

From Wewelsburg to Project Monarch: Anatomy of a Fringe Violence Conspiracy

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Abstract

In 1982 the Temple of Set (ToS) a pre-eminent ‘Satanic’ religious institution faced an initiatory crisis. Its senior initiate Dr. Michael A. Aquino travelled to Heinrich Himmler’s Wewelsburg castle to reflect on the ethical and philosophical implications of the crisis. The resulting document, a reflective meditation known as the ‘Wewelsburg Working’, later became controversial when it was leaked to Christian fundamentalist, Patriot militia, the Larouche movement and cult awareness communities.

This essay examines the Wewelsburg Current as a case study in how social diffusion of ‘forbidden knowledge’ may create unforeseen effects and why the document was interpreted differently by new religious groups, media pundits, law enforcement officials and extremist political subcultures. The sources include publicly available literature, hermeneutic interpretation of internal documents, and reflexive heuristic inquiry (this addresses issues of research subjectivity given the author’s ToS membership between 1996 and 1998). It also draws on insights about the broader ‘Nazi Occult’ subculture by Joscelyn Godwin, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Mark Jonathan Rogers, Stephen Edred Flowers and Peter Levenda.

The essay identifies four key problems for future research. First, researchers of extremist politics will need to be familiar with reflexive embodied research. Second, critical layered methods are required to evaluate different interpretations of knowledge claims. Third, the social diffusion of ‘forbidden knowledge’ often creates crises that rival the nuclear proliferation debate. Fourth, the ‘Wewelsburg Working’ has ethical implications about confronting the ontological nature of radical evil in an era Michael Ignatieff defines as ‘virtual war’.

The Wewelsburg in Popular Culture

In April 2005 the British paranormal magazine *Fortean Times* featured as its cover-story the Wewelsburg castle in Westphalia, rebuilt by Nazi SS Reichsfuhrer Heinrich Himmler during World War II.¹ The Wewelsburg has resurfaced online as a mysterious Nazi artefact in *X-Files* and *Stargate* fan fiction.²

The Wewelsburg's enigmatic status is due, in part, to the subculture shockwaves of a little-understood philosophical meditation known as the 'Wewelsburg Working' (1982).³ The meditation was conducted in 1982 by Michael A. Aquino, who had gained notoriety by working closely with Church of Satan founder Anton Lavey; by co-founding the Temple of Set in 1975 after an organisational rift; and who was a psychological operations (PSYOP) specialist in the United States Army. For conspiracy theorists in the pre-millennialist 1990s, Aquino's Satanic religion, his PSYOP experience, and the Wewelsburg Working were proof that he was the nefarious mastermind of a global human trafficking and mind control operation called Project Monarch.⁴ After the Abu Ghraib scandal and Nick Berg's 'snuff' death was circulated online, these allegations were revived.⁵ Rogue mind control technology was also used to explain the 1994 Rwandan genocide.⁶

The debate about Wewelsburg occurs amidst two significant shifts in cultural politics. First, World War II symbolism and events are being re-inscribed in the Bush Administration's War on Terror. This process continues what Marianna Torgovnick calls a 'war complex'.⁷ For example history became rhetoric when Condoleeza Rice, then U.S. Secretary of State, compared Iraq's insurgency to the Nazi Werewolf guerillas of post-conflict Germany.⁸ Second, the Wewelsburg Working is often interpreted within the Nazi Occult subculture which flourished in the late 1960s and 1970s. This began when Jacques Bergier and Louis Pauwels' *Morning of the Magicians* (1960) revealed the Nazi cosmology of Hermann Wirth and Hans Horbiger to a wider audience.⁹ Pauwels and Bergier also revealed the Ancestral Heritage Organisation (Ahnenerbe), a Nazi

research group established by Heinrich Himmler, which investigated racialist archaeology and the occult sciences. These revelations morphed into fascination with ODESSA, Martin Bormann, and other post-war undercurrents of Nazi survival.¹⁰ The recent series *Occult History of the Third Reich* (2003) popularised these themes for a new audience.

This essay explores why the Wewelsburg Working occurred, what its philosophical implications were, and how it was reinterpreted by law enforcement, the media, and conspiracy subcultures. It is primarily concerned with hermeneutic difficulties, and how controversial texts may have ‘after lives’ very different to authorial intent.¹¹ These ‘after lives’ can move from the fringes to the mainstream, and may become one motivational driver for religiopolitical violence. Scholars who study fringe movements and subcultures must understand the importance of propaganda and symbolic imagination. Holocaust revisionist Ernst Zundel understood this when he created the ‘Nazi UFO’ meme and infiltrated conspiracy groups.¹² To counter such tactics, we must do the same.

Issues of Personal Bias

The investigation of new religious movements and sects remains controversial within academia. I am not claiming to be a researcher with objective neutrality in the positivist sense. Rather, I draw on internal documents and my understanding of Setian symbology to compare its worldview to its critics and outsiders. Via narrative inquiry, my self-reflexivity is acknowledged, whilst other viewpoints are analysed and critiqued. This approach is situated in the paradigms of reflexive embodied research, action learning, and autoethnography.¹³

As a TS member from June 1996 to April 1998, I have experienced some of its institutional frameworks, socialization and worldview. My experience of TS was limited to several *Scroll of Set* contributions, e-mail correspondence, input into the design of an

intranet, and attending one regional conclave. Others will have had different experiences due to TS' multifaceted structure and unfolding individuation. Hence this is not a sociological essay on Setian initiatory praxis or my experiences.

Some topics encountered whilst researching this essay would require their own specialised papers. Recent scholars have re-evaluated the Ahnenerbe's archaeological expedition to Tibet in 1937-38 often cited as an influence on the *Indiana Jones* film trilogy.¹⁴ Julius Evola's metaphysics influence the broader occult community and the metapolitics of civilisational decline. Francis Yockey's macrohistorical study *Imperium* (1948) and his attempt to found a post-war Nazi Internationale highlight the shadowy links between the Nazi Occult subculture and post-war neo-fascist groups.¹⁵ Others have also explored how Nazi aesthetics have influenced contemporary Satanic groups, and the cultural politics of Scandinavian church burnings that occurred in the early 1990s.¹⁶

Interpretative Model: Cults and the 'Brainwashing' Debate

Discussion of new religious movements has also been complicated by brainwashing claims and the 'killer cults' narrative popularised by the anti-cult community. The 'killer cults' thesis has been used to summarise the People's Temple mass suicide, the Waco siege, the Heaven's Gate, Solar Temple and Ten Commandments suicides. Critics suggest the 'killer cults' thesis relies on a retrospective narrative, applies one frame to different circumstances, and at paranoid extremes, will perceive fringe groups as enemies within host societies.

Chryssides notes there is no agreed upon definition of 'cultic', and that the characteristics include "the intensity of religious (mystical) experience . . . its looseness of organization . . . and . . . its lack of proximity to the dominant religion."¹⁷ Janja Lalic's PhD dissertation features one of the most detailed counter-cult arguments. Influenced by

mentor Margaret Thaler Singer, Lalich reaffirms the primacy of the ‘cultic’ label over competing interpretations.¹⁸

I have several objections to Lalich’s critique of new religious movement (NRM) scholarship. First, religious and secular scholars have different interpretative frames and judgment criteria. Second, Lalich ignores scholars who pursue a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’: the legacy of Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and Foucault. Third, Lalich relies on quantitative analysis to debunk critics, where contextual and qualitative criteria applies. Fourth, she allows for ‘atrocious narratives’ by former members. Marc Sageman notes this theme also typifies Singer and Steven Hassan’s brainwashing claims.¹⁹

Ken Wilber’s *A Sociable God* (1984) proposes a counter-model that distinguishes between spiritual development and the various contexts (cultural, organisational, sociopolitical) in which they occur.²⁰ Many of Wilber’s insights, notably his distinction between surface stereotype and ‘deep religion’, echo Aquino’s Wewelsburg Working. TS senior initiate Don Webb provides a second counter-model: the awakening of a ‘daemonic’ self will create a ‘shock’ that, if navigated carelessly, will lead to self-delusion. Drawing on Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade and others, Webb hints this has implications for radicalisation and extremism.²¹ To grasp why, we need to understand the Temple of Set’s ontology and epistemological praxis.

