

Forcing Cheese, and Us, Through Holes

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 30 April 2014 21:58 - Last Updated Friday, 02 May 2014 11:45

What we see depends on us, on what we want to see. It depends on our everyday mindsets and moods, and how nature and nurture have shaped us, past and present. In early times, gathering information about our world, people used plain old human vision, and went toe-to-toe with the world, even if they didn't always see eye-to-eye with it.

Somewhere in there, we made the world more complex, and started using windows and doors and portholes and telescopes and other viewing intermediaries. Newspapers, radio, and television wandered along eventually, helping us see farther away and further ahead.

Rose-colored glasses were sometimes worn by deluded or contented observers of life, whether by a neighbor halfway down the block or a reporter halfway around the planet. Sometimes, people saw red -- *pinkos and reds, to be exact* -- directed as their vision was by the low-horsepower, straight-ahead, horse blinders of that era. For the most part, though, the view of the world was pretty clear, and most people's desires to see, and their means of doing so, were reliable, neutral, and intact. They were ready to make up their minds, after consulting the facts. This was the norm. The world and its details were not only knowable, people were busy knowing them.

You could generally trust the facts would be reported accurately from neighbors down the block, based on things they had themselves heard and seen. Reports from afar followed the same rules, and begat the ABCs of journalism: *Accuracy, Brevity, Clarity*. But something peculiar was happening, too. It was not always the case, but, more and more, you had to squint to see past, around, and *through* other people's opinions in order to clearly see the facts.

There were still plenty of facts, with more made all the time. The facts grew more complex day by day, too. Still, sense could be made of the world. Whether the *motives* behind events were for good or ill, well -- that was up to you to decide. Understanding the world, and the piecemeal facts of the world, was still entirely possible. The facts, as they say, were the facts. People didn't have their own private set of facts anymore than they had their own private supplies of gravity or sunshine.

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Manipulating information has been around a very long time -- clear back to the Greeks in 480 BCE -- probably even sooner, if you count the arched attempts by family or friends to wheedle food or favors, or get someone to flee an ideal cave on the basis of a bogus Brontosaurus tale. It doesn't take much to imagine very distant ancestors locked in petty disputes with others of their day, each trying to one-up the other with early tweaks on the truth, clear back to when the soot was still fresh on the cave paintings.

But it took electronic media, and the ability to simultaneously blanket an enormous number of people with accounts of the day, all at once, to really rev up the twists and turns of information adjustment to suit any particular cause.

Propaganda had been around in one form or another from the earliest days. But it took the Industrial Revolution to really crank up the information-deception mills, to get creative with basic misinformation techniques -- like implanting Big Lies, twisted facts believed when endlessly repeated -- and then institutionalize and implement them, part and parcel, as components in a bigger plan, and across vast swaths of countryside.

It is a very clear, unblurred line from Joseph Goebbels's Nazi perfection and streamlining of such early, clumsy doctrine to the current laserlike precision of the spin doctor's high art on Madison Avenue...

... and to the shameless language-hijacking and knee-jerk, sound-bite-shaping antics of Frank Luntz and Rush Limbaugh, to the patriotic-sounding, right-wing think tanks of the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute, organizations which share the right wing mission to impale Democracy on the spike of lunatic-fringe fear-mongering and scapegoating.

It goes on and on, from the bat-crap craziness of recent SCOTUS rulings on corporate personhood and installing a veritable plan for pumping up Super PACs and allowing purchase of political offices, to the unlimited ship-of-state-scuttling resources of the Koch brothers, and all the way to the buffed and polished Republican talking points handed around each day by the Reince Priebus crowd, and then duly espoused in chest-beating fashion by every GOP office holder and broadcaster, right on down to the bills and laws forced on unsuspecting Americans by the American Legislative Exchange Council, acting as bulldozers-for-hire for private ax-grinding and profiteering.

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The Will of the People has been eviscerated, left abandoned by the masses in favor of more appealing activities and rewards. There are no limