

Recall This Book 92  
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Janet McIntosh: (JP, EF)

Transcript

Elizabeth Ferry: Hello everyone, welcome to *Recall this Book* where I'm here back in the studio with my illustrious colleague and co-host John Plotz. Hello John.

John Plotz: Hey Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Ferry: And me Elizabeth ferry. And our guest today is another illustrious colleague, Janet McIntosh, Janet is a sociocultural and linguistic anthropologist. She's currently writing a book about language in the US military, and along with these projects with this project, she's been using tools of linguistic anthropology to examine the language of the right wing, particularly in the United States, and that's what we're going to be talking about. So Janet, as is our wont, maybe you could get us started and just tell us. A little about your work and how that how you're looking at language use in the. US fits into it.

Janet McIntosh: Sure, thank you so much for having me. So yes, my history is as a socio cultural and linguistic anthropologist. I used to work in sub-Saharan Africa and switched over in recent years to looking at how language militarize is service people. And then I was sort of diverted along the way by the Trump administration and all the fascinating linguistic dynamics that were going on there. So with my colleague Norma Mendoza Denton, who's at UCLA, we co-authored a book of essays called *Language in the Trump era*, and you know, once you start to pay attention to. This stuff it keeps grabbing at you no matter how hard you try to quit it. Right wing I just can't quit.

Elizabeth Ferry: You know, so yeah. So I mean, would you say that you Were kind of attuned to these questions, because of what you were. I mean, we've all been attuned to them. This is

something that's very, you know, part of the reason why your book, for instance, language in the Trump era has been a, you know, a lot of people have been excited about it. Is that it's something that people have noticed, yeah. But would you say that your work?

Janet McIntosh: I think that the paternal disciplinarian that you get in a lot of Trump language and a lot of the right-wing language that's trying to school the left into being harder and tougher and less pathetic and sensitive and snowflakey. There really is some as we call it inter discursivity with certain elements of military. Language, so I think I was kind of attuned to elements of that.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, yeah and also. And this can maybe lead us to some concrete examples. The ways in which sort of the inside and outside are defined right, who gets to be in a group that's in on a secret or outside absolutely right?

Janet McIntosh: I mean, the marine core is the ultimate in-group, for instance, and one of the things that's been so effectively powerful about Alt, right? Language there the world of memes and so forth. And Q Anon. Has been that it's supremely good at making people feel empowered because they're part of an exclusive in-group right that has. And here's where we go away from the military that has access to say in the case of Q Anon, you know secret knowledge and is empowered and emboldened by this vague idea of an alternative state waiting in the wings and so forth, but it's knowing the right language that gets you access for that.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, and that has.

Janet McIntosh: Possibility in power.

Elizabeth Ferry: I mean, so one of the examples we want to talk about is the

*let's go Brandon* example right? So maybe start us out and give us a little bit of the background.

Janet McIntosh: Of it, yeah, right. So I'm sure I'll skip some things, but there's probably a lot of background knowledge. OK, so that is a right-wing slogan that got going in the fall. 2020 There was a race Talladega race track and a driver named Brandon Brown had one and while he was being interviewed on live TV, there was a raucous crowd in the stands who were like ripping off their shirts and pumping their fists and chanting folk Joe Biden like that which was an ongoing had been an ongoing chant at. At some sports games. And for whatever reason, the news broadcaster said, oh listen they're chanting. *Let's go Brandon*. And it's not clear whether that was a conscious or unconscious re layering of the writing.

Janet McIntosh: At any rate, this was taken up with great hilarity by folks on the right. *Let's go Brandon* became that slogan. And there's this kind of super thin veneer. This obvious pretense of not swearing but actually underneath it all, cursing out Joe Biden and meaning to say *fuck Joe Biden*, so it's got tons of appeal.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, right?

Janet McIntosh: I mean, there are lots of things going on here, right? One thing I was thinking about just. Before coming here is that. There's always this this wink like oh, we're in cahoots with each other with one another as a as a group of anti-Biden folks, because we know what it really what it really means.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right?

Janet McIntosh: We really mean Fuck Joe Biden, but that winking thing. It's like we're in cahoots and I'm remembering I cast my mind back to 2008 when Sarah Palin was debating Joe Biden. And the VP president. Debates and she infamously winked multiple times at the camera, and it was her effort to do this whole, to enlist her supporters in this well, you and I know

what's really going on Winky, if it might have flown with her followers.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, right? Yeah, yeah.

Janet McIntosh: It was mocked by the left, but that sort of sense of oh, there's a bit of a shared secret, right? But then another layer that's going on here is that there's this whole language, ideology backdrop among the right, which your listeners will know very, very well. Which is. A kind of hostility to the idea that people should be careful with their language right now. It's sort of the anti PC ideology. The mockery of this idea, that the details and nuances of language matter we have to not hurt or wound each other with language. And I think that part of what Let's Go Brandon, as a slogan does, is it actually mocks. The very idea that you'd have to mince words and you can see that in some of the three are concrete examples of that, like there was a T-shirt for sale. At Red, let's go Brandon, and then I'd like to solve the puzzle and underneath that there's a graphic that looks like it's from Wheel of Fortune where it says Folk Joe Biden, but they've deleted with opaque rectangles like EU in fog and the eye and Biden. It's like it's right there, but they're kind of pretending.

Elizabeth Ferry: See, that's one dimension of it, because it's like a veneer. But it's a veneer that nobody is supposed to. Not see through yeah, right? I mean it's very. It's so thin that it is. I agree with you it is a kind of mocking gesture of like the idea of veneers, right? Exactly like I'm going to say this, but I can't get in trouble and there's this sort of media thing like I can't get in trouble.

Janet McIntosh: Right?

Elizabeth Ferry: Saying it on TV.

Janet McIntosh: Exactly or on a Christmas Eve phone call with Joe Biden, when one guy rang off going.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right?

Janet McIntosh: Let's go Brandon and then afterwards like it was just playful fun so you have plausible deniability.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, yeah.

Janet McIntosh: And you also, if you're an evangelical, who doesn't want to cuss out loud, you can put that sign in your window.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, yeah.

Janet McIntosh: And I've seen photos on the. On a Facebook page of children wearing let's go Brandon sweatshirts, there's a whole chain of stores in New England by the way that are now.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, right?

Janet McIntosh: Called let's go Brandon yes.

Elizabeth Ferry: And in your article, which will, if with your permission post on our website you visited one such store, right? Yeah, in a way though, it's kind of like implausible deniability.

Janet McIntosh: That's a great way of putting it.

Elizabeth Ferry: Because it's like it's not like anyone really believes that that they're not saying that.

Janet McIntosh: That's so true.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, yeah.

Janet McIntosh: That's so true. Yeah, but it is, it is. Fun, you know. Meanwhile it gets paired with. Symbolism that it has been increasingly dark and violent. It's being printed on guns. It's being, you know, it was hung over an overpass. Let's go Brandon next to a swastika on a big banner. It's printed on

this so-called freedom frag bottle openers that are shaped like grenades, and so it's getting. And that's what we call that in semiotics, regimentation where you keep putting one side. In proximity to other signs, and there's a kind of a rubbing off of meaning, and so it gives. Let's go brand in a bit of a sinister. It can be fun, but it can also be sinister, and that pairing of levity with sinister intimations is also setting up the frog memes were great. That as well, it's something the alt right is very good at.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, yeah.

Janet McIntosh: It's great at enlisting people effectively.

John Plotz: I really like your unpacking of that, but the fragging isn't just asserting the kind of. I don't know. Violence of the right as belonging to some sort of authoritarian impulse that is deep in our country. It's also the notion of rebellion, and I'm wondering if that tension, the idea that it's at once. I don't know the well-disciplined right and the undisciplined, right? Like how does that doubleness? Yeah, yeah, I mean. I, I guess this is an impossible question to answer about something about how the semiology of these signs works, but it's about whether it's really activating 2 contradictory things at once and holding them together, or whether it's just gesturing at the one but really adhering to the other.

Janet McIntosh: I don't know, but you just made me think about one thing I'm writing about when it comes to military signage during boot camp, which is that there is there are totally contradictory messages about the idea that this is a structure. That's incredibly rule bound. And then there are perpetual violations of those rules and. Mocking of those rules and. That those opposite poles.

John Plotz: Top Gun mill. Movies are built right like we're here to be the best. Where the instrument of the US government and we're breaking every rule development that we're here to enforce

the rules because the rules are important, they have to be obeyed.

Janet McIntosh: I were breaking all. The rules.

John Plotz: And therefore we get to. Break them all in important.

Janet McIntosh: And we're going rogue.

John Plotz: So yeah, right.

Janet McIntosh: I mean, so. I mean, I'm reading it now because of the way because of what I'm working on as a sort of vaguely. It smells a little bit like the way that military power likes to work in the USA. That's what it's reminding me of.

Elizabeth Ferry: It also? I mean, it seems like a reference to the civil War too, right? The rebel. They were the. Rebels, and that was the. Right, so by kind of enrolling that. Stance or that position?

John Plotz: Right, right? But you're also talking to people.

Elizabeth Ferry: You're bringing that history with you to some extent.

John Plotz: Yeah, totally, but you're also talking to people who don't have a shared code book like it's not as if like the nudge, nudge wink itself has to be. It like it has to carry with it its own instructions for being deciphered, 'cause it's not as if people know it already. That's kind of why I was asking you about militarized language, because I totally take the point that anytime you end. Or any kind of institution you're given, sort of the jargon to activate you. You know, so that we know if something problematic.

John Plotz: We know what that means. You know, like we because you know we're professor is on a campus. So if you're told something problematic, you know what to read and add. But this is different because it's meant to recruit a lot of

people like unlike the military, which is only. Whatever it is 1,000,000 people. This is reaching 250.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right? And it doesn't have that institutional framework.

Janet McIntosh: That's a good point.

John Plotz: Yeah, exactly.

Janet McIntosh: Well, right? I mean recruiting tools that keep things kind of baggy like that can get more people right. Because every people can in fill with the fantasy of their choosing. That's one of the geniuses of Q Anon. Actually, yeah it comes to the conspiratorial stuff that people are reading in. They can fill in the fantasies that they're most invested in.

Elizabeth Ferry: Maybe this is a moment to turn to Q Anon, which you've also and Q drops which you've also written about, which seem to be a different, uh, a different kind of secrecy. Because it's much deeper and it's more invested in being hard to figure out, maybe.

Janet McIntosh: Right, yeah, absolutely 0, right?

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, so it comes with that.

Janet McIntosh: I mean, it also has a little bit of a little bit of decoupling between what we call the signifier and the signified, but it is deliberately much more cryptic, and that's part of the appeal.

John Plotz: Janet, can you just say one more sentence on what you mean By the decoupling of the signifier and the signal?

Janet McIntosh: Sure, well I think it's common for folks to imagine the linguistic meaning is more or less transparent, right that we have sort of dictionaries in our head and here in. Look up the definition.

Elizabeth Ferry: Language sort of works on the fact that we assume that to be true, right?

Janet McIntosh: We write and that it's neatly intelligible. In fact, ordinary language has all kinds of. Of slippage and messiness between the surface form and what's actually meant, and people will give classic examples or things like. If I say if I look at the window and I say oh it's, it's getting cold in here, I might really mean get up and close the window so there are all kinds of ways that on the daily we're not being 100% transparent when it comes to the relationship between the surface form of our signs or signifiers, and what we actually mean, but I. Do think that especially with Q Anon and then also with let's go Brandon. Uhm, there's a more deliberate and obvious kind of sense that, OK, what you see on the surface isn't exactly what's meant. There's something more to be done, and there are different reasons for that, like you were saying, Elizabeth with let's go, Brandon.

Janet McIntosh: It's the implausible deniability. Everyone wants the meaning to be known even though they're not saying it directly. But with Q Anon, you know that was that movement has been very empowering in a different way, because there's a real decoupling of between the sign forms themselves in the Q drops that Q started to put on. 4 Chan and four Kun and eight Kun back in 2017. There's a real discrepancy between those signs and any kind of clear meaning, and in fact you have to have an arsenal. Well, first of all, it's never entirely clear what Q wanted to mean, but they're leaving all these little clues cryptic. You know aphorisms, numbers, letters, acronyms, and so forth, and saying things like everything is connected and look forward to look backward. These little cues about how you're meant to interpret them to dig for something super.

John Plotz: So John can I ask a sort of historical linguistic question is. That always been true of prophecy, like going back to Nostradamus or something.

Janet McIntosh: Oh yeah, yeah, actually.

John Plotz: OK, yeah.

Janet McIntosh: So in an article I wrote about it, I say it's a lot like divination. Yeah, you know, my earlier work in Kenya. One thing I looked at was how diviners would use. You know, modes of language that were totally unintelligible to ordinary people, and you had to have special access to, like the supernatural truths. In order to declare them, yeah.

John Plotz: Right, like the Delphic Oracle

Janet McIntosh: Like glossolalia speaking in tongues, though, the tongues of men and angels are usually indecipherable to the ordinary human ear, but sometimes there are folks who claim to be able to interpret the tongues as they come because they have a more direct channel to the divine.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, right?

Janet McIntosh: So it actually that's part of how. Q Anon I think has gotten its power is through this sort of. Vaguely divinatory language. A lot of what it says is quite prophetic, right? Nothing can stop what's coming. The storm is coming. Or weirdly, you're going to love how this movie ends.

John Plotz: So in some sense, it's the opposite of the implausible deniability part the let's go brand in which is just one to one correspondence or something.

Janet McIntosh: Really good point.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah yeah.

John Plotz: But this is meant to be the fulfilled.

Elizabeth Ferry: And it, it seems like it produces, and this is where there's

kind of a creep. Be resemblance to, like literary critique and stuff, right? It produces a community of people who are debating different interpretations, right? And sort of.

Janet McIntosh: That's right, and that.

Elizabeth Ferry: I like has its. Own sure kind of community building.

Janet McIntosh: And you feel petty and you. Feel powerful as the person who can feed beneath the surface.

John Plotz: Yes, strong readers and we clear close readers.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yes, find the Germany.

John Plotz: Originalists probably foundationalists.

Janet McIntosh: Yeah indeed. Yeah, well and with Q with Q Anon of course a lot of the people who became adherence, you know, anon's followers, code crackers, people who would bake the so-called bread crumbs. Or people who feel alienated from the so-called elite experts. So right the experts in the university are exactly who they do not want to be looking to for.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, right, right.

Janet McIntosh: For the real truth, right, they want they have direct access to it, and that's tremendously empowering. Yeah, then, that was very wasn't stand still. Is and then that cryptic language? You know, having secrets is power. You know George Simmel wrote about this. Right secrecy equals power, whether that's about holding a secret or cracking a secret. All of those are empowering right. It was very, very empowering, and it feels. And it felt state like I think it felt, has felt like. There's this old state waiting in the.

Elizabeth Ferry: Wings yes, yes, that has this kind of looking glass quality to relationship to what are perceived as the institutions of power now.

Janet McIntosh: Look by looking glass quality you mean.

Elizabeth Ferry: Well, I don't know, maybe this is. Pushing it but. Is there do you feel like there's any kind of degree of implicit? Like, OK, now we're going to use these tools of, you know, we're going to be the ones who know the inner knowledge and can Lord it over the rest of you. Yeah, yeah, so that's what I mean. Like that that it's sort of like a looking glass university discourse or something like that. Or a looking glass elite discourse. You disagree no, no, I agree I.

John Plotz: Was just thinking of this Adorno essay from the 50s the stars down to Earth about why people like astrology and that astrology it just specifically on that power question. It's actually not a political conspiratorial account. It's just an account of like wanting to know that there's some kind of esoteric order that is. Available to common people through newspaper astrological columns which align you with the stars which are so much more important than any earthly configure.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right?

John Plotz: Yeah wow.

Janet McIntosh: Transcendently important.

Elizabeth Ferry: Definitely yeah, and that require. Esoteric tools and.

