The Spectacle of the False Flag

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Published by Punctum Books

Wilson, Eric, et al.
The Spectacle of the False Flag: Parapolitics from JFK to Watergate.

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1 | Parapolitics and Spectacular Power

‘The more important something is, the more it is hidden.’—Guy Debord

A widely under-utilized source for the development of radical criminological theory is the work of the French post-Surrealist and Situationist philosopher Guy Debord. Of vital relevance to radical criminology is Debord’s nuanced linking of the criminogenic with the mass politics of popular representation and perception, epitomized by his seminal notion of the Society of the Spectacle: “the autocratic reign of the market economy which had acceded to an irresponsible sovereignty and the totality of new techniques of government which accompanied this reign.”¹ The hegemony of the Society of the Spectacle, in turn, is signified by the integrated spectacle, the cultural reification of mass media as the sole medium and arbiter of ‘truth’;

¹ Debord, *Comments*, 2.
an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.'

As a result, the overall relationship between the social and the visual is governed by a radical functionality.

If the spectacle—understood in the limited sense of those ‘mass media’ that are its most stultifying superficial manifestation—seems at times to be invading society in the shape of a mere apparatus, it should be remembered that this apparatus has nothing neutral about it, and that it answers precisely to the needs of the spectacle’s internal dynamics. If the social requirements of the age which develops such techniques can be met only through their mediation, if the administration of society and all content between people now depends on the intervention of such ‘instant’ communication, it is because this ‘communication’ is essentially one-way; the concentration of the media thus amounts to the monopolization by the administrators of the existing system of the means to pursue their particular form of administration.

Once defined as integrated, the spectacle is understood to be socially (and politically) unifying precisely because “the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship among people that is mediated by images.” But the spectacle, while unifying in effect, is totalitarian in nature.

For what is communicated are orders; and with perfect harmony, those who give them are also

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2 Debord, Society, 12.
3 Ibid, 19-20.
4 Ibid, 12. I expand on this aspect of the spectacle in greater detail in my discussion of the Don DeLillo novel LIBRA in Chapter Five.
those who tell us what they think of them... A virtually infinite number of supposed differences within the media thus serve to screen what is in fact the result of a spectacular convergence, pursued with remarkable tenacity. Just as the logic of the commodity reigns over capitalist’s competing ambitions, and the logic of war always dominates the frequent modifications in weaponry, so the harsh logic of the spectacle controls the abundant diversity of media extravagances.⁵

The cultural logic of the spectacle is identical with the transition of the political economy, now increasingly ‘virtual’ in nature, towards a globalized form of what I have called ‘cyber-capitalism’;⁶ ‘The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image.’⁷ Anticipating the excavations of both Jean Baudrillard⁸ and Paul Virilio⁹ on the para-covert effects of simulation upon public discourse, Debord openly postulates the infinite transformational potential of the mass ‘mediated’ multiplication of the commodity-form.

The spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life. It is not just that the relationship to commodities is now plain to see—commodities are now all that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity… With the advent of the second so-called industrial revolution, alienated consumption is added to alienated production as an inescapable duty of the

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⁵ Debord, *Comments*, 6-7.
⁶ Wilson, ‘Criminogenic Cyber-Capitalism’, generally.
⁸ Baudrillard, generally.
⁹ Virilio and Lotringer, generally. I discuss Virilio in greater detail in Chapter Five.
masses.\textsuperscript{10}

This intensive, or internal, colonization of social space by late industrial capitalism having been completed by the end of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{11}

The spectacle subjects living human beings to its will to the extent that the economy has brought them under its sway. For the spectacle is simply the economic realm developing \textit{for itself}—at once a faithful mirror held up to the production of things [including ‘events’] and a distorting objec-
tification of the producers [and ‘actors’].\textsuperscript{12}

However, with the universalization of a digitalized, or ‘virtual’, neo-liberalism as the integrated (and integrat-
ing) component of post-Cold War globalization, we wit-
ness a parallel technocratization of all forms of governance, both public (political) and private (economic).

The ubiquitous growth of secret societies and net-

\textsuperscript{10} Debord, \textit{Society}, 29.

\textsuperscript{11} Although he is notoriously imprecise concerning the historical evolution of the spectacle, in his \textit{Comments} Debord writes that the society of the spectacle had been in existence for ‘barely forty years’ when he first wrote about it in 1967: this would place its genesis sometime during the 1920s. Debord, \textit{Comments}, 3. Jonathan Crary has offered a fascinating explanation for this startling assertion: 1927 was the year of both the perfection of the television by Vladimir Zworkin and the release of Al Jolson’s \textit{The Jazz Singer}, the first film that completely synchronized the cinematic image with recorded sound, an event that signalled not only a new cinematic technique but an unprecedented industrial and financial conglomeration as well, the record industry largely subsidizing Hollywood’s transition to ‘talking’ films; ‘as with television, the nascent institutional and economic infrastructure of the spectacle was set in place.’ Crary, 457-8. The late 1920s was also the period when both Stalinism and Fascism grasped the revolutionary potential of the new media technologies for political propaganda.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid}, 16.
works of influence answers the imperative demand of the new conditions for profitable management of economic affairs, at a time when the state holds a hegemonic role in the direction of production and when demand for all commodities depends strictly on the centralization achieved by spectacular information/promotion, to which forms of distribution must also adapt. It is therefore only a natural product of the concentration of capital, production and distribution. Whatever does not grow must disappear, and no business can grow without adopting the values, techniques and methods of today’s industry, spectacle and state.\textsuperscript{13}

The effective collapse of media into spectacular power “means quite simply that the spectacle’s domination has succeeded in raising a whole generation molded to its laws.”\textsuperscript{14} Spectacular government,

which now possesses all the means necessary to falsify the whole of production and perception, is the absolute master of memories just as it is the unfettered master of plans which will shape the most distant future. It reigns unchecked; it executes its summary judgments.\textsuperscript{15}

The spectacle, therefore, is mediated through its primal political form, \textit{spectacular power}, which, not at all coincidentally, is “the historical moment by which we happen to be governed.”\textsuperscript{16} And, within this unbroken social procession of mediating images dwells the hegemony of the \textit{clandestine}; “At the root of the spectacle lies that oldest of all social divisions of labor, the specialization

\textsuperscript{13} Debord, \textit{Comments}, 6.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 7.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{16} Debord, \textit{Society}, 15.
of power.”\textsuperscript{17} And with this comes the operational hegemony of covert agency; “Secrecy dominates this world, and first and foremost as the secret of domination.”\textsuperscript{18}

We should expect, as a logical possibility, that the state’s security services intend to use all the advantages they find in the realm of the spectacle, which has indeed been organized with that in mind for some considerable time; on the contrary, it is a difficulty in perceiving this which is astonishing and rings false.\textsuperscript{19}

Accordingly

Networks of promotion/control slide imperceptibly into networks of surveillance/disinformation. Formerly one only conspired against an established order. Today, \textit{conspiring in its favor} is a new and flourishing profession. Under spectacular domination people conspire to maintain it, and to guarantee what it alone would call its well-being. This conspiracy is a part of its very functioning.\textsuperscript{20}

It follows, therefore, that the ubiquity of the clandestine is itself the primary sign of the lurking presence of an extra-legal form of sovereignty; ‘In a world that \textit{really} has been stood on its head, truth is the moment of false-

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 18.
\textsuperscript{18} Debord, \textit{Comments}, 60.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 25. This neatly dovetails with the statement provided by CIA Director Richard Helms to the Church Committee (1975-6), the Senate body investigating the assassination operations (or ‘wet work’) undertaken by the CIA during the 1950s and 60s: “When you establish a clandestine service [like] the Central Intelligence Service, you established [sic] something totally different from anything else in the United States government. Whether it’s right that you should have it, or wrong that you should have it, it works under different rules…than any other part of the government.” Cited in Talbot, 112.
\textsuperscript{20} Debord, \textit{Comments}, 74.
hood.’ Paul Hirst has stated this plainly:

The nuclear-security apparatus reserves to itself considerable powers of control over economic resources, special police measures, etc., and has a capacity for secret policy-making whose limits are difficult to determine. If we take [Carl] Schmitt’s claim seriously that ‘sovereign is he who decides on the exception’ seriously, then most of our formal constitutional doctrines are junk.

‘Junk’ indeed, although ‘spectacle’ might be a more accurate term; ‘Understood on its own terms, the spectacle proclaims the predominance of appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance.’ Viewed through radical criminological lenses, contemporary onto-politics reveals a perpetual migration between antinomies: the public (political) and the private (covert) forms of decision-making. And it is precisely within this eternally unstable double movement that the covert power of the spectacle resides.

SPECTACULAR POWER, CRIMINAL SOVEREIGNTY, AND PARAPOLITICS

‘Real power begins where secrecy begins.’
—Hannah Arendt

The (radical) criminological term for this hitherto nameless condition outlined by Debord is criminal sovereignty—

21 Debord, Society, 14.
23 Debord, Society, 14.
ty and has been most thoroughly defined by Robert Cribb as

[N]ot just a topic but an analytical conclusion. On the one hand, it goes significantly beyond the proposition that relations between security and intelligence organisations, international criminal networks and quasi-states are occasional and incidental, the work of ‘rogue elements’ and the like. On the other hand, it falls significantly short of grand conspiracy theory: it does not suggest that the world of visible, ‘normal’ politics is an illusion or that it is entirely subordinated to ‘deep’ politics. Rather, it proposes that the tripartite relationship between security and intelligence organisations, international criminal networks and quasi-states is systematic, extensive and influential.24

The multiple extra-judicial affinities between criminal sovereignty and spectacular power thoroughly subvert mainstream criminology’s current preoccupation with models of good governance, transparency, and rule-compliance as benchmarks of social and political normality.

The great world-historical irony revealed by Debord is that the apparent ‘regression’ of the State into more archaic forms of governance is actually the supreme sign of the advancement of ‘those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail’.

It is precisely here that we can see the profound truth of the Sicilian Mafia’s maxim, so well appreciated throughout Italy: ‘When you’ve got money and friends, you can laugh at the law.’ In the integrated spectacle, the laws are asleep; because they were not made for the new production

24 Cribb, 8.
techniques, and because they are evaded in distribution by new types of agreement. What the public thinks, or prefers to think, is of no importance. This is what is hidden by all these opinion polls, elections, modernizing restructurings. No matter who the winners are, the faithful customers will get the worst of it, because that is exactly what has been produced for them.  

As I have argued elsewhere, any State that has been (extra-) constitutionally reconstituted under criminal sovereignty—or, in the alternative, has been socially and economically reduced to the pure functionality of the integrated spectacle—may be expected to exhibit the following four signs: governance as a substitute for government (the collapse of the distinction between ‘public state’ and ‘civil society’, resulting in an open-ended but clandestine ‘privatisation’ of the State); duality (the iterable relationship between ‘law’ and ‘crime’); nomadicism (a chaotic proliferation of supra-statist, statist, and sub-statist entities, all of an indeterminate legal nature, that regularly transverse established juro-political boundaries); and the irrational (the invisible co-option of the ‘public interest’ by the ‘private actor’). The radical criminological term for this temporal dominium of criminal sovereignty—‘the historical moment by which we happen to be governed’—is parapolitics, the study of ‘criminals behaving as sovereigns and sovereigns behaving as criminals in a systematic way…The task of parapolitics as a discipline is to identify the dynamics of that

25 Debord, Comments, 69-70.
26 Wilson, Government of the Shadows, generally.
27 Here, I am employing ‘nomadicism’ in the sense of ‘the nomadic’ as developed by Deleuze and Guattari at 351-423. The nomadic denotes not only a free moving material agent or agency, but also the ontological indeterminacy of the nomadic force, the equivalent of the ‘un-decidable’ in Deconstruction.
relationship and to delimit precisely the influence that it has, or does not have, on public politics.  

