

Conspiracy Theories: The Need for Critical Thinking [B2]

Dai terrapiattisti ai no vax, sembra che in quest'epoca di massima informazione le teorie complottiste siano sempre più in auge. Si tratta di un fenomeno nuovo? C'è un modo efficace di contrastarne la diffusione?



In 1835, the [editor](#) of The Sun newspaper in New York, Richard Adams Locke, decided [to play a trick](#) on his readers. An intelligent man with many scientific interests, Locke was angry with the astronomers of the day who frequently published pseudo-scientific articles about the inhabitants of other planets. At the time, most astronomers were religious and [argued that](#) God would never have created other [heavenly bodies](#) without populating them. Locke published a series of articles [claiming that](#) the Moon was covered in mountains, lakes and rivers and inhabited by a variety of marvellous creatures. Locke cited the work of prominent British astronomer and inventor Sir John Herschel as his [source](#) and [stated that](#) Herschel had [glimpsed](#) the lunar landscape through his [remarkable](#) new telescope.

PEOPLE ON THE MOON

Unfortunately, the [prank backfired](#). Halley's Comet was predicted to pass close to the Earth in 1835 and was in fact [spotted](#) by US astronomers on the very day Locke published his first article. [Amidst](#) all the excitement and fascination with the night sky, the articles seemed to confirm [what](#) other astronomers had been saying for years and Locke's [hoax](#) was taken as truth. [Eager](#) to [cash in](#), the The Sun's [publisher](#), Benjamin Day, was [only too happy](#) when the lunar series became a sensation. He [hired](#) a local artist to illustrate the articles and the story [spread like wildfire](#). By the time the [hoax](#) was over, the The Sun was the [most widely-read](#) newspaper in the world and the story had been republished many times.

TIN FOIL HATS

This [trend](#) continued into the 20th century. In 1926, the writer and biologist Julian Huxley, brother of the novelist Aldous Huxley, published a short science fiction story called The [Tissue-Culture](#) King. In it, he introduced the idea of wearing a [hat](#) made of [tin foil](#) to prevent mind-reading. Huxley was a scientist and his fiction was so full of convincing scientific [jargon](#) [that](#) many readers thought there might be some truth behind it.

MICROWAVE VOICES

During World War Two, some people working near radar transponders reported hearing clicks, or even [speech](#), inside their heads. The phenomenon, known as the Microwave Auditory Effect, may have been caused by modulated radio frequencies. Over the years, other people suffering from auditory hallucinations or other types of mental illness made the connection and began to [claim](#) [that](#) government agents, corporations or even paranormal [beings](#) were transmitting sounds and thoughts into their heads using microwave signals. They referred to the technology as Voice to [Skull](#) or V2K and the recommended protection was a [tin foil hat](#)!

CONFIRMATION BIAS

If these stories sound familiar, it is probably because this is just how [what](#) we call 'fake news' is generated today. Someone publishes a story [loosely](#) based on scientific facts and directly confirming [what](#) people already think they know. Facilitated by new technology and unscrupulous media platforms, the story is re-published, re-posted or re-tweeted and goes viral, [gathering](#) detail as it spreads. So, [put together](#) a good story, a new technology and a few credulous people, and you [end up with](#) a conspiracy theory. Counteracting Misinformation: Conspiracy Theories

WATCH THIS VIDEO

Il movimento terrapiattista fa sempre più proseliti. In tutto il mondo stanno aumentando le persone che credono che la terra sia piatta e che per secoli oscure cospirazioni siano riuscite a farci credere il contrario. Abbiamo intervistato alcuni sostenitori del terrapiattismo in California.

Glossary

- **only too happy** = ben felice
- **Tissue-Culture** = coltura di tessuti
- **stated** = affermare
- **glimpsed** = intravedere
- **gathering** = riunire, raccogliere
- **put together** = mettere insieme
- **remarkable** = notevole
- **backfired** = ritorcersi contro
- **Eager** = desideroso
- **hired** = assumere, ingaggiare
- **most widely-read** = il più letto
- **tin foil** = carta stagnola
- **claim** = affermare
- **hoax** = bufala
- **publisher**, = editore
- **hat** = cappello
- **beings** = esseri, entità
- **Skull** = cranio
- **loosely** = vagamente
- **editor** = caporedattore
- **speech** = voci
- **heavenly bodies** = corpi celesti
- **prank** = burla, goliardata
- **Amidst** = nel mezzo di
- **spread like wildfire** = diffondersi a macchia d'olio
- **jargon** = gergo
- **to play a trick** = fare uno scherzo
- **argued** = sostenere
- **cash in** = approfittare
- **source** = fonte
- **spotted** = avvistare
- **trend** = tendenza
- **end up with** = ritrovarsi con