Janet McIntosh: Yeah. And meanwhile everything that comes out of the mouth of you know Democrats and university professors and scientists and so forth should be subject to skepticism. It's a whole epistemological orientation where one must read beneath the surface, right? Whether it's for the. Dastardly realities of the lifts. Cabal of, you know, pedophilic conspiracies or whether it's because Trump is trying to tell you something with the way he moved his hand in. That meeting

John Plotz: Are you making a strong claim for the political affinity to the right? Like is there an elective disposition towards right wing politics for this? Or is it just happened to be the case that Q Anon itself is, which is manifestly a right-wing conspiracy thing?

Janet McIntosh: Right?

John Plotz: But you know, we think of example.

Janet McIntosh: I don't, it's not that strong a claim, I just think it's. Uh, a really handy way of making people feel empowered and congealing them effectively around a community, but it's also effective as we've been. Saying and yeah. Yeah, me too. Do you feel like you can repeat the service?

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, yeah.

Janet McIntosh: In fact, recurs idea of the hermeneutics of suspicion is that you know this notion, that Allah marks all of Freud so much of what we see on the surface of society. We should be reading more deeply into for these patterns of these forces of capital and this subconscious and so forth.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, right? And then so zooming back out just for a little bit. You know all of these kind of secrets and you know delicate operations of veiling and unveiling. Exist also within a politics of direct speech and you know, we tell it like it is and what you've described as semiotic callousing, which I'd like you to unpack for our listeners, and.

Janet McIntosh: Sure, yes that is, and it is. It is really different and, in some ways, as you say, contradictory in some ways to the delicacy with which, like you and Don will construct a drop and the interpreter will interpret it. So this idea of semiotic callousing came up. For me when I was looking at the way language is used during basic training in Parris Island,

South Carolina, which is one of two Marine core recruit training depots in the States and.

John Plotz: It's in a Billy Joel song.

Elizabeth Ferry: He said.

Janet McIntosh: No, I did not.

John Plotz: It is his sort of meta. This is a test. For Vietnam is that they come from Parris Island. But yeah, anyway, sorry.

Janet McIntosh: Yeah, so I mean and. And of course everyone who's seen you know Stanley Kubrick full metal jacket is familiar with some of what goes on in Parris Island. It's true, there's a lot of yelling and it is true that recruits are still insulted, although the rules of you know recruit, training order. Says you're not meant to demean and insult and disrespect and so forth. And of course, the drill instructors do that all the time. Yes, they're a little. They don't venture as often into things like racial slurs, but they're still all the gendered trouble you know, I, I'm not sure how blue to get on this show, but you know? Pansies and homophobic stuff. Little girls. Cupcakes and so forth so.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right.

Janet McIntosh: And OK, so what's going on there? I mean, there's a lot, it's a rite of passage. People are being ground down. I love Victor Turner, but it's also I think there's a teaching tool within the very use of insults that all your old sensitivities need to be dulled. Whether that has to do with your personal. Or your empathic mercy for, say, the enemy because you know it's in some very, very loose fashion. The drill instructor is to the recruit as the Marine is to the enemy because the marine will turn around and then use dehumanizing slurs and insults and so forth against the people that they're supposed to kill.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, but not pedagogically.

Janet McIntosh: Not pedagogically anymore, right? So this so. The first kind of we, the wave of semiotic callousing, really, really starts during. During basic training, and it is indeed pedagogic. So I mean and I.

John Plotz: So it's kind of a live fire drill like you're meant to be able to put up with all these things. Since there are things, you might be able to, you might have to endure out of the world.

Janet McIntosh: Meant to be able to see them right.

John Plotz: And then civilians are different because they can't endure these things 'cause they haven't been tough and.

Janet McIntosh: You know, especially left wings, right? But and especially women and especially gay people and so forth, gay men. But yes, absolutely it. And when you say it's like a live fire drill, I'm really riveted by the way that this mode of using language is talked about by. 8 Marines and veterans and drill instructors in this kind of quasi physical way like you're meant to thicken your you meant to help develop a thick skin you're meant to like roll off you it's. It's like as if the you're getting little verbal semiotic bullets.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, yeah.

Janet McIntosh: And you're meant. To harden yourself, and that's supposed to translate into.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, or like napalm or something.