Most closely identified with the progressive scholarship of Peter Dale Scott, who strives throughout his work to formulate a new terminology, or even a poetics, with which to convey new understandings of hitherto undescribable political phenomena, the as yet still marginalized notion of the parapolitical lends itself supremely well to a Debordean application.

Scott defines parapolitics in the following manner:

1. A system or practice of politics in which accountability is consciously diminished. 2. Generally, covert politics, the conduct of public affairs not by rational debate and responsible decision-making but by indirection, collusion, and deceit. Cf. conspiracy. 3. The political exploitation of irresponsible agencies or para-structures, such as intelligence agencies.

For Debord the reduction of media to the functionality of spectacle induces the collective loss of historical and political reason; ‘under the rule of the integrated spectacle, we live and die at the confluence of innumerable mysteries.’ For Scott, the essence of the parapolitical is an ‘intervening layer of irrationality under our political culture’s rational surface.’ The submerged, or repressed, nature of covert agency is not only an ontological problem but an epistemological one as well; it is precisely because of its irrational nature that the parapol-

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28 Cribb, 8.
29 See Kinkle in general.
30 Scott, War Conspiracy, 238.
31 Debord, Comments, 55; also, 25, 40, 69 and 74.
32 Scott, Deep Politics, 6-7.
itical evades cognitive recognition, with all of the attendant ideological implications.

Just as politics as a field (‘political science’) studies the overt politics of the public state, so parapolitics, as a field, studies the relationships between the public state and the political processes and arrangements outside and beyond conventional politics. However, conventional, or liberal, political science assumes the normalcy of the state, both in its constitutional and normative dimensions, as a given and studies political phenomenon from the perspective of the state. Parapolitics, in contrast, constitutes a radically nominalist critique of conventional political studies. Parapolitics uses the varying levels of interaction between conventional states and quasi-statist entities as the basis for formulating an analytical perspective that privileges neither the state nor its alternatives as legitimate international actors. Although of no determinative political bias, parapolitics does foster a basic scepticism regarding the coherence of orthodox liberal understandings of the state.33

As a result of the clandestine application of spectacular power, mainstream scholarship is rendered thoroughly oblivious to the operational presence of the parapolitical mechanisms of governance, collectively denoted as the Deep State.

Liberal political science has been turned into an ideology of the ‘deep state’ because undisputable evidence for the [national security] ‘deep state’ is brushed away as pure fantasy or conspiracy34… Thus, the problem with liberalism in political sci-

33 Wilson, ‘Deconstructing the Shadows’, 30.
34 Ola Tunander cited in Wilson, ‘Deconstructing the Shadows’, 29
ence and legal theory is not its ambition to defend the public sphere, political freedoms and human rights, but rather its claim that these freedoms and rights define the Western political system.\textsuperscript{35}

For Scott, parapolitical scholarship has enabled us to directly perceive two aspects of the Deep State.

The potentially larger condition of a shadow government, or a state within a state, is what we may call the \textit{deep state phenomenon}. But there [is] also the more operational sense of the \textit{deep state connection}: a hard-edged coalition of witting forces including intelligence networks, official enforcement, illegal sanctioned violence, and an internationally connected drug mafia.\textsuperscript{36}

My own predilection, however, is to resist the totalizing implications of the language of Scott’s more recent work; in place of the seemingly monolithic Deep State, I prefer the radically pluralistic—if not latently schizophrenic—notion of Scott’s earlier term, the \textit{Dual State}.

