

*Alternative literature: a practical guide for librarians*

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## Parapolitics and deep politics

The work of so-called 'conspiracy theorists' is frequently dismissed as no more than ravings, and as such is marginalized in much the same way that critiques of the media are marginalized, through the very channels of the mass media themselves. Consequently the public are kept unaware of a vast body of knowledge and continuing research into the mechanisms that enable such control to take place. Inevitably much of this work is speculative – the powers that be are hardly likely to open up their procedures and archives to public scrutiny – yet no more speculative than most scientific theories. Postulates are set up and then tested. It is the test of any theory that provides real proof, not any subjective idea of how fanciful it might at first appear. We have seen how Herman and Chomsky's theory of thought control through the mass media has been tested repeatedly and has never been disconfirmed. This does not secure it for all time, but it certainly makes it worthy of consideration and, in the absence of a rival theory, is the best we have.

'Parapolitics' is the term most frequently applied to the analysis of political institutions in order to discover whether there exist such hidden mechanisms of control. The majority of the primary research takes place in alternative literature. Parapolitics has been defined by Peter Dale Scott, one of the foremost researchers in this field, as 'a system or practice of politics in which accountability is consciously diminished'. But parapolitics, he avers, is but one occurrence of what he calls 'deep politics', meaning 'all those political practices, deliberate or not,

which are usually repressed rather than acknowledged'.<sup>8</sup> We should note how this differs from the accepted meaning of conspiracy theory, where all such activity is considered both covert and deliberate. Peter Dale Scott's definition of deep politics allows for the irrational and unquantifiable. This has two effects: whilst it undoubtedly complicates any research project, it does at least encourage a rigorous, critical approach to that research, since it warns the researcher against looking for deliberateness in every action of every governmental agency.

The alleged 'shoot to kill' policy of the British Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland is an example of parapolitical practice, since it refers to a policy that has been consciously designed for a specific end, and its existence suppressed (this is assuming it to be true). By contrast the British Army's alleged collusion with Loyalist paramilitary forces is not parapolitical, since any examination of this relationship not only encompasses policy decisions but the accidental effects of organized crime on arms shipments. This takes us out of the realm of political arrangements and into the more unpredictable systems of sociopolitical studies encapsulated by the phrase 'deep politics'.

*Lobster* is a splendid example of a parapolitical journal. Or rather, *Lobster* are a splendid example, since following an editorial split there are now two journals of that name. The net result of the split is twice as much research into a field that is mostly ignored by the mainstream press. Both are worth investigating for their research on MI5, MI6 and other covert state activities, research that is largely unavailable elsewhere. While Steve Dorril's *Lobster* concentrates on the activities of the British and US security services, Robin Ramsay's *Lobster* casts its net wider to encompass histories of fascism, the JFK assassination, the Lockerbie bombing and the military's medical experiments on service personnel. What both *Lobsters* excel at are finding the links between apparently unrelated events, or finding the significance of an event that many commentators would consider trivial.

The majority of this research does not take place in an academic setting; it is undertaken by amateurs, yet its nature is far

the literature itself and networking with the people involved in alternative publishing.

### Networking through the literature

At its most basic level this need entail no more than close reading of information sources such as those discussed in the previous chapter. Yet becoming assiduous readers of titles like *Factsheet 5* and *Alternative Press Review* is only the beginning. Since it is largely untrammelled by commercial and competitive forces, and is less concerned about providing free publicity to what in the mainstream would be called 'rival interests', the periodical literature of the alternative press is far more committed to the dissemination of information and ideas than that of the mainstream. Not only is such publicity offered, much more of a periodical's pages will be taken up by such publicity. Many alternative periodicals will typically devote far many more pages to reviews than their mainstream counterparts, just as they will include extensive lists of organizations, publishers, other periodicals and other sources of information. All this is essential material for networking.

Sometimes the impact of this type of close reading can produce unexpected effects. It was a reference at the end of an article in an issue of *Lobster* that led to the founding of the activist librarians' group Information for Social Change, through byways too tortuous to map here. Suffice to say, were it not for *Lobster* then *Information for Social Change* would not exist. *Lobster* is a model for the potential to be found in this kind of networking. To begin with, the research it presents is nothing if not rigorous. In the field of parapolitics, where so much writing can easily drift into unfounded speculation, annotated articles are crucial. Most are accompanied by dozens of closely-typed footnotes, bibliographies and suggestions for further reading. An issue of *Lobster* is more than a record of current research. It can be used as a reference source, a review journal and a significant networking tool to access a whole other world of ideas, publications and people. Consider the contents of issue 26 of Robin Ramsay's *Lobster*.

The opening article by Daniel Brandt, 'Cyberspace wars', in addition to its value as a counter to the prevailing media representations of the Internet, also examines the activities of right-wing pressure groups such as Western Goals and the Anti-Defamation League (B'nai Brith). It reports on the work of the groups Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility and the Electronic Frontier Foundation. He tells us about NameBase, a tool that he recommends for both investigative journalists and reference libraries. For many readers this will be the first time they have encountered such names. Elsewhere in the same issue we find reviews of almost 50 recent books dealing with the assassination of President Kennedy along with eight pages of book reviews on other topics. Scattered throughout the rest of the issue, often in footnotes, we find the names and addresses of organizations, publications and individuals, all involved in parapolitical research. But *Lobster* is not unique: *Anarchy* regularly reviews in excess of 100 publications in each issue; the first issue of *Promises and Disappointments* reviewed an equivalent number across the spectrum of paranormal, Fortean and UFO research publications. The practice of mailing out fliers, broadsheets, even others publishers' free zines with one's own work is commonplace. The current favourite for this practice, which seems to appear in every mailing received by the author during the writing of this book, is a reprint of Ivan Schcheglov's Situationist tract *Formulary for a new urbanism*, circulated by the London Psychogeographical Association/Unpopular Books. The author's copy of the latest edition of *Light's List* came in an envelope stuffed with fliers and mini-catalogues for chapbooks, poetry and short story magazines and zines. Alternative publishers cooperate endlessly in their networking, which is all to the benefit of anyone researching or acquiring. You will very soon find yourself part of a network, receiving unexpected, unsolicited mail from publishers you never knew existed, publishing titles on topics you never dreamed of.

You can either throw your hands up in despair at the perverse diversity of it all or you can dive in, safe in knowing that even if you never plumb its depths, you will always return with something – maybe even the odd pearl. You will never find all there is