John Plotz: I'm just I guess I'm asking about this notion of abusive language or the language that. Is like, you know, sort of declaring one's allegiance to. You know, whatever, uh, sort of Trump speech. I guess. How much you understand that as being abuse in order to put people in their place versus how

much you're connecting it to the drill Sergeant model, which is more like toughening you up so you can.

Janet McIntosh: Tufeni right? I know right?

John Plotz: Be one of us. Pedagogic as opposed to abusive, yeah?

Janet McIntosh: Exactly, I don't know this is good for conversations.

Elizabeth Ferry: But I mean the abusive is. Also pedagogic to some other potential listener, right? I mean when they're calling, when you're when you're yelling at someone and saying you're a, you're a liberal crybaby.

John Plotz: Oh, you're signaling to other people.

Elizabeth Ferry: You're also signaling to the other people who you believe will agree with you or you hope. Will agree with you, right?

Janet McIntosh: That's a great point, and maybe you're getting you know, no one wants to be called, uh, uh, wuss or a crybaby or infantilized, or sometimes feminize. So maybe it gets swing people over to this empowering side of Trumpy discourse.

Elizabeth Ferry: And it's actually. I mean it's there is this funny way in which social media enables that kind of communication? Because often social media is. Or, you know, let's say a tweet. You know, has, uh has uh. Presumed or performed direct object. Of view, I'm speaking to. You, Queen Elizabeth or whatever. But in fact, the tweet is speaking to. Other people who agree, right, yeah?

Janet McIntosh: That's right, the intended audience is someone other than the supposed target.

John Plotz: Then the addressee, yeah, right yeah, that's a good point.

Janet McIntosh: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Elizabeth Ferry: All right, well this may be our moment to begin turning towards home, and as our listeners will know, we generally have a section called Recallable Books which don't necessarily have to be literal books. That you know this conversation may have provoked in our minds, and maybe in your mind, so that you know if you want to, you want to go down any of these rabbit holes. Here are some ideas, so perhaps I'll begin. Out with and John will laugh.

John Plotz: I will not.

Elizabeth Ferry: Although I loved him, there have been very few times that I have suggested a Trollope novel in this podcast, as my recallable book.

John Plotz: I'll laugh gently with you.

Elizabeth Ferry: But this is going to be one of them. It's not actually a terrifically good novel. It's called Marianne Fay, one of the later Trollope.

John Plotz: I have never read it.

Elizabeth Ferry: But it's yeah. I'm not sure well you know, go for it, but. But there's a part of it. Which one of the main characters, Marion Fay, the title character, is a Quaker, who is who becomes lured, falls in love with her. And there's a passage in which and it has a very interesting father daughter relationship. They're often really kind of good father, daughter, relationships and draw up novels and, and he speaks in what's called Quaker Plain speech, which has a number of different features. But maybe the most famous and kind of. Prominent feature is. Referring to people as the end vowel or vowel in the UM. He the passage in the novel, says that you know her father kind of absolved her of doing this so that. She would use you. Which is, you know, was at the time. The you know, as in French or Spanish, was a plural form of the second person that was used. As a form of respect, in contrast to the singular form, which is the and

the which was used for children or persons of lower stature, right? So and Trollope says. And thus she was absolved from the slight tinge of hypocrisy of Quaker speech. And it really reminded me of this sort of, you know, complicated, somewhat unpredictable, but also highly wrought use of language as kind of enrolling different kinds of. Politics, because of course quadruplane speech was intended as a leveling right. Nobody should be getting. You know special a special pronoun because they're we're all you know, sinners, and we're all equal in our relationship to God.

John Plotz: Like in Spain, in the civil war, the Royalist used few.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right exactly yeah, two right.

John Plotz: Do #2 yeah.

Elizabeth Ferry: And it reminded me of an article by Michael Silverstein about that shift where this sort of interesting thing happened because the Quakers started, you know very pointedly, using vowel and the. Kind of irking other people who rebelled against this and saw it as a kind of slightly you know, Rover, rebellious, and maybe even you know. Hypocritical as Trollope seems to suggest, and so they kind of double down on you. And the argument is that that's sort of the shifting moment when in fact everybody started. It did in fact lose its kind of sense of hierarchy, right, right? But instead of, as the Quakers had had. Hoped becoming calling everyone the endowed. You're now we call everyone you so. There is an article by Silverstein. Which we will put on the.