The Dual State. A \textit{State} in which one can distinguish between a \textit{public state} and a top-down deep state. The \textit{deep state} emerges in a false-flag violence, is organized by the military and intelligence apparatus and involves their link to organized crime. Most states exhibit this duality, but to varying degrees. In America the duality of the state has become more and more acute since World

\textsuperscript{35} Tunander, 68.

\textsuperscript{36} Scott, \textit{American War Machine}, 21. ‘Today everything that has ever been labelled “invisible government”, or “shadow government” can be considered parts of that machine—not just the CIA and organized crime but also such other non-accountable powers as the military-industrial complex (now the financial-military-industrial complex), privatized military and intelligence contractors, public relations experts, and even Washington’s most highly organized lobbyists.’ \textit{Ibid}.
The dual nature, or duality, of the State signifies the suspension of political monism and the division of the residual ‘State’ into a public domain and a (quasi-) private ‘para-state’. Even more subversive is the (potentially) unlimited sub-division of the para-state into multifarious and competing clandestine groupings. The duality of the State correlates precisely with spectacular power; any State under the aegis of the integrated spectacle suffers an absolute loss of onto-political meaning by that fact alone.

So it is that thousands of plots in favor of the established order tangle and clash almost everywhere, as the overlap of secret networks and secret issues or activities grows ever more dense along with their rapid integration into every sector of economics, politics and culture. In all areas of social life the degree of intermingling in surveillance, disinformation and security activities gets greater and greater. The plot having thickened to the point where it is almost out in the open, each part of it now starts to interfere with, or worry, the others, for all these professional conspirators are spying on each other without really knowing why, are colliding by chance yet not identifying each other with any certainty…In the same network and apparently pursuing similar goals, those who are only a part of the network are necessarily ignorant of the hypothesizes and conclusions of the other parts, and above all of their controlling nucleus.\(^38\)

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37 Scott, *War Conspiracy*, 238. In turn, the ‘Dual State’ equates with a ‘deep political system’, which Scott defines as ‘one which habitually resorts to decision-making and enforcement procedures outside as well as inside those publicly sanctioned by law and society. In popular terms, collusive secrecy and law-breaking are part of how the deep political system works.’ Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK*, xi-xii.

38 Debord, *Comments*, 82-3.
But the truly vital connective thread between Debord and Scott lies within their respective meditations upon the primacy of the clandestine manipulation of public perception and social discourse for the domination of the politically irrational. For Scott, no less than for Debord, a stage-managed form of universal cognitive dissonance constitutes the highest form of parapolitical governance; in Scott’s terminology, the mass production and consumption of *deep events*, ‘events that are systematically ignored, suppressed, or falsified in public (and even internal) government, military, and intelligence documents as well as in the mainstream media and public consciousness.’ Like Debord, Scott has conceived of modern civilization as “a great conspiracy of organized denial”, the creation of a ‘partly illusory mental space in which unpleasant facts, such as that all Western empires have been established through major atrocities, are conveniently suppressed.’ Deploying the deep event as an instrument of parapolitical hermeneutics, Scott has advanced the proposition that the integrated spectacle is the interpretative key of the national history of the U.S.

In American history there are two types of events. There are ordinary events which the information systems of the country can understand and transmit. There are also deep events, or mega-events, which the mainstream information systems of the country cannot digest. I mean by a ‘deep event’ one in which it is clear from the outset that there are aspects which will not be dealt with in the mainstream media, and will be studied only by those so-called conspiracy theorists’ who specialize in deep history.

