Negative capacity. From a psychoanalytic notion to a democratic strategy for dealing with conspiracy theories

Angelo Maria De Fortuna[*], *Raffaele De Luca Picione*[**]

Submitted: 14th June, 2024
Accepted:16th September, 2024

Abstract

Authors claim an innovative viewpoint on the conspiracy theories phenomenon. Considering them as epiphenomena of the crisis, authors do not see them as a mere attack to democracy (although they may have anti-democratic effects), rather they see them as creations in response to the human need for meaning. Thinking about the concepts of power and knowledge democracy, authors argue that the development of *negative capacity* can represent a strategy for individual and social development in a democratic perspective. Such capacity, if cultivated in a systemic and systematic way, can support the coexistence of different narratives (conspiracy and non-conspiracy) and well-being, providing an important aid to the individual and social right to understand the world while respecting otherness.

Keywords: Conspiracy theories, democracy, individual and social development, interdisciplinary approach, negative capacity.

[*] Department of Communication Sciences, Humanities and International Studies, Urbino University.
[**] Giustino Fortunato University, Benevento.

Corresponding Author: Angelo Maria De Fortuna. Dipartimento di Scienze della Comunicazione, Studi Umanistici e Internazionali, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo, Via Saffi 15, 61029 Urbino (Italy). E-mail: angelomariadefortuna @gmail.com

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

Introduction

In the contemporary world, affected by accelerated rhythms and the crisis of normative and ideological references, finding what to believe is not an easy task. Knowledge is impoverished by an accelerated process of fragmentation (De Luca Picione & Lozzi, 2021; Kaës, 2013). Therefore, the problem consequent to the inexorable fall of certainty is expressed in the identification of a reasonable truth within the world of narration, common sense and the fragilization of reality (Lorusso, 2018).

In the contemporary community – connoted by a form of onlife connectivity (Floridi, 2015) due to the pervasiveness of *Information and Communication Technologies* (ICTs) and the enormous influence they have (and will continue to have) on human ways of understanding the world via the circulation, dissemination and alteration of information and communication flows (Riva, 2018) – the "independent" search for meaning, in a plethora of plausible scenarios, explodes in multiple and disparate interpretations. Such practice manifests a widespread desire to weave the threads of the master narrative of contemporary history (Blanuša & Hristov, 2020; Fenster, 2008) – i.e. a narrative about the understanding of the era we are living in and how it affects our autobiographical identity (Bruner, 1990).

The right to have one's own opinion and to be able to express it freely (Bentivegna & Boccia Artieri, 2021) – as guaranteed, for instance, by Article 21 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic – is a dense (albeit apparently taken for granted) declination of living in a democratic country. Therefore, it is necessary to question the role of institutions – the third-party constructions that perform the function of guarantors (Kaës, 2013; Esposito, 2020) – in defining culture (Biesta, 2007) and what one has to believe in.

The idea that the contribution of higher education to democracy lies primarily in the education of knowledgeable, informed and critical citizens still plays a prominent role in the discussions on the role of higher education in democratic societies (Biesta, 2007). While some see the contribution of higher education specifically in the production of a particular type of critical citizen, others argue for a transformation of higher education itself. Higher education institutions (embedded in a broader social, political and economic context) are places of

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

productive cultural tension (Delanty, 2003) between specific training needs (e.g. the course of clinical psychology) and the concrete experience of trainees, who do not merely "learn the job", but, through experiential learning, create and integrate their own way (influenced by institutional experience) of understanding citizenship and professionality (e.g., being citizen and professional psychologists in today's community, with all the inevitable repercussions in ethical and deontological terms). Therefore, in our perspective, formative institutions should be conceptualized as situated and systemic experiences aimed at promoting human practices (as implementation of techniques and as creation of intra-personal processes). Delanty (2003), in this regard, suggests that universities should become places of public discourse rather than exclusive seats of expertise, so that they can become «important agents of the public sphere, initiating social change rather than just responding to it» (Delanty 2003, p. 81).

The *vexata quaestio* of the truth to believe (and the presence of its guarantors) is crucial and is fully expressed in the historical (van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018; Pagán, 2020), yet topical, phenomenon of conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories can be defined as *explanatory narratives* (Barkun, 2003; Harambam, 2020; Leone *et al*., 2020; Rabo, 2020; Räikkä & Ritola, 2020) *about the discovery of an evil plan to the detriment of the common good* (De Fortuna & De Luca Picione, 2023, 2024; Uscinski, 2018; Uscinski & Enders, 2023).

Throughout this contribution, authors will address the issue of conspiracy theories in relation to the phenomenon of power, then, in relation to the democracy of knowledge – i.e., a context in which formal and informal knowledge is easily accessible and debatable by all citizens. Subsequently, authors will discuss conspiracy theories as a dynamic process of *embodied* understanding of the world and how, through the development of *negative capacity* (Bion, 2023; De Luca Picione, 2020), it is possible to develop a dialogical, creative and democratic relationship between people and institutions (Douglas *et al*., 2024; Jolley *et al*., 2023).

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial –
No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage
please see: http://creativecommons.org

Conspiracy theories and their relationship with power and knowledge

It is interesting to present the definition offered by Giry and Tika (2020) in which they appreciate conspiracy theory as a hegemonic (or recurrent) view of world functioning: «It is a theory of power, of its practices and representations in which plots, pacts, secrecy and concealment play a decisive and central part» (Giry & Tika, 2020, p. 114). Given the above, and in view of numerous analyses conducted on large samples – for a review see Biddlestone *et al.* (2022); Goreis & Voracek (2019); Pilch *et al.* (2023) – one might believe that conspiracy theories may represent a worldview substantiated by an unconscious way of dealing with the power difference between alleged victims and alleged conspirators – for more on this, see Loziak & Havrillová (2024). The results, however, are not unambiguous. Although adherence to conspiracy theories tends to correlate with perceptions of personal powerlessness (i.e., the belief that one's actions do not affect outcomes, e.g., Abalakina-Paap *et al.* 1999; Imhoff & Lamberty, 2020), conspiracy theories are not infrequently supported – not only instrumentally, but also «genuinely» (Brotherton, 2015) – by objectively powerful people (Douglas *et al.*, 2019).

Psychological research often assumes that conspiracy theories involve powerful groups, but those authors rarely specify whether such power is an objective characteristic of these groups or a characteristic attributed to these groups by conspiracy theory believers (Nera *et al.*, 2020). In sum, the hypothesis that conspiracy theories are *at the core* a phenomenon that challenges power appears neither theoretically nor empirically tenable (Nera *et al.*, 2020), i.e., conspiracy theory does not *a priori* challenge or defend the *status quo* (Biddlestone *et al.*, 2022).

The issue of power, therefore, has to be approached with a broader perspective. One of the most accepted definitions of social power describes it as «asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations» (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p. 361) – these resources do not have to be necessarily material (Imhoff & Lamberty, 2020).

An interesting perspective on justice and power is provided by critical community psychology – an approach that seeks to promote individual and social well-being through the adoption of an ecological, justice-oriented and value-based perspective (Arcidiacono & Di

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial –
No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage
please see: http://creativecommons.org

Martino, 2016; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). This approach argues that well-being is also highly dependent on the environmental resources and the opportunities to access them. Critical community psychologists, therefore, work on promoting the quality of life through the advancement of justice, democracy, environment conservation, capacity building and freedom of choice (Natale *et al.*, 2016). According to this perspective, framing human well-being according to how it is affected by a power differential, rather than the more abstract promotion of human rights, requires considering where power resides and how to address such imbalances from a systemic perspective (Natale *et al.*, 2016).

According to the theory presented by Douglas *et al.* (2017), conspiracy theories represent a human response to an epistemic crisis – meaning is lacking –, an existential crisis – the perception of security and control is lacking –, and a social crisis – the widespread crisis exacerbates social malaise by activating needs for emotional closeness and the need for individual and social identity affirmation (Cichocka *et al.*, 2016; De Fortuna & De Luca Picione, 2024) – e.g., consider how migration flows and their (often questionable) management have stimulated the redundant theory of "ethnic substitution" as a political strategy in relation to an "authentic" belief. According to the theory presented by van Prooijen (2019), moreover, for a conspiracy theory to develop, it is necessary for a particular group to perceive a threat – in a particularly salient domain of life (Cichocka *et al.*, 2016) – and to be able to identify an alleged enemy responsible for the evil through a process of meaning-making.

As pointed out by De Fortuna and De Luca Picione (2023, 2024), the core of the models presented by social psychology (an area of psychology that has been most interested in the phenomenon of conspiracy) is precisely the sensemaking process of experience (mobilized by the negative emotions associated with the perception of crisis). However, this process has not been explored from a perspective that focuses on the meaning and the potential of this function.

Every human experience can be considered essentially semiotic. If we adopt a perspective that conceives of knowledge as an experiential process of continuous mediation and articulation of signs (De Luca Picione, 2015, 2021; Hoffmeyer, 1997; Salvatore, 2016; Salvatore *et al.*, 2021, 2022; Valsiner, 2014, 2021; Valsiner & De Luca Picione,

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

2017), culture no longer represents a shared entity or collection of knowledge (Bruner, 1990), but the very nature of the relations by which we both define the world and are, at the same time, defined by it (Valsiner, 2014). This, *de facto*, greatly enriches our potential for signification, but, at the same time, problematizes the question of identifying the "true" to be believed.

Recalling the issue of cultural democracy, it seems that the link between cognitive styles and belief in conspiracy theories is weaker in student samples. Thus, it seems plausible that education is effective in reducing susceptibility to conspiracy theories by implementing analytical thinking styles (Biddlestone *et al.*, 2022). Despite the consistency of such studies, these findings tell us nothing about the dimensions of meaning that such a narrative fulfils, both on an individual and on a collective level (De Fortuna & De Luca Picione, 2024; Klein & Nera, 2020). Indeed, in many cases, people of high social, cultural and economic status may be tempted to believe in a conspiracy theory (Brotherton, 2015). This suggests that everything related to education and critical reasoning skills represent nothing more than moderating variables in a catalytic context of causality (De Luca Picione & Freda, 2014).

As reported by Imhoff and Lamberty (2020) – who echo Magee and Galinsky (2008) – power can be formal or informal. Formal power is characteristic of a position that guarantees the legitimacy to exert influence, whereas informal power connotes factual power, not necessarily guaranteed by any formalized code. This condition, however, is expressed through differentiated access to material and immaterial resources (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). We could, moreover, explore the meaning that the very concept of "power" acquires, that is, of "having power" over someone, something or some place: control over the self, over the other, and over the material and immaterial, proximal and distal environment. Thus, in the broad sense, we can consider knowledge to be an application of a certain power – as it represents not only a system of learning, but also a processual system useful in practical applications, e.g., the ability to grasp useful information from experience to assume a position with respect to a given issue (Dewey, 2010).

That said, how does the relationship between knowledge and conspiracy theories develop? Who holds the knowledge? Who is

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial –
No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage
please see: http://creativecommons.org

legitimized to have it and with what effects? Is it possible for two different forms of power and therefore different forms of knowledge to coexist? If so, how can it be managed? It is precisely here that a possible contribution from psychoanalytically oriented clinical psychology in favour of democratic action and collective and individual well-being fits in.

Conspiracy theories and their relationship with the democracy of thinking in response to crisis

Conspiracy theories represent an adaptive response to the crisis of meaning (De Fortuna & De Luca Picione, 2023, 2024). Starting from an affective semiosis perspective (Salvatore & Freda, 2010; Salvatore *et al.*, 2021; Valsiner & De Luca Picione, 2017), we can understand the production and dissemination of conspiracy theories as a process of sensemaking in relation to unpleasant feelings and salient external or internal, ambiguous or nefarious experiences due to the crisis (De Luca Picione *et al.*, 2024). As mentioned above, uncertainty hinders people's ability to predict future circumstances and breaks the continuity of the narrative by creating meaning gaps (Freda, 2008; Stenner & De Luca Picione, 2023).