The Temple of Set and the *Xem* Crisis

The Temple of Set was founded in 1975 after an initiatory crisis in the Church of Satan. When Anton LaVey decided to reassert hierarchical control over a growing organisation, and to sell the initiatory degrees, Aquino and approximately 30 Priesthood members resigned.²² They founded the more low-key and secretive Temple of Set (TS), whose key philosophy is summed up in the watchword *Xeper* (Egyptian for ‘to become’). Rather than the Church of Satan’s flamboyance and egoistic hedonism, Aquino embraced a neo-Platonic model of psychocentric evolution.

On 30 June 1975 Aquino invoked the Prince of Darkness in the event, known as the Santa Barbara Working. Aquino had understood Satan as both a cultural symbol of spiritual rebellion and as a Jungian archetype. Yet the key outcome was a ‘transmission document’, the *Book of Coming Forth By Night* (1975), which suggested human cultural evolution was due to an ‘isolate intelligence’ exemplified by the Egyptian god Set.²³ Rather than suggest a return to Egyptian religious imagery, the document proclaimed an Aeon of Set as both psychological disposition and as a trans-historical life-world. Its non-Judeo-Christian cosmology was to prove a serious ‘disjuncture’ for TS’ core initiates. “*Xeper* is the experience of an individual psyche becoming aware of its own existence and deciding to expand and evolve that existence through its own actions,” explains Don Webb.²⁴

Over the next three years TS went through a period of exploration. These included R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz’s Egyptian hieratic symbolism, astrobiology experiments, and a planned space station collaboration with Jefferson Airplane’s Paul Kantner. Aquino stepped down from the TS High Priesthood in 1978 and appointed Robert Barrett, who proclaimed the watchword *Xem* as providing a goal or focal point for *Xeper*. Barrett used tests for initiatory Recognitions and took TS in a more avowedly Egyptological direction. This shift in philosophical direction and organisational culture created new group tensions.²⁵ Barrett suddenly resigned before the 1982 TS Conclave, and a subsequent coup by Priesthood allies was revealed and prevented.²⁶

The coup plotters then leaked several top-level documents into the wider occult community, including the Wewelsburg Working papers. William Butch and others established the short-lived Temple of Nephthys. Ex-member Linda Blood later surfaced during the Satanic Ritual Abuse rumour panics to warn that TS had been drifting into the Nazi Occult and Holocaust revisionism.²⁷ These allegations also became part of a San Francisco Police Department investigation into claims that Aquino was involved in child sex abuse at the Presidio army base. Anti-cult advocates such as Steven Hassan would

rely on negative sources from this period, including Blood, anthropologist Gini Graham Scott, and Church of Satan advocate Arthur Lyons.²⁸

The Ahnenerbe and the Wewelsburg Working

The source of Nazi Occult allegations made against Aquino was his political research within the Order of the Trapezoid sub-group. Aquino had been interested in Heinrich Himmler's Ahnenerbe research institute (Ancestral Heritage Organisation), founded in 1935. The Ahnenerbe's focus was on "the spiritual, intellectual and biological history of the race." Post-war organisations have focused on Bruno Beger's study of "racial anatomical characteristics" that included a collection of "Jewish skulls" from German concentration camps.²⁹ The major interpretation is that Ahnenerbe exemplified what happens when fringe extremists take over a scientific culture.

However, scholars now suggest that Ahnenerbe's research has leaked into contemporary culture. The Ahnenerbe undertook "a study of long-range weather patterns, in relation to the sun-spot cycle and astronomical events", to confirm Hans Horbiger's *Welteislehre*, or 'fire and ice' cosmology.³⁰ Siegmund Rascher's 'altitude' experiments with Dachau prisoners, would both influence John Lilly's floatation tank designs and the later Monarch mind control subculture.³¹

The Wewelsburg Working took place on 19 October 1984 in Heinrich Himmler's Wewelsburg Castle, Westphalia. Aquino invoked the Prince of Darkness about the *Xem* crisis, and gained an understanding that initiatory 'shocks' were part of inevitable psychecentric evolution and unfolding.³² Aquino later explained to Larry Kahaner: "The working's most concrete result was the reactivation of the Order of the Trapezoid."³³ This began the Wewelsburg Current, as other TS initiates subsequently visited Wewelsburg and explored Aquino's imagery.