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Understood not as an accumulation of episodic events but as manifestations of foundational systemic properties, these deep events ‘suggest the on-going presence in America of what I have called a “dark force” or “deep state,” analogous to what [Vincenzo] Vinciguerra described in Italy as a “secret force…occult and hidden, with the capacity of giving a strategic direction to the [successive] outrages.”’\(^41\) For Scott, then, ‘national security state conspiracies’ as deep events serve as ‘components of our political structure, not deviations from them.’\(^42\)

Especially germane for my purpose is Scott’s arresting equation between the deep event and the (integrated) spectacle of the false-flag, best understood as a self-inflicted catastrophe within the public sphere as a means of: (a) controlling political perceptions; and (b) temporarily obviating conventional political operations in favor of enhancing the decisionism of the Executive branch—in other words Carl Schmitt’s infamous ‘state of exception’\(^43\). If deep events can be shown to periodically recalibrate the psychic economy of the collective post-political consciousness through the instantaneous and unending circulatory operations of mass media, then the hyper-intensive visuality and theatricality of false-flag spectacle may legitimately be considered an indispensable tool of clandestine suppression through the control of perception by means of media circulated imagery. In this sense, the false-flag resembles nothing so much as a media saturated variant of the much wider covert phenomenon of the strategy-of-tension, a parapolitical mode of governance mediated through catastro-

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\(^{41}\) Scott, ‘Systemic Destabilization’, 4 of 18.


\(^{43}\) Wilson, ‘The Concept of the Parapolitical’, generally.
phe. As Scott alludes, Italy is the contemporary birthplace of classic strategy-of-tension para-statism: Italy: the Piazza Fontana bombing in 1960, the Piazza della Loggia bombing in 1974, and the Bologna railway bombing of 1980, were all terrorist acts conducted by a clandestine far-right network embedded within the Italian military, national security, and police networks—and which, since this is Italy, included the Mafia—that were all re-presented by an hysteria obsessed media as manifestations of the homicidal will of the Far Left. In the words of Vincenzo Vinciguerra, one of the convicted conspirators, the explosions were ‘supposed to be the detonator which would have convinced the political and military authorities to declare a state of emergency.’ If the U.S., in turn, can properly be considered to constitute a Dual State—like Italy—then I should be able to point to instances of decisive political importance wherein the strategy-of-tension served as a mechanism of governance; equally, I should be able to provide evidence of false-flag spectacles having become embedded within the para-political landscape the Dual State.

YANKEES AND COWBOYS

“Clandestinism is not the usage of a handful of rogues, it is a formalized practice of an entire class in which a thousand hands spontaneously join. Conspiracy is the normal continuation of normal politics by normal means.”
—Carl Oglesby

An acknowledged classic in the literature of so-called

44 Ganser, generally.
45 Scott, ‘Systemic Destabilization’, 1 of 18.
'conspiracy theory’, Carl Oglesby’s *The Yankee-Cowboy War* (1976) imposes a Debordean geo-political grid upon the parapolitical systems and networks of the U.S. Dual State, that most violently manifested itself in The War Between the States (1861-65). Almost alone of works on American ‘deep History’, Oglesby’s text radically prioritizes the legacy of the struggle over Secession, revealing it as the genetic determinant of the U.S. as a quintessential dual (-ist) State.

> [T]he cost of nationhood in the United States was not merely a sectional compromise but also a compact between two distinct elites—a modern [sic] capitalist class that increasingly recognized the advantages of a free labor system and a southern planter class already implicitly committed to the preservation and extension of slavery… Hence, the United States seemingly emerged from its revolutionary period without a national ruling class; it was in fact a federation of two regional ruling classes.’

46 ‘That a power struggle of some kind is in fact necessary from the beginning [of American History] and that there has always been “a split at the top” is best evidenced by the struggle over secession.’ Oglesby, *Yankee-Cowboy War*, 323 fn. 3.