John Plotz: Yeah, I want to read that article. I'm not sure I want to read that novel, but I definitely did.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yes, I might even put the passage says it is in the public domain. John do.

John Plotz: Cool, I do. It's very short and I'm imagining some listeners

might be thinking of it already, which is the Richard Hofstadter article from 1964. The paranoid style in American politics, and it was a pleasure to go back and reread it.

Elizabeth Ferry: You have a...

John Plotz: American politics has often been an arena for angry minds, and he goes on to say I called this way of thinking in American politics. The paranoid style simply because no other word adequately evokes the sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy. And, you know, the reason I was asking your question. About the innate right witness, Janet was like to think about, you know, people like offset or make the argument that there's something distinctive about American, you know, radically democratic politics from the 19th century that that sparked this. I mean, going back to the you know, to the populists who always had sort of left- and right-wing dimensions, but were. Often conspiracy thinkers. They often were afraid of the bankers. They were afraid of the International Jewish conspiracy, and yet they were also, you know, very left wing and some of their politics. So just to think about what that. You know the difference between openness, kind of in a way, like a search for an open democratic politics that precisely depends on conspiracies about there being locked rooms elsewhere that that openness can't reach and so that Hofstetter article is 60 years old Now 70 but seems.

Janet McIntosh: That's great, I would love to look at that.

John Plotz: 60 yeah.

Janet McIntosh: Yeah, I wanted to share a book by a fellow anthropologist named Susan Lepselter. She published a book in 2016 titled The Resonance of Unseen Things, Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny. So she did incredible field work in Nevada among UFO believers. This is a really

poetic, sympathetic, beautifully written book. She is interested in. In, I mean this has to do with reading the signs in the world and interpreting what forces lie beneath them and the UFO believers do have something in common with Q Anon followers in the sense that they're constantly connecting the dots. Like, you know, constellations in the night sky, they'll find a. A figure there. There's a word for that called apophenia, which is where you where you draw connection. You find patterns in random signs. And one of the things that Lepselter argues is that all this perception of the uncanny signs of. Aliens among this community in Nevada. Aliens who capture and trap people. It's kind of a big metaphor for the malaise and hopelessness. The despondency of downward economic mobility, so here we have. It's a 2 Fer because we have the UFO believers reading into the signs beneath them and finding aliens, right? And then we have lip seltzer. Reading what the UFO believers are saying about UFO's and reading between.

Elizabeth Ferry: Yeah, that's great. This app I think it's.

John Plotz: Abyssinia all the way down, yeah.

Elizabeth Ferry: Like a good.

Janet McIntosh: Ethnographer wonderful ignored for reading beneath them to the deeper meaning and in this case, we can actually go back to Mark. 's right, it has to do with despondency about capitalist late capitalism, but it's a wonderful, wonderful read. I highly recommend it.

John Plotz: You remember that Saturday Night Live set of sketches about alien abduction.

Janet McIntosh: Oh, how could I? Are we reenacting?

John Plotz: Yeah, but right.

Elizabeth Ferry: Right, right? Well. For the moment, nothing remains except

to thank Janet so much for great conversation and for coming to talk with us.

Janet McIntosh: Pleasure, thank you so much what? A fantastic thing you have going now what? What number is this again?

Elizabeth Ferry: Well, it's going to be in the 90s.

John Plotz: It's somewhere in the high.

Elizabeth Ferry: High 90s, yes, so listeners you know interpret this as you will.

Janet McIntosh: Yeah, yeah.

Elizabeth Ferry: We're closing in on our 100th episode, and as always. We really thank you for listening and hope to hear back from you as well. Thanks a lot. Recall this book was founded by John Plots and me. Elizabeth Berry is sponsored by Brandeis University and the Mandel Humanities Center. Sound editing is by Naomi Cohen. Website design and social media by Miranda Peery of the English department. We are eager to hear your comments, criticisms, and thoughts. If you liked what you heard, please subscribe. Rate and review us on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts from all of us here at RtB. Thanks for listening.