A complete understanding is beyond the scope of this essay, although its philosophical implications are explored below. Our understanding may be enhanced by former TS initiates who have founded their own organisations (notably The Storm's Zeena and Nikolas Schreck), and when Aquino publishes his memoir chapters. Surprisingly, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke and others only mention the incident in passing.³⁴ The Wewelsburg Working can be understood as Aquino tapping into Roger Griffin's "palingenetic myth" strata, which he describes as "regeneration after a period of crisis."³⁵ Aquino's aims and motivations would be understood differently by others. Peter Levenda suggests the Working seriously damaged Aquino's reputation.³⁶

Satanism and Neo-Nazi Subculture

The original Church of Satan had been interested in the Nazi Occult subculture as an aesthetic and statement of power. LaVey had a cultural imprint, the post-war working class 'outsider', which later influenced the second wave of violent skinheads in Great Britain.³⁷ What made LaVey different was his anthropological/sociological synthesis of knowledge. LaVey clearly foresaw the brooding and dark goth aesthetics that would become prominent in the early 1990s, and he gained the support of musician Marilyn Manson and other radical aesthetes.

Yet by the early 1980s this subcultural 'drift' had attracted neo-Nazis to the Satanic religious subculture. The second generation attracted to LaVey's mystique included racialist philosophers, notably Boyd Rice and Michael Moynihan, and industrial bands with 'white power' themes. The existence of 'self-styled' Satanists such as the sociopath Richard 'Nightstalker' Ramirez, posed a similar problem for official religious organisations as did 'lone wolf' terrorists to mainstream political negotiators. The Southern Poverty Law Center notes, ironically, that neo-Nazis who "long for a return to the genetically based tribe, or folk" were contrary to LaVeyan Satanism's glorification of the hedonistic ego.³⁸

These trends meant that Aquino's Wewelsburg Working was interpreted outside the Temple of Set in a different context. Aquino's understanding of Nazism centered on Ernest Nolte's 'metapolitical phenomenon' and Peter Viereck's warnings about the Romantics and modernity. This was augmented by the first wave of Nazi Occult writings that attempted a subjectivist understanding of Nazi cosmology. Aquino was part of a generation influenced by Hermann Rauschning's study of Hitler as a "revolution in nihilism", and Wilhelm Reich's study of sexual repression and mass groupthink.³⁹ Aquino's ambiguous viewpoint on the Holocaust during the *Leuchter Report* scandal, which so angered critic Kevin Filan, was closer to Nolte's concern that 'the singularity of the 'Final Solution' had been blown out of any proportion; it was unique in means (the gas chambers) but not in conception.'⁴⁰ He was also clearly interested in understanding the Nazis for lessons in rhetoric, symbolism, and psychological warfare.

The consequent debate played out in law enforcement investigations, the conspiracy subculture, and in U.S. media. Each group, as an epistemic community, perceived TS and Wewelsberg via different frames. A meta-frame clarifies these disparate insights and signals. This synthesis creates a deeper picture.

1. Satanic Ritual Abuse

In the early 1980s, U.S. law enforcement began investigating allegations of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA). These surfaced with Lawrence Pazder's *Michelle Remembers* (1980), and gained prominence with the McMartin, Presidio, and West Point cases. Oliver Stone's mini-series *Wild Palms* (1991) characterised this period of 'lost children' as the patriotic battleground between two feuding political elites.

The SRA cycle highlighted the difficulties that law enforcement faced in profiling political violence. Investigators took intelligence from academics, 'Christian cops', and anti-cult groups. Furthermore, stereotypes and taxonomies may create flawed cases. Investigators recognised the potential for organized crime syndicates to use religious iconography and imagery. Several sociological studies of Satanic Ritual Abuse have

concluded that SRA was a cyclical rumour panic and ‘urban legends’ narrative.⁴¹ Left Hand Path scholar Stephen Edred Flowers suggests the true culprit was conservative fears about the nuclear family’s breakdown.⁴²

