embodiment of libido, with an ironic nod to Freud. They are vertical barbarians from the lower depths of the psyche, fighting to gain access to the privileged regions from which they have been excluded.

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As a young man Witkacy experienced this paranoia in his family’s reactions to his close association with Jews as friends and lovers. In 1903 the elder Witkiewicz wrote to his sister: “Stasiek is surrounded by Jews. He’s immersed in Zionism, he’s almost growing a side-curl.”⁵ In 1912 when Witkacy became engaged to a sixteen year-old Jewish girl, Anna Oderfeld, his father

⁴ S. I. Witkiewicz: *Gyubal Wahazar*, [in:] idem: *Tropical Madness: Four Plays*, trans. by D. and E. Gerould, New York 1972, p. 149.

⁵ S. Witkiewicz: *Listy do syna*, eds. B. Danek-Wojnowska i A. Micińska, Warszawa 1969, p. 695. Also quoted and translated in D. Gerould: *Witkacy: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz as an Imaginative Writer*, University of Washington Press, Seattle and London 1981, p. 204.

voiced his serious reservations. Witkacy gave ironic expression in his charcoal drawing, "Consequences of Marriage with a Jewess," which shows an emaciated young man towered over by his fertile Jewish wife and surrounded by Jewish babies and relatives.

In *The Madman and the Nun*, none of the characters is exactly sure just who is in control of their lives. The Madman Walpurg organizes a conspiracy by which he overthrows the psychoanalytic regime that has incarcerated him.

One of Witkacy's most impenetrable plays, *Janulka, Daughter of Fizdejko* puts forward for consideration different theories of history, which are both discussed and enacted by the characters. Among these theories conspiracy occupies a prominent place, and the play itself seems deeply conspiratorial.

In *Janulka*, we witness the machinations of the princess and hangers-on at the court of Lithuania in what may be the fourteenth or the twenty-third century. Everyone appears to be manipulating appearances and plotting the overthrow of the government. The Jews are once again a subject of conspiratorial discussions.

THE MASTER OF SEANCES, who is a major theoretician of conspiracy, explains his position about the role of the Jews: "The entire anti-Semitic campaign will have to be launched in a covert manner. But anyhow, we don't have to fear the Jews, nor hate them either, just use them so that they don't even know they're being used." But PRINCESS AMALIA warns him: "You might get used yourself, and yet be convinced that you were the one running the show." To which VON PLASEWITZ adds: "You won't be able to get along without the Semites. They – or actually we – are the indispensable frame for every picture of the future."⁶

The conspiratorial Boyars troop in and out are paired off and kill one another on orders from the Master. They repeat these obsessional actions, which start up all over again, as though they were on a treadmill.

At the end of JANULKA, the twelve Lithuanian BOYARS rush onstage brandishing axes with which they massacre Elsa, Fizdejko, de la Trefouille, Der Zipfel, and the Master.

Joel Kranz, a transcendental Zionist, (whose name first occurs in Witkacy's notations in 1912 as a character for a dramatic version of his novel *Bungo*), appears from behind the bush in a purple coat with a crown on his head, accompanied by Princess Amalia. Having seized power and ready to found a new dynasty, Kranz and Amelia smile at the massacre. They are the breeders-to-be of a new race.

⁶ S. I. Witkiewicz: *Janulka, Daughter of Fizdejko*, [in:] *The Witkiewicz Reader*, trans. D. Gerould, Northwestern University Press, Illinois 1992, p. 170.

Witkacy's surprising denouements are *coup de théâtre* that occur as *coup d'état*. Often, at the end of Witkacy's dramas, an upstart conspirator comes forward with a triumphal laugh. The reins of power are suddenly seized by someone unexpected emerging from the shadows, the undergrowth, or the underground. Sometimes it is someone who has not even appeared on stage previously, as is the case at the very last moment of *Tumor Brainiowicz* with Arthur Persville who delivers a speech of some fifty words. Power rapidly shifts hands, new alliances are formed, and offspring are promised from such cross-breeding. The last-minute take-over results from some ultimate double-cross. Once the hidden structures are unmasked, and the conspirators come out into the open, we perceive that conspiracy has been a sure route to a successful power grab. The worst paranoia seems fully vindicated.

In Witkacy's novel *Insatiability*, conspiratorial thinking is given its fullest expression in the shape of the menace from the east, the yellow peril, called "the mobile yellow wall" – a line of Chinese troops "flawless, fearless machines" with its countless invisible feet marching relentlessly west. It is a successful plot to take over first Poland, the bulwark, and then the entire world through a mysterious drug, the Murti-Bing pill, that produces a state of euphoria that destroys the will to resist.⁷ Those who take the pill are soon relieved of the anguish and torment of the individual personality; they quickly become lulled into mindless happiness. The populace succumbs to the collectivist ideology of the Chinese despite the heroic attempts of the Polish general to defy the oncoming juggernaut. "As a dangerous individualist belonging to a bygone era," he is executed in ceremonial decapitation.⁸

What now remains to be determined is the legitimacy of Witkacy's use of conspiracy theory.

Is Witkacy a Proponent of Conspiracy Theory?

Having established that conspiracy theory is central to Witkacy's prophetic dramatization of the collective anxieties of his age, I must ask what are the risks and consequences of entering into the conspiratorial mind and cultivating its sensibility? Is Witkacy endorsing the inflammatory views that his characters adopt?

⁷ Idem: *Insatiability*, translated by L. Iribane, Northwestern University Press, Illinois 1996, p. 91.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 515.

What are we to make of Witkacy's exploitation of conspiracy theory? Is Witkacy a purveyor or a parodist of paranoia?

If in the charcoal drawing *Results of a Jewish Marriage*, we have a parody of his father's fears of Jewish procreativity, in the plays do we have a similar parodistic rendering of the phobias and paranoias relating to Jewish, Chinese, and Bolshevik threats and perils?

In unmasking the prevailing view of things, in showing that the power structure is not what it seems to be, in revealing that true power lies elsewhere, does Witkacy foster irrational fears and phobias, or does he simply show a world that is a prey to the fears and phobias of conspiracy theories?

Is Witkacy actively preying on the anti-Bolshevik, anti-Semitic, anti-Chinese fears and paranoias of the period, or is he simply playing with them and parodying them, thereby rendering them as ridiculous caricatures?

Does Witkacy feed the fires of the bias and prejudice, which he adopts? Does he further and advance conspiracy theories, or does he explore the state of mind that produces them?

Does Witkacy believe in these conspiracy theories or does he simply use them as the subject matter or content?

Witkacy himself denied the importance of ideology in his work. Using Ludwig Wittgenstein's formularization, I should say that the plays convey philosophy not as a body of doctrine, but as an activity. The role of ideas in Witkacy's plays is as dramatic activity – thought as action.

We should remember what Witkacy says in his "Theoretical Preface" (1921) that we should not take seriously the content:

These fantasies are only pretexts for certain formal combinations. [...] What we are now attempting is to impart to certain masses of events in time a kind of 'dynamic tension.' This is the formal significance of the so-called 'content' of poems and plays. Please note that we do not attribute any objective significance to the "opinions" expressed by the characters in these plays.⁹

Conclusion

In the final analysis, Witkacy believes in the theory of pure form that can encompass the most diverse social and political theories. This is the ultimate conspiracy theory that Witkacy believes in – the theory of pure form that dominates and controls all else.

⁹ Idem: *Theoretical Preface*, [in:] idem: *Seven Plays*, translated by D. Gerould, M. E. Segal Theatre Center Publishing, New York 2004, p. 4.

Abstract

In this article the author takes an historical overview of conspiracy theories and how they have been paraded in the work of Witkacy. They have been with us at least since the time of Ancient Rome, connected both with the Christians and Jews. The author argues that they have been used to explain historical events, especially at times of crisis, social change and upheaval, when nations, social groups, and individuals have felt threatened by inexplicable disasters and perils. Conspiratorial thinking detects labyrinthine plots and finds individuals or groups that can be held responsible for menacing social changes. They have clearly influenced Witkacy's work. It is argued that the lonely protagonist is confronted by encroaching realms of otherness, 'concentric circles of constraint and encroachment' in the form of the cosmos, political and social order, family, and even the self.

Prof. Daniel Gerould
City University of New York