Automatic and intuitive thinking (including biases) is the quickest and most efficient process (Kanhemann, 2011; Valsiner, 2014; Valsiner & De Luca Picione, 2017; Salvatore *et al.*, 2019a) to fill in the meaning gaps and to re-weave the plot gaining an immediate affective dimension to shape experience (Salvatore *et al.*, 2019a, 2023; Valsiner, 2014; Valsiner & De Luca Picione, 2017; Venuleo *et al.*, 2020). Conspiracy theories abound in times of crisis (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). Again, the decrease in perceived control (the current crisis) increases the likelihood that people will adopt a conspiracy theory (Sullivan *et al.* 2010; Whitson & Galinsky 2008). Conspiracy theories, on their part, provide a simple reading of the world's phenomena that can restore a sense of mastery and identity (De Fortuna & De Luca Picione, 2024). Conspiracy theories, in sum, are about understanding the world in a state of deep affective and emotional activation due to the impairment of certain vital functions and needs (Douglas *et al.*, 2017). The issue, however, is very complex insofar as supporting

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

conspiracy theories, on the one hand, can have relevant consequences, e.g. for health – for a review see van Mulukom *et al*. (2022) – for history understanding (Butter & Knight, 2020), for the influence on prosocial attitude (Jolley & Douglas, 2014; Van der Linden, 2015); but on the other hand, it can represent a subjective narrative – not necessarily false, but tending to falsehood (Douglas & Sutton, 2023) – concerning one's way of understanding the world – a faculty, this, which is an expression of the functioning of a democratic society (Douglas *et al.*, 2019). This is why there is no need to resort to a hasty *debunking* strategy (Van Prooijen & Imhoff, 2022). Indeed, conspiracy thinking is not simply an inevitable reaction to postmodernity but can be a creative response (Butter & Knight, 2020). Conspiracy theories do not a priori pose a dangerous threat to democracy (Butter & Knight, 2020), they «can in fact play the role of a productive challenge to an existing order – albeit one that excessively simplifies complex political and historical events» (Fenster, 2008, p. 90). Conspiracy theories may not be strictly accurate, but they are one of the few popular attempts to address the problems of power and secrecy in modern society (Butter & Knight, 2020).

Conspiracy theories can be understood as an attempt to compensate for the powerlessness of bearing the world's evil and the need to unearth those responsible for all of society's problems (Blanuša & Hristov, 2020; Uscinski, 2018; Uscinski & Enders, 2023). Without considering the most literal meaning of the term "power", rather broadening its understanding by referring to the nuances it can acquire, conspiracy theories represent a function of epistemological and emotional, individual and social development in response to the crisis of meaning.

It is possible, however, that in some cases conspiracy narratives and individual and societal issues become so pressing that they lead to a-dialogical states of cognitive and emotional inflexibility. These are the cases in which theories are held with such conviction that they are pervasive and result in what Bollas (2011) calls a "*fascist state of mind*". Bollas (2011) believes that the ordinary functioning of a subject's mind is characterized by a dialogue between different parts of the self. To present this dialogue, Bollas (2011) uses the metaphor of a parliament. Just as in a parliament (which debates and makes decisions through a democratic process), the mind reaches conclusions through the interaction of its various parts. This process can involve

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

negotiations, compromises and conflicts, as the different parts have their own perspectives, needs and desires; whereby these different parts either compete for dominance or seek a resolution. Under the influence of a particularly intense impulse (such as fear, envy, uncertainty, etc.), this democratic intrapsychic dialogue can collapse into a centralizing internal order – like a dictatorship or tyranny of one voice – (Bollas, 2011): the "fascist mental state" – the reduction (the generalizing simplification of meaning) and hardening (the rigid reification of meaning) of meaning dimensionality, which leads to a reduced capacity for internal organization in the orientation of responsive and proactive action to environmental changes (Salvatore *et al.*, 2023; Venuleo *et al*., 2020). In practice, this translates into a monologic (Goertzel, 1994), incontrovertible and irrefutable view of the world, characteristic of the most effete idealists as well as the most convinced theorists. It is a non-dialogic narrative, but one that wants to impose itself as the only possible reality (De Luca Picione & Dell'Amico, in review; Webb & Rosenbaum, 2023).

The coexistence of two seemingly irreconcilable dimensions of power (my truth versus your falsehood), as well as the need to understand world events, do not have a simple, obvious or unambiguous resolution, but can benefit from the development of a capacity typical of clinical practice: *negative capacity* (Bion, 2023; De Luca Picione, 2020).

How clinical psychology can support the development of well-being and the coexistence of different views

Contrary to what it might seem – given the articulate elaboration of conspiracy thinking and the dedication to search for evidence in support of their theses (Brotherton, 2015) – conspiracy theorists enact a fast, intuitive and emotion/affection-driven style of reasoning (Blanuša & Hristov, 2020; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018; Webb & Rosenbaum, 2023). Indeed, as indicated above, belief in conspiracy theories is also inversely correlated with higher education indices, suggesting that developing slow thinking strategies reduces the likelihood of believing in conspiracy theories (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). This issue, however, as argued above, needs to be explored from a different perspective.