As Larry Kahaner describes, many investigators had problems in interpreting religious symbolism. Consequently, investigators focused on crimes that will stand up in courts, rather than religious beliefs. First, investigators such as Denver Police Department’s Bill Wickersham had deeply ingrained Catholic beliefs and reacted with superstition.⁴³ Second, investigators such as SFPD’s Pamfiloff placed occult groups in a cultic frame of reference, and in the wake of the People’s Temple mass suicide, began looking for signs of public disorder.⁴⁴ Research surveys had loaded questions which led to confirmation bias that cult members were potential killers.⁴⁵

San Francisco Police Department’s Sandi Gallant and Gary Pamfiloff investigated Aquino for the Presidio investigation. Their intelligence files were concerned with the religiopolitical triggers for group violence. The SFPD investigation, which did not lead to a prosecution, highlighted a myriad of SRA problems: the collection, interpretation and verification of crime scene evidence; the potential potential religious bias of investigators; the limits of forensic science to consider intersubjective beliefs; and use of an informal police ‘social network’ to investigate a new criminal profile. TS’ secrecy therefore skewed Gallant and Pamfiloff’s analysis. A more sophisticated briefing is Dawn Perlmutter’s collation of public source documents.⁴⁶

Consequently, the SFPD investigation, McMartin, and others created genealogies that influenced the Monarch subculture. Sandi Gallant’s 14 February 1985 memorandum on ritual child abuse has the features of what would later become the Monarch model: an extra-territorial network, ritualistic child abuse, secretiveness, and multiple personalities.⁴⁷ Martin Cannon investigated Monarch in the mid-1990s and suggested that its key theorist Mark Phillips was fleecing gullible conspiracy theorists.⁴⁸

Another difficulty was in distinguishing the Monarch subculture from urban rumour cycles of missing children, and the existence of criminal sex rings. For instance, Dawn Perlmutter disagrees with Supervisory Special Agent Kenneth Lanning's investigation into Satanic Ritual Abuse, which found no evidence of SRA but did acknowledge the existence of multidimensional child sex ring cases."⁴⁹ Unresolved professional feuding enabled the rumour cycles to continue for years.

2. Conspiracy Communities

The Wewelsberg Working's diffusion also illustrated the paranoid dynamics of conspiracy subcultures. Rather than give an evaluative analysis, conspiracy researchers presented Aquino in starkly Manichean terms as a symbol of instrumental evil. The more speculative *X-Files*-type argument, the better. The site Trufax (www.trufax.org), for example, has historicised the Wewelsburg Working as a key event in its timeline of political conspiracy theories.

The closed nature of the conspiracy community meant this argument was reamplified, due to the lack of open peer review and reliance on past citations without cross-checking primary documentation. For instance, Mae Brussell's radio programs influenced *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Nessie, and author Alex Constantine. Three figures exemplified this diffusion outcome: Lyndon Larouche, William Cooper, and David Icke.

Larouche railed against Aquino and the TS as Illuminati-style manipulators of the New World Order. Larouche believed that Satanism was the true political ideology of this ruling elite. His essay 'Is Satan In Your Schoolyard?' raised concerns that Aquino's initiates were infiltrating Pentagon military intelligence, that Internet bulletin boards gave him a global audience, and that Satanists were the latest phase of a religious conspiracy.⁵⁰ Before it was taken offline in May 2005, the Australian Larouche site 'Global Economic Crisis' reprinted these allegations.

British conspiracy theorist David Icke took at face value allegations that Aquino was masterminding Project Monarch, a renegade mind control program. Icke included the allegations in his bestselling books, which blended New Age sound-bites, British Israeli politics, Pentecostalist apocalypics, and a geopolitical critique taken from the John Birch Society (that the British Empire controlled the global drug trade). Icke interpreted TS hieratic symbolism literally as a serpentine cult.⁵¹ He references the Monarch conspiracy subculture, to label Aquino as a “notorious mind control programmer.”⁵² Icke quotes extensively from an undisclosed interview with a self-described member of the “San Diego Illuminati” that Aquino was a “pedophilic . . . engaged in ‘scientific experimentation’.” However, because Icke’s source admits they were “mind controlled to mind control others” this taints the testimonial’s objectivity.⁵³