47 George M. Frederickson, cited in ibid, 323 fn. 3. As Oglesby freely admits, the core of his thesis is taken directly from Caroll Quigley’s magisterial work on the ‘anglo-sphere’, *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time*: ‘The period since 1950 has seen the beginnings of a revolutionary change in American politics. This change is not so closely related to the changes in American economic life as it is to the transformation in social life. But without the changes in economic life, the social influences could not have operated. What has been happening has been a disintegration of the middle class and a corresponding increase in significance by the petty bourgeoisie at the same time that the economic influence of the older Wall Street financial groups has been weakening and been challenged by new wealth springing up outside the eastern cities, notably in the Southwest and Far West. These new sources of wealth have been based very largely on government action and government spending but have, none the less, adopted a petty-bourgeois
Almost alone in following Oglesby, Scott, in his seminal work on the John Kennedy (hereafter JFK) assassination, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK* (1993), was the first to deliberately situate the locus for the potential for conspiracy within regionally based networks and factions that follow the broad excavations of Oglesby’s post-Secessionist schema. This theme of regionalism-as-dualism continues straight into Scott’s most recent work.

[I]t is quite possible to acknowledge that there are both ongoing continuities in American policy and also important, hidden, and recurring internal divisions that have given rise to America’s structural deep events. These events have repeatedly involved friction between Wall Street and the [Council on Foreign Relations] on the one hand, and the increasingly powerful oil- and military-dominated economic centers of the Midwest and the Texas Sunbelt on the other. At the time that General MacArthur, drawing on his Midwest and Texas support, threatened to challenge Truman and the State Department, the opposition was seen as one between the traditional Europe-Firsters of the Northeast and the new-wealth Asia-

outlook rather than the semi-aristocratic outlook that pervades the Eastern Establishment. This new wealth based on petroleum, natural gas, ruthless exploitation of national resources, the aviation industry, military bases in the South and West, and finally on space with all its attendant activities has centred in Texas and southern California. In existence, for the first time, made it possible for the petty-bourgeois outlook to make itself felt in the political nomination process instead of in the unrewarding effort to influence politics by voting for a Republican candidate nominated under Eastern Establishment influence.’ Quigley, 1245-6. Naturally Quigley’s state-centric account needs to be updated for our post-modern contemporary reality, primarily in the way in which the two regional/economic blocs have fused into a supra-statist entity labelled by Scott as ‘the American War Machine’, a hybridization underpinned by the transformation of high-velocity financial networks into cybernetic weapons systems; see Wilson, ‘Criminogenic Cyber-Capitalism’, generally.
Firsters. In the 1952 [federal] election, the foreign policy debate was between Democratic ‘containment’ and Republican ‘roll-back’... [a split] even within the CIA, between ‘Wall Street internationalism’ on the one hand and ‘cowboy-style’ expansionism on the other.48

Because of its obvious political symbolism, both Scott and Oglesby naturally focus on the JFK assassination—the spectacular murder of a New England liberal President in a reactionary southern state—as a pivotal micro-event encapsulating macro-level parapolitical trends. But The Yankee-Cowboy War is even more audacious in its scope than Deep Politics and the Death of JFK: Oglesby claims to have uncovered a hitherto unrecognized ‘parapolitical symmetry’ between the two great political scandals of 1960s and 1970s America respectively: the murder of JFK and the constitutional overthrow of Richard Nixon.

The assassination of John Kennedy and the downfall of Richard Nixon have both been viewed as isolated and moral disasters for American democracy... [In truth, the] two events are actually concrete links in a chain of related and ominous events passing through the entire decade in which they occurred and beyond. And this chain of events itself represents only the violent eruptions of a deeper power struggle of rival power elites identified here as Yankees and Cowboys. This book proposes to show that Dallas and Watergate are intrinsically linked conspiracies in a hidden drama of coup and countercoup which represents the life of an inner oligarchic power sphere, an ‘invisible government,’ capable of any act in the pursuit of its objectives, that sets itself above the

law and beyond the moral rule: a clandestine American state, perhaps an embryonic police state.\textsuperscript{49}

In essence, Oglesby is suggesting that both dramas were governed by a covert mechanism of parapolitical exchange; unable to successfully manage its international transition to Hegemon because of the embedded, or ‘deep’ structure of factional regionalism within the domestic political economy, the U.S. from 1945 to 1973 underwent a kind of clandestine factional power struggle ‘safely’ mediated through the periodic staging of integrated spectacles.

The Dallas-to-Watergate outburst is fundamentally attributable to the breakdown [that took place] within the incumbent national coalition, the coalition of the Greater Northeastern powers [anglophilia; international finance capitalism; Wall Street; The Council on Foreign Relations; NATO] with the Greater Southwestern powers [anglophobia; the aero-space industry; The China Lobby; the petroleum industry; the manufacturing sectors of the ‘military-industrial complex’], the post-Civil War, post-Reconstruction coalition, the coalition of the New Deal, of Yankees and Cowboys.\textsuperscript{50}

This is ‘Civil War II’, a simulacrum of the earlier War Between the States, but this time waged through clandestine agencies waving a false-flag of some sort, signifying the re-direction of covert agency from foreign into domestic political space—the political nightmare of the internationalization of Harry Truman’s national security

\textsuperscript{49} Oglesby, \textit{Yankee-Cowboy}, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 14.
This is the theme, at bottom, of the entire narration to follow. The agony of the Yankees and the Cowboys, the ‘cause’ of their divergence in the later Cold War period, is that there was finally too much tension between the detentist strategy of the Yankees in the Atlantic and the militarist strategy of the Cowboys in the Pacific. To maintain the two lines was, in effect, to maintain two separate and opposed realities at once, two separate and contradictory domains of world-historical truth. In Europe and the industrial world, the evident truth was that we could live with communism. In Asia and the [Developing World], the evident truth was that we could not, that we had to fight and win wars or else face the terrible consequences at home [in the form of civil unrest and radical leftism]. As long as the spheres of détente and violence could be kept apart in American policy and consciousness, as long as the Atlantic and the Pacific could remain two separate planes of reality wheeling within each other on opposite assumptions and never colliding, then American foreign policy could wear a look of reasonable integration. But when it became clear that the United States could not win its way militarily in [East Asia] without risking a nuclear challenge in the North Atlantic, the makings of a dissolving consensus were at hand.52

Essential to Oglesby’s schema is the cathartic function of the role played by spectacular power; the trauma of the spectacular event was consciously intended to yield a post-traumatic rehabilitation of political and cultural consensus through a prescribed script of appropriation. This becomes clear when we realize the depths of

52 Ibid, 5.
Oglesby’s crypto-Debordean approach: ‘The intensification of clandestine, illicit methods against racial and antiwar dissent [i.e., “The Spirit of 1968”] as a “threat” to the (secret) state precisely coincided with the intensified use of such methods in conflicts for power and hegemony taking place within the secret state, against a background of declining consensus.’\(^5^3\) The language here is wholly Debordean; although Comments on the Society of the Spectacle appears nowhere within Oglesby’s text, The Yankee-Cowboy War uncannily replicates Debord’s post-cynical reconstitution of the primacy of covert power within the age of spectacular power: ‘Clandestinism is not the usage of a handful of rogues, it is a formalized practice of an entire class in which a thousand hands spontaneously join. Conspiracy is the normal continuation of normal politics by normal means.’\(^5^4\)

For Oglesby, both Dallas and Watergate ‘book-end’ the tumultuous decade of the 1960s, which ultimately culminated in the irreversible transition of domestic hegemony away from the North-East Yankee elites to the South-West Cowboy factions, solidified by the election of Ronald Reagan and the establishment of the U.S. as a ‘pure war’ State.\(^5^5\) In the following chapters, I will offer a full-length Debordean reading of Oglesby’s thesis, adding an important observation of my own—that Dallas and Watergate, the shift from Yankee towards Cowboy political economies—were linked by an under-studied integrated spectacle: the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

\(^5^3\)Ibid, 5.
\(^5^4\) Ibid, 27-8.
\(^5^5\) Wilson, ‘Criminogenic Cyber-Capitalism’, generally; see also Wilson, ‘Speed/Pure War/Power Crime’, generally.