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial –
No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage
please see: http://creativecommons.org

Affect can be described as a primary psychophysical experience activated by the environment, but also as the main component of the human relationship with the context itself (Carli & Paniccia, 2003). According to *embodied cognition*, the representations of the world are rooted in the basic circuits that underpin the sensory processing of stimuli (De Luca Picione, 2024; Salvatore & Freda, 2011; Salvatore *et al*., 2019a; Tossici & Tossici *et al.*, 2024). This implies that the regulation of the relationship with the environment consists of the organization of psycho-sensory data with an increasing degree of specification and integration (Salvatore & Freda, 2011; Salvatore *et al.*, 2019a; Tossici & De Luca Picione, 2024; Tossici *et al.*, 2024). The dynamic nature of time, however, does not allow for only retroactive sense-motor regulation, as this would not guarantee survival. Consequently, the *embodied*, situated and immediate nature of the somatopsychic sense-making process is recognized in its inferential character (Salvatore *et al*., 2019a, 2021). The most basic level of understanding, existing since birth, focuses on the discernment of sensations into antithetical categories such as pleasant-unpleasant (Salvatore *et al*., 2019a, 2021). Thus, higher-order logical states develop as elaborations of lower-order states, so that the body functions partly as a disorganized container of physiological patterns and partly as a laboratory for processing them (Salvatore *et al*., 2019a). According to this logic, a *feeling* is the conscious experience of an affective activation (e.g., feeling angry is the experience of the affective state of unpleasantness); whereas *emotions* (e.g., "anger") are the cognitive interpretation of the affective state in accordance with contextual variables (De Fortuna & De Luca Picione, 2024; Valsiner & De Luca Picione, 2017): «*I am angry because they cover up the truth about vaccines. The powerful always do this*, *they want to defend their own narrow-minded interests. I will not take the vaccine*».

The state of psycho-physiological activation of this process, which immediately follows the rupture of continuity caused by the crisis – of meaning, control and social closeness, with reference to Douglas *et al.* (2017) – can lead to the easy acquisition of a conspiracy belief (De Fortuna & De Luca Picione, 2023, 2024). Indeed, in times of uncertainty, it is functional in reducing complexity by quickly and effectively guaranteeing a justificatory narrative that provides refuge from anxieties through the identification of a perpetrator (De Fortuna & De

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial –
No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage
please see: http://creativecommons.org

Luca Picione, 2024; Landau *et al.*, 2015). In its extreme functioning, the normal absence (e.g. the unknown about vaccines) mutates into the presence of something evil (the already known of their medical ineffectiveness and manipulative use). In this way, every unprocessed sign undergoes a process of reification (De Luca Picione & Freda, 2014) becoming the indessical sign of a conspiracy (De Fortuna & De Luca Picione, 2023, 2024). We can say that the state of distressing uncertainty is reified anthropomorphically in the construction of an enemy – the widespread tendency to define and defend one's own identity, sense of belonging, cognition and beliefs by means of an affect-laden process of enemizing otherness: the so-called *paranoid belongingness* (Salvatore *et al.*, 2019b).

Let us define – now that we have introduced an affective modality of understanding the world in times of crisis – how clinical psychology can be a useful tool for democracy and for the development of a sense resource in a community. The *act suspension* is a typical practice of clinical psychology that Carli and Paniccia (2003) take from Bion's (2023) theorization of *negative capacity*, i.e. the capacity to stand in uncertainty. In this theoretical perspective, the suspension of «acted belief» (Carli & Paniccia, 2003) – triggered by a rapid understanding of the world guided by affective sensations (I perceive something unpleasant) and subsequently insertable into a non-dialogical macro-category of understanding experiences ("*vaccines are definitely dangerous*"), comparable to the monological, concatenated belief system (Goertzel, 1994; Swami *et al.*, 2011) – could allow different views to coexist in a democratic intra- and extra-psychic dialogue (Bollas, 2011). Given that conspiracy theorizing would seem to correlate with emotional dysregulation (Molenda *et al.*, 2023) – not necessarily pathological (Bortolotti, 2023; De Fortuna & D Luca Picione, 2024; Douglas *et al.*, 2024) –, being able to contain and question the emotional response of sensemaking would open the «conjugation of reality and experience in the subjunctive» (Bruner, 2009). How is this possible?

Implementing *negative capacity*, the psychologist succeeds, with an internal work of reflection on the self in relation to the other, to conduct and develop the psychotherapeutic relationship without colluding with the client's relational proposal (Carli & Paniccia, 2003; Grasso *et al.*, 2004; Semi, 1985). Based on the previously given

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

reflection of knowledge as power, it can be said, in a broad sense, that the clinician acquires power from the suspension of immediate judgement. By being able to "come in and out" of the relationship, i.e. by being able to identify with what one hears and experiences, but, at the same time, also being able to distance oneself from it, the clinician (over time) gains a deeper understanding of the matter in play (Grasso *et al.*, 2004; Semi, 1985).

In the authors' discussion, this ability to pause in indefiniteness while waiting to better understand the stimuli around us – leaving intuitive (and more properly emotional) understanding unsaturated – can be particularly useful in the development of a multi-voice dialogue on the meaning of the events that animate our uncertain times.

According to *embodied cognition*, the initial act of immediate symbolization of an experience – which, however, is influenced by spatiotemporal dynamics and the individual and collective culture that generated it (Salvatore *et al.*, 2021; Valsiner & De Luca Picione, 2017; Valsiner 2014, 2021) – is often intuitive and not associated with a properly communicable definition (Valsiner & De Luca Picione, 2017). Nevertheless, by developing curiosity, flexibility, the ability to tolerate frustrations and the understanding of how emotions work, one can take a playful attitude towards narratives while leaving them unsaturated. Abiding in uncertainty makes creative evolutions possible in the fantasy game between truth and lies. Being and non-being manifest themselves in the conjunctive alternation of ideas, images, words and emotions (Bruner, 1990; Stenner, 2018; Winnicott, 2016). By leaving the question of reality and non-reality unresolved, therefore, we are more ready to accept the other's reality, even if it seems implausible to us. This would promote dialogue and peaceful coexistence (Douglas *et al.*, 2024; Jolley *et al.*, 2023).