William Cooper’s *Behold A Pale Horse* (1991) included Aquino’s PSYOP writings and excerpts from the San Francisco Police Department’s intelligence files on the Temple of Set.⁵⁴ The excerpts reveal that Gallant and Pamfiloff had interpreted TS within a neo-Nazi frame, and had warned of potential violence.⁵⁵ Cooper’s high profile in the militia and patriot communities meant that Aquino was now connected with PSYOP strategies in the Branch Davidian siege at Waco, Texas.⁵⁶ This stereotype of covert and extra-state activities now meant that Aquino was integrated into conspiracy narratives of assassination training and post-Iran/Contra money laundering.⁵⁷

3. The Media

Finally, the SRA rumour panic coincided with the growing popularity of tabloid television programs. Aquino’s enigmatic aura was due, in part, to his appearances on Geraldo and Oprah. The confrontations exposed Satanic subculture stereotypes, and also the difficulties of communicating initiatory knowledge in ‘litany’ sound-bites.⁵⁸ It led TS initiate Stephen Edred Flowers to found Runa-Raven Press, and Aquino to use Internet publishing. This meant Setians developed a publishing infrastructure to diffuse their philosophies.

Initiatory Ethics and Ontological Evil

Aquino conducted the Wewelsburg Working in response to the initiatory crisis of Barrett era TS. Aquino was concerned with the Recognition process and the initiatory system inherited from the Golden Dawn and the Church of Satan.⁵⁹

For Aquino, the initiatory path has ‘shocks’ that can destabilise the initiate and the organisation. The working revealed this tension in the initiate’s potential and realising these expanded horizons. Consequently, because these ‘shocks’ can lead to initiatory ‘falls’, an organisation needs an early warning system, or process, to identify and resolve problematic transitions. Contrary to its critics, the Wewelsburg Working was ultimately a defence of initiatory elitism. Because past institutions had used moral codes to create ‘buffers’ for complex knowledge, contemporary groups needed to emphasise the moral capacities for consequentialist thinking, foresight, and strength of self-being. One clear implication is that when initiates encounter their Jungian Shadow, or become unstable during an initiatory ‘shock’ if constellated too soon, their ideational system may become closed—hence the potential for violence.

Aquino recognised the danger of applying such ‘shocks’ on a macro-scale to group political culture. His viewpoint differs slightly from ‘cultural terrorists’ like the Situationists and Genesis P-Orridge, who have studied the Nazis to understand Spectacle. At a group level, the Wewelsburg Working warns that those who attempt to ‘do Good’ (Plato’s *Agathon*) may actually unleash Evil (on a cosmic level rather ‘than the ‘evil’ of constructivist social conventions), if they have a ‘flawed’ epistemology. Carl Rashke’s *Painted Black* and other books have obscured this motivation with stereotypes.⁶⁰ On an historical scale, Himmler’s mission highlights the dangerous fusion of scientific rationality and violence.

However, Aquino’s use of the Wewelsburg opened up a wider debate about the Ahnenerbe’s research legacy. This highlighted the difference between ‘initiatory’

transgressive ethics, and the collectivist social taboos over artefacts ‘sedimented’ with past violence. The debate polarised those with a Manichean view of Evil from others who had a more complex understanding. Roger Shattuck’s six categories of ‘forbidden knowledge’ is useful here.⁶¹ For his critics, Aquino’s use of the Wewelsburg castle “violated moral and secular prohibitions”, to attain “dangerous and unwelcome knowledge”. For Aquino, this was a necessary step, in a situation where “delicate knowledge” was required, and where “ambiguity” needed clarification. The polarisation between Aquino and his critics also centered on Wewelsburg as a site of Shattuck’s “knowledge double-bound”, where the attempt to synthesise objective and subjective modes “leads to great mental stress.”⁶²

This stress was evident when Tim Maroney’s article ‘The Nazi Trapezoid’ (1990) brought Wewelsburg to the occult community’s attention.⁶³ Maroney undertook a ‘pro-/anti’ analysis of the Temple of Set’s reading list, which had been posted on Internet sites in 1989.⁶⁴ In their responses to Maroney, Aquino and Robert Menschel detailed the organisational and interpretative contexts of this research.⁶⁵ This included clarification by Aquino and Stephen Edred Flowers about the caution with which they treated German Romantics.⁶⁶

Maroney’s paper would subsequently be cited by TS critics in online ‘flame-wars’ that were waged throughout the mid-to-late 1990s on Internet newsgroups. Some ex-initiates, notably Kevin Filan and Scott Locklin (aka Lupo LeBoucher), conducted these ‘flame-wars’ with personal agendas that led to court cases and identity theft. The most notorious participant was ‘Curio’, who posted several thousand messages over five years before being unmasked as social worker Diana Napolis. She exemplified the ‘shock’ transition that Aquino had warned about. In 2003, Napolis threatened Steven Spielberg and Jennifer Love Hewitt. Her court statement reveals how Nazi Occult, SRA and Monarch theories had created a delusional belief system that Ken Wilber would describe as ‘pre-trans’.⁶⁷

One source of Napolis' fantasies had been Cory Hammond's infamous 'Greenbaum Speech', which outlined a genealogy of Nazi-influenced mind control therapists.⁶⁸ Hammond's speech also directly influenced Fritz Springmeier and Cisco Wheeler's Project Monarch writings, which had circulated in the militia and patriot communities. Napolis should have read theorist Jim Keith, who concluded that Springmeier had constructed a mind control history that blurred the line between urban rumour, power elite analysis, and unverifiable hearsay.⁶⁹ Napolis had melded Aquino's German Romanticism and Lovecraftian Expressionism with European Illuminist politics. Yet Aquino's philosophical meditation also foresaw the dangerous synthesis of 'degenerative' spirituality, science fiction subcultures, and scientific research which exemplified Aum Shinrikyo's weapons of mass destruction program.⁷⁰

Conclusion

The Wewelsburg Current has implications for reflexive embodied research, evaluating different interpretations of knowledge claims, the social diffusion of 'forbidden knowledge', and the proliferation of human ecology insights from research communities into societies.

First, reflexive embodied research has methodological value in understanding religious sects, subcultures, and terror networks. Only recently have counter-terrorist and new religious movement researchers begun to acknowledge the 'interiority' of their interviewees and subjects via experiential action research and multi-vocal texts. Researchers may infer beliefs and potentialities when quoting literature fragments out of their subcultural context. A continuing problem to the development of critical counter-terrorism discourse is that researchers convey institutional assumptions and norms rather than the actual life-worlds of the fringe groups, subcultures, and terror networks they study.

Second, the Wewelsburg Working provides a case study in why researchers need to critically evaluate the different interpretations of knowledge claims. The potential errors

range from limiting data collection to familiar types, errors of inferring values and worldviews, and un-surfaced frames. Pamfiloff and Galant's investigation highlights the danger of 'intelligence' based on fragments, rumours, and 'institutional facts' (John Searle) rather than direct engagement. Critics like Mae Brussell and Alex Constantine have misrepresented Aquino's motivations by constructing a stereotype: a skewed understanding of Satanic ethics, the 'shock' value of the 'Nazi Occult', and fears of covert operations that echoed the 1975 Church inquiry into the Central Intelligence Agency. In his assessment of Gini Graham Scott's *The Magicians* (1982), Stephen Edred Flowers summed up the difficulties of knowledge claims: Scott "was actually hermeneutically incapable of understanding the real meaning of what was happening around her."⁷¹ Flowers' observation applies to many other public critiques.

Third, how others interpreted the Wewelsberg Working illustrates the dangers in the social diffusion of 'forbidden knowledge'. The Temple of Set and other initiatory groups are viewed as an anachronism because, as Roger Shattuck notes, "Open knowledge as a modern achievement appears to have left behind the tradition of esoteric knowledge only for initiates."⁷² This achievement is the legacy of the Italian Renaissance and the European Enlightenment. It has reached its aegis in the Open Source software movement, notably in Lawrence Lessig's writings. Contemporary popular culture further obliterates the distinction between 'discovery' and 'use', one reason why some conspiracy theorists misinterpret semiotic references and rumours as 'fact'.

Fourth, the subcultural mutations from Wewelsburg to Monarch reveal potential crises that rival the nuclear proliferation debate. The counterterrorist debate on 'weapons of mass destruction' has an Armageddon cultural script based on Judeo-Christian millenarian apocalypticism. Social critics including Jacques Ellul and Lewis Mumford have also emphasised that technical instrumental logic underpinned the atomic bomb's development, a logic that emphasises physical artifacts rather than ethical complexities. Aquino's doctoral dissertation *The Neutron Bomb* (1980) was written in the shadow of a bitter 'war-of-words' between Robert J. Oppenheimer and Edward Teller.⁷³ The

transition from ‘discovery’ phase to deployment and institutionalisation may result in different outcomes and ethical prerogatives to those held by creators and discoverers.