As with the development of a transitional area (Winnicott, 1971) during childhood (which continues to exist throughout the individual's life), the community needs the development of a social transitional area that ensures that truth and illusion remain in a zone of co-existence (De Luca Picione & Dell'Amico, under review).

This process alone does not resolve the whole problem, because it is enormously complex, but it does create the conditions for potential development. People, by being able to keep their experience unsaturated, would be open to the unforeseen alternative and would be able

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial –
No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage
please see: http://creativecommons.org

to verify their experiences with fewer preconceptions, whether communicated by peers, politicians, or even institutions. The development of negative capacity would contribute to the development of informal power (in the broad sense defined above) because it would allow people not to collapse their experience and judgement into a collusive act or an emotionally hasty judgement.

Picking up on Magee and Galinsky (2008), *negative capacity* would contribute to the development of power because it could lead to an increase in the ability to access «valued resources in social relations» (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p. 361). In some sense, therefore, the development of *negative capacity* can circumvent the problem of formalized power by providing an alternative based on the acceptance of the other and the possibility of democratic dialogue as it would also allow visions that are "impossible to accept". The cultivation of *negative capacity*, in sum, can at the very least contribute to a more fruitful relationship with the resources one already has – in this regard, it could be interesting to examine (in future works) the unfolding of individual and social resources in the light of the construct of *semiotic capital* (Cremaschi *et al*., 2021a, 2021b). An example, only apparently trivial, could be useful: from a community clinic perspective, a school program for the development of negative capacity could help young television viewers to assume a more critical attitude towards political debates staged on mass information channels. Again, a collective, by cultivating this skill, might be able to curb the increasing polarization of public debate and hate speech (Bentivegna & Boccia Artieri, 2021). The development of this capacity, therefore, would be desirable at all levels of society.

In the opening we mentioned the role of institutions as guarantors (Kaës, 2013). This role, however, does not end with the possession of knowledge, of which they are still the official guarantors – e.g., the clinician who conducts a therapy without legal authorization commits an offence under Article 348 of the Penal Code (Abusive Exercise of a Profession) – despite the fact that they are challenged by the democratic faculty to acquire (with enormous ease) any information through IT devices (creating new forms of culture). Resuming (after justifying with our reflections) what was said at the beginning, Delanty (2003), points out that: «Universities (*but also institutions in general*) can play a major role in the knowledge society if they accept what might be

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

called the *principle of transgressivity*, that is, the university is not the exclusive site of expertise but a *site of public discourses*» (Delanty, 2003, p. 81, *our italic*).

The role of institutions as *meta-guarantors* (Kaës, 2013) – which are transpersonal constructs whose main function is to stabilize a symbolic framework (perceivable through rituals, norms, traditions and shared belief systems) that grants sense, identity, continuity and predictability at personal and collective levels –, therefore, from a community perspective, not only involves the provision of knowledge, but also and above all the need to point out the skills-as-processes (such as *negative capacity*) that protect a democratic dimension through which everyone can secure a personal form of well-being and power (while fully respecting others' freedoms and self-determination). We speak, in conclusion, of a function of institutions that strives to ensure the development of the processes involved in the parliamentary mental structure discussed by Bollas (2011). In such an intra-interpersonal relationality, many issues would take on a narrative, democratic and potentially evolutionary dimension.

Conclusion

Beginning with a brief description of the complexity of the current community, authors defined conspiracy theories in their relationship with the construct of power and the plurality of the world's readings (the democracy of knowledge). Defining power as the faculty of being able to make use of a certain type of resources, we qualified conspiracy theories as an attempt to respond adaptively and creatively to the crisis of power and knowledge (in the post-truth paradigm).

In a perspective that encompasses both the needs of individuals and those of the community, authors sought to provide some insights into how *negative capacity* can be a useful democratic resource for the human need to respond to the crisis (of which conspiracy theories are an outcome). Finally, authors argued for the importance of a function of institutions that stands as a guarantee of democracy and plurality (not just given knowledge) by allowing for gradualness (as opposed to immediacy) of thought and reflective processes.

In this article, authors do not simply warn against conspiracy

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial –
No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage
please see: http://creativecommons.org

theories, but capture their communicative and symptomatic meaning and value (De Fortuna & De Luca Picione, 2024). If culture has no agentivity (Valsiner, 2014), rather it is humans who act, then conspiracy theories are not themselves a danger to democracy, but are, on the contrary, a creative outcome (Butter & Knight, 2020) with a communicative value (that is indispensable for any psychologist and scholar of the human dimension). If conspiracy theories are grasped in their dimension of meaning – that is, in their representation of the impossibility of satisfying basic human needs (Douglas *et al.*, 2017) –, then the individual and institutional response needs to be democratic because, regardless of their effects (even nefarious), they concern collective well-being and the difficulty of managing power imbalances (Arcidiacono *et al.*, 2016; Natale *et al.*, 2016). Imbalance, which, in this case, is understood first and foremost in terms of access to the «hidden truth» (Fenster, 1999; Giry & Tika, 2020): the real purpose of vaccines, the murky events behind the US elections, climate change, a planetary elite managing the world's wealth, etc.

The answer to the crisis of meaning is neither unambiguous nor resolving, but it may pass through certain institutional interventions aimed at the implementation of clinical and psycho-educational projects (to be carried out at an integrated and systemic level) so that both the collective and the individual may benefit from the acquisition of the skills necessary to avoid enclosing the meaning of experience in a single, rigid and unequivocal vision. In this way, then, conspiracy theories (with their nefarious effects) would not disappear, but individuals and collectives would be better equipped to deal with the complex dynamics of democratic coexistence.

References

Abalakina-Paap, M., Stephan, W. G., Craig, T. & Gregory, W. L. (1999). Beliefs in conspiracies. *Political Psychology*, *20*(3), 637-647. DOI: 10.1111/0162-895X.00160

Arcidiacono, C. & Di Martino, S. (2016). A critical analysis of happiness and well-being. Where we stand now, where we need to go. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective*, *2*(1). DOI: 10.1285/i24212113v2i1p6

Barkun, M. (2003). *The nature of conspiracy belief. A Culture of Conspi-*

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

racy. Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America. University of California Press.

Biddlestone, M., Cichocka, A., Žeželj, I. & Bilewicz, M. (2020). Conspiracy theories and intergroup relations. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 219-230). Routledge.

Biddlestone, M., Green, R., Cichocka, A., Douglas, K. & Sutton, R. (2022). *A systematic review and meta-analytic synthesis of the motives associated with conspiracy beliefs*. PsyArXiv Preprints. DOI: 10.31234/osf.io/rxjqc

Biesta, G. (2007). Towards the knowledge democracy? Knowledge production and the civic role of the university. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *26*, 467-479. DOI: 10.1007/s11217-007-9056-0

Bion, W. R. (2023). *Learning from experience*. Taylor & Francis.

Blanuša, N. & Hristov, T. (2020). Psychoanalysis, critical theory and conspiracy theory. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 67-80). Routledge.

Blanuša, N. & Hristov, T. (2020). Psychoanalysis, critical theory and conspiracy theory. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 67-80). Routledge.

Bollas, C. (2011). *The Christopher Bollas Reader*. Routledge.

Bortolotti, L. (2023). Is it pathological to believe conspiracy theories? *Transcultural Psychiatry*, *0*(0). DOI: 10.1177/13634615231187243

Brotherton, R. (2015). *Suspicious minds: Why we believe conspiracy theories*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. S. (2009). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Harvard University Press.

Butter, M. & Knight, P. (2020). Conspiracy theory in historical, cultural and literary studies. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 28-42). Routledge.

Carli, R. & Paniccia, R. M. (2003). *Analisi della domanda.* Il Mulino.

Cichocka, A., Marchlewska, M. & De Zavala, A. G. (2016). Does self-love or self-hate predict conspiracy beliefs? Narcissism, self-esteem, and the endorsement of conspiracy theories. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *7*(2), 157-166. DOI: 10.1177/1948550615616170

Cremaschi, M., Fioretti, C., Mannarini, T., Salvatore, S. (2021a). Semiotic Capital. In *Culture in Policy Making: The Symbolic Universes of Social Action.* Cham: Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-71967-8_8

Cremaschi, M., Fioretti, C., Mannarini, T., Salvatore, S. (2021b). A Cultural View of Policy-Making. Pluralism, Performativity, and Semiotic Capital. In *Culture in Policy Making: The Symbolic Universes of Social Action*. Springer, Cham.

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

De Fortuna, A. M. & De Luca Picione, R. (2023). Perché crediamo alle teorie del complotto? Analisi multiprospettica di un fenomeno psicosociale. In T. De Giuseppe, E. Martini, R. De Luca Picione & A. L. Zurra, *Educational Science tra Digital Transformation e Sfide Interdisciplinari per Professionalità Inclusive* (pp. 37-65). Il Papavero.

De Fortuna, A. M. & De Luca Picione, R. (2024). Searching for meaning through conspiracy theories. Considerations on the state of the art of psychological literature and definition of a research agenda from a semiotic dynamic cultural perspective. *Culture & Psychology*, *0*(0). DOI: 10.1177/1354067X241246760

De Luca Picione, R. (2015). *La mente come forma*, *la mente come testo: una indagine semiotico-psicologica dei processi di significazione*. Mimesis.

De Luca Picione, R. (2020). Dreaming Uncertainties. A semiotic interpretation of Bion's "Negative Capability": condition for imagination emerging. In T. Valério, A. C. Bastos & L Tateo (eds.), *From dream to action: imagination and (im)possible futures* (pp. 217-231). Information Age Publishing.

De Luca Picione, R. (2021a). Metapsychology of borders: Structures, operations and semiotic dynamics. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, *23*(4), 436-467. DOI: 10.1080/13642537.2021.2000463

De Luca Picione, R. (2021b). Models of semiotic borders in psychology and their implications: From rigidity of separation to topological dynamics of connectivity. *Theory & Psychology*, 31(5), 729-745. DOI: 10.1177/0959354320947184

De Luca Picione, R. & Dell'Amico, S. (under review). A psychoanalytic reflection on fascism, populism and the social transitional space of the democracy. *Psychoanalytic Dialogue*.

De Luca Picione, R. & Freda, M. F. (2014). Catalysis and morphogenesis: The contextual semiotic configuration of form, function, and fields of experience. *The catalyzing mind: Beyond models of causality* (11), 149-163. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4614-8821-7_8

De Luca Picione, R. & Lozzi, (2021). Uncertainty as a constitutive condition of human experience. An extensive review of the paradoxes and complexities of sensemaking processes in the face of uncertainty crisis. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis and Education*, *1*(2). DOI: 10.32111/SAS.2021.1.2.2

De Luca Picione, R., Freda, M. F., Bianco, R., Capelli, F., De Fortuna, A.M., Dioni, B., Fante, C., Raffin, C., Rollo, S., Troisi, G., Sandomenico, C. & Musetti, A. (2024). Sensemaking processes of parents with children affected by autism spectrum disorders. Identification of specific clusters of Sense of Grip. *Human Arenas*, 1-22. DOI: 10.1007/s42087-024-00406-5

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial –
No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage
please see: http://creativecommons.org

Delanty, G. (2003). Ideologies of the knowledge society and the cultural contradictions of higher education. *Policy Futures in Education*, *1*(1), 71–82. DOI: 10.2304/pfie.2003.1.1.9

Dewey, J. (2010). *Democracy and education*. International Alliance Press.

Douglas, K. M. & Sutton, R. M. (2023). What are conspiracy theories? A definitional approach to their correlates, consequences, and communication. *Annual review of psychology*, *74*, 271-298. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-psych-032420-031329

Douglas, K. M., Sutton, R. M. & Cichocka, A. (2017). The psychology of conspiracy theories. *Current directions in psychological science*, *26*(6), 538-542. DOI: 10.1177/0963721417718261

Douglas, K.M., Uscinski, J.E., Sutton, R.M., Cichocka, A., Nefes, T., Ang, C.S. and Deravi, F. (2019), Understanding Conspiracy Theories. *Political Psychology*, 40: 3-35. DOI: 10.1111/pops.12568

Douglas, K. M., Sutton, R. M., Biddlestone, M., Green, R. & Toribio-Flórez, D. (2024). Engaging with conspiracy believers. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 1-19. DOI: 10.1007/s13164-024-00741-0

Esposito, R. (2020). *Istituzione*. Il Mulino.

Fenster, M. (1999). *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture*. University of Minnesota Press.

Floridi, L. (2015). *The onlife manifesto: Being human in a hyperconnected era*. Springer nature.

Freda, M. F. (2008). *Narrazione e intervento in psicologia clinica. Costruire, pensare e trasformare narrazioni tra Logos e Pathos*. Liguori Editore.

Galinsky, A. D., Magee, J. C., Gruenfeld, D. H., Whitson, J. A. & Liljenquist, K. A. (2008). Power reduces the press of the situation: implications for creativity, conformity, and dissonance. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *95*(6), 1450-1466. DOI: 10.1037/a0012633

Giry, J. & Tika, P. (2020). Conspiracy theories in political science and political theory. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 108-120). Routledge.

Goertzel, T. (1994). Belief in conspiracy theories. *Political psychology*, 731-742. DOI: 10.2307/3791630

Goreis, A. & Voracek, M. (2019). A systematic review and meta-analysis of psychological research on conspiracy beliefs: Field characteristics, measurement instruments, and associations with personality traits. *Frontiers in psychology*, *10*, 205. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00205

Grasso, M., Cordella, B. & Pennella, A. R. (2004). Metodologia dell'intervento in psicologia clinica. In *Metodologia dell'intervento in psicologia clinica*. Carocci.

Harambam, J. (2020). Conspiracy theory entrepreneurs, movements and

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

individuals. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (pp. 278-291). Routledge.
Hoffmeyer, J. (1997). *Signs of Meaning in the Universe*. Indiana University Press.
Imhoff, R. & Lamberty, P. (2020). Conspiracy beliefs as psycho-political reactions to perceived power. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 192-205). Routledge.
Jolley, D. & Douglas, K. M. (2014). The effects of anti-vaccine conspiracy theories on vaccination intentions. *PloS one*, *9*(2), e89177. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0089177
Jolley, D., Seger, C. R. & Meleady, R. (2023). More than a prejudice reduction effect: Positive intergroup contact reduces conspiracy theory beliefs. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *53*(6), 1262-1275. DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2973
Kaës, R. (2013). *Il Malessere.* Borla.
Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Macmillan.
Klein, O. & Nera, K. (2020). Social psychology of conspiracy theories. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 121-134). Routledge.
Landau, M. J., Kay, A. C. & Whitson, J. A. (2015). Compensatory control and the appeal of a structured world. *Psychological bulletin*, *141*(3), 694-722. DOI: 10.1037/a0038703
Leone, M., Madison, M. L. & Ventesel, A. (2020). Semiotic approaches to conspiracy theories. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 43-55). Routledge.
Lorusso, A. M. (2018). *Postverità.* Laterza.
Loziak, A. & Havrillová, D. (2024). Conspiracy Mentality: How it Relates to Populism, Relative Deprivation, Mistrust of Expertise and Voting Behaviour. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, *20*(1), 1-15. DOI: 10.5964/ejop.10049
Magee, J. C. & Galinsky, A. D. (2008). 8 social hierarchy: The self-reinforcing nature of power and status. *The academy of management annals*, *2*(1), 351-398. DOI: 10.1080/19416520802211628
Natale, A., Di Martino, S., Procentese, F. & Arcidiacono, C. (2016). Degrowth and critical community psychology: Contributions towards individual and social well-being. *Futures*, *78*, 47-56. DOI: 10.1016/j.futures.2016.03.020
Nelson, G. & Prilleltensky, I. (2005). *Community psychology: In pursuit of liberation and well-being*. Palgrave Macmillan.
Nera, K., Bertin, P. & Klein, O. (2022). Conspiracy theories as opportunistic attributions of power. *Current opinion in psychology*, *47*, 101381. DOI: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101381

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

Pagán, V. E. (2020). Conspiracy theories in the Roman Empire. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 531-541). Routledge.
Pilch, I., Turska-Kawa, A., Wardawy, P., Olszanecka-Marmola, A. & Smołkowska-Jędo, W. (2023). Contemporary trends in psychological research on conspiracy beliefs. A systematic review. *Frontiers in psychology*, *14*, 1075779. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1075779
Rabo, A. (2020). Conspiracy theory as occult cosmology in anthropology. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp. 81-93). Routledge.
Räikkä, J. & Ritola, J. (2020). Philosophy and conspiracy theories. In M. Butter & P. Knight (eds.), *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories* (pp.56-66). Routledge.
Riva, G. (2018). *Fake News: vivere e sopravvivere in un mondo di post verità.* Il Mulino.
Salvatore, S. (2016). *Psychology in black and white: The project of a theory-driven science*. IAP.
Salvatore, S. & Freda, M. F. (2011). Affect, unconscious and sensemaking. A psychodynamic, semiotic and dialogic model. *New ideas in psychology*, *29*(2), 119-135. DOI: 10.1016/j.newideapsych.2010.06.00
Salvatore, S., Palmieri, A., Pergola, F. & Andrisano Ruggieri, R. (2019a). Trasformazioni sociali, affettivizzazione della sfera pubblica e ricerca di senso. [Social transformations, affectivization of the public sphere and search for sense]. *Educ. Sci. Soc. Open Access J*, *10*, 206-255. Retrieved from https://journals.francoangeli.it/index.php/ess/article/view/8726
Salvatore, S., Mannarini, T., Avdi, E., Battaglia, F., Cremaschi, M., Fini, V., Forges Davanzati, G. *et al.* (2019b). Globalization, demand of sense and enemization of the other: A psychocultural analysis of European societies' sociopolitical crisis. *Culture & Psychology*, 25(3), 345-374. DOI: 10.1177/1354067X18779056
Salvatore, S., De Luca Picione, R., Bochicchio, V., Mannino, G., Langher, V., Pergola, F., ... & Venuleo, C. (2021). The affectivization of the public sphere: the contribution of psychoanalysis in understanding and counteracting the current crisis scenarios. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis and Education: Subject*, *Action & Society*, *1*(1), 3-30.
Salvatore, S., De Luca Picione, R., Cozzolino, M., Bochicchio, V. & Palmieri, A. (2021). The role of affective sensemaking in the constitution of experience. The affective pertinentization model (APER). *Integrative psychological and behavioral science*, 1-19. DOI: 10.1007/s12124-020-09590-9
Salvatore, S., Mannarini, T., Gennaro, A., Celia, G., De Dominicis, S., De Luca Picione, R., ... & Rocchi, G. (2023). The affective regulation of

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial –
No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage
please see: http://creativecommons.org

uncertainty: The semiotic dimensionality model (SDM). *Social Sciences*, 12(4), 217. DOI: 10.3390/socsci12040217
Semi, A. A. (1985). *Tecnica del colloquio*. Raffaello Cortina Editore.
Stenner, P. (2018). *Liminality and experience: A transdisciplinary approach to the psychosocial*. Springer.
Sullivan, D., Landau, M. J. & Rothschild, Z. K. (2010). An existential function of enemyship: evidence that people attribute influence to personal and political enemies to compensate for threats to control. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *98*(3), 434-449. DOI: 10.1037/a0017457
Swami, V., Coles, R., Stieger, S., Pietschnig, J., Furnham, A., Rehim, S. & Voracek, M. (2011). Conspiracist ideation in Britain and Austria: Evidence of a monological belief system and associations between individual psychological differences and real-world and fictitious conspiracy theories. *British Journal of Psychology*, *102*(3), 443-463. DOI: 10.1111/j.2044-8295.2010.02004.x
Tossici, G. & De Luca Picione, R. (2024). The aesthetic and affective matrix of pre-reflective sensemaking at the origins of the relationship between subject and world. A dialogue between Kant's Third Critique and psychoanalysis. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. DOI: 10.1080/00207578.2024.2306937
Tossici, G., Nitri, A. & Zurloni, V. (2024). Stress and sport performance: A PNEI multidisciplinary approach. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *15*, 1358771. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1358771
Uscinski, J. E. (2018). The study of conspiracy theories. *Argumenta*, *3*(2), 233-245.
Uscinski, J. E. & Enders, A. M. (2023). *Conspiracy theories: A primer*. Rowman & Littlefield.
Valsiner, J. (2014). *An Invitation to Cultural Psychology*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
Valsiner, J. (2021). *General Human Psychology*. Springer.
Valsiner, J. & De Luca Picione, R. (2017). The Dynamic Regulation of Affective Processes through Semiotic Mediation. *Rivista internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia, 8*(1), 80-109. DOI: 10.4453/rifp.2017.0006
Van der Linden, S. (2015). The conspiracy-effect: Exposure to conspiracy theories (about global warming) decreases pro-social behavior and science acceptance. *Personality and individual differences*, *87*, 171-173. DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2015.07.045
van Mulukom, V., Pummerer, L. J., Alper, S., Bai, H., Čavojová, V., Farias, J., ... & Žeželj, I. (2022). Antecedents and consequences of COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs: A systematic review. *Social Science & Medicine*, *301*, 114912. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.114912

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org

van Prooijen, J. V. & Imhoff, R. (2022). The psychological study of conspiracy theories: Strengths and limitations. *Current opinion in psychology*, *48*, 101465. DOI: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101465
van Prooijen, J. W. (2019). An Existential Threat Model of Conspiracy Theories. *European Psychologist.* DOI: 10.1027/1016-9040/a000381
van Prooijen, J. W. & Douglas, K. M. (2017). Conspiracy theories as part of history: The role of societal crisis situations. *Memory studies*, *10*(3), 323-333. DOI: 10.1177/1750698017701615
van Prooijen, J. W. & Douglas, K. M. (2018). Belief in conspiracy theories: Basic principles of an emerging research domain. *European journal of social psychology*, *48*(7), 897-908. DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2530
van Prooijen, J. W. & Van Vugt, M. (2018). Conspiracy theories: Evolved functions and psychological mechanisms. *Perspectives on psychological science*, *13*(6), 770-788. DOI: 10.1177/1745691618774270
Venuleo, C., Salvatore, G., Ruggieri, R. A., Marinaci, T., Cozzolino, M. & Salvatore, S. (2020). Steps Towards a Unified Theory of Psychopathology: The Phase Space of Meaning Model. *Clinical neuropsychiatry*, *17*(4), 236–252. DOI: 10.36131/cnfioritieditore20200405
Webb, R. E. & Rosenbaum, P. J. (2023). Conspiracy Theory Vulnerability From a Psychodynamic Perspective: Considering Four Epistemologies Related to Four Developmental Existential-Relational Positions. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *11*(1), 60-74. DOI: 10.5964/jspp.8089
Whitson, J. A. & Galinsky, A. D. (2008). Lacking control increases illusory pattern perception. *science*, *322*(5898), 115-117. DOI: 10.1126/science.1159845
Winnicott, D. W. (2016). The location of cultural experience. *The Collected Works of DW Winnicott*, 429-436. Oxford University Press.

Copyright © FrancoAngeli
This work is released under Creative Commons Attribution - Non-Commercial – No Derivatives License. For terms and conditions of usage please see: http://creativecommons.org