The Monarch subculture alludes to similar ethical issues regarding the Cold War legacy of human ecology research. Monarch’s ontological universe is a mish-mash of human ecology research into cybernetics and mind control; Neuro-Linguistic Programming terms; fears of post-Kinsey sexology; a fundamentalist ‘literal’ reading of occult symbology; and near death experiences.⁷⁴ Its exponents influence readers precisely through the fusion of obsession, proto-scientific language, and voyeuristic themes of sexualised violence. Its narrative reflects through a distorted lens the post-Watergate climate of duplicitous realist statecraft, from rumors of Beltway call-girl schemes to ‘honeypot’ espionage traps. Yet when Fritz Springmeier released his Monarch details onto the Internet, he created an ethical dilemma that echoed nuclear proliferation. Springmeier’s plans are now available on the Internet, just as nuclear bomb schematics are. Anyone can access them and experiment. Therefore, despite their proclaimed ethical stance, Springmeier and others failed to consider diffusion factors, different audiences, and long-term impacts.

Implications for Further Counterterrorism Research

The subcultural fallout from the Wewelsburg Working also has several general implications for future counterterrorism research. This essay has highlighted the need to understand terrorists’ agency on their own terms, the recruitment process for terror organisations, and the psychology of spiritual dread.

First, the ‘initiatory’ perspective adds more psychological depth and self-agency to understanding terrorists’ subjective motivations. Some CT pundits rely on ‘extremist’ and ‘fanatic’ pejorative labels as totalistic explanations, rather than trying to understand how terrorist cosmologies become meshed with strategies of political violence. The ‘initiatory’ perspective views this instead as a process of unfolding *becoming* that is based on symbolic intensification and transgressive ethics. Jessica Stern and Mark

Juergensmeyer's recent work come the closest to this viewpoint, as they separate their theoretical lenses and values from those held by their interviewees.

Second, the 'vetting' process for joining an initiatory secret society has some broad parallels (if very different aims) to joining some terrorist organisations. Rather than brainwashing, this process identifies certain attitudes, dispositions, and qualities of the recruit that exist as potentialities. Secrecy is not always necessary if the individual and organisation are closely aligned. Context, ethical frameworks, goals, and the techniques used to socialise the recruit into new norms all must be considered when making a moral judgment.

Marc Sageman's study of Salafi Jihadist groups reaches a similar conclusion: recruitment occurs due to "social affiliation" with Jihadists, "increasing intensification of beliefs and faith" of the worldview, and "formal acceptance to the jihad through the encounter of a link to the jihad." Sageman concludes that "It may be more accurate to blame global Salafi terrorist activity on in-group love than out-group hate."⁷⁵ Zachary Abuzza notes the screening process is the first step in Jemaah Islamiyah's recruitment strategies, which can lead to further Islamic studies and paramilitary training.⁷⁶

Ehud Sprinzak notes that Hamas uses such a 'vetting' system for its recruits and to protect itself from counterintelligence agents.⁷⁷ The process becomes problematic when organizations mould their recruits for political violence (notably suicide bombings), when elites get caught up in turf battles, and when a tradition decays. This is another way to understand the splinter formation of terrorist groups and the psychological complexities of individual terrorists.

Finally, researcher Jessica Stern contends that because terrorism is a vicious type of psychological warfare, we need to understand spiritual dread. Stern acknowledges that "a sense of transcendence is one of the many attractions of religious violence for terrorists, beyond the appeal of achieving their goals."⁷⁸ Aquino's Wewelsburg Working suggests that counterterrorism researchers may need to look in antinomian areas for their pivotal

insights and to ensure the findings are used ethically. The transcendent impulse holds a key to engaging with terrorists during their socialisation process and 'de-roling' their reliance on strategies of political violence. The Working's unanticipated outcomes also suggest that the 'politics' of fear' are not unique to the Bush Administration's War on Terror, and will be 'sedimented' within contemporary society for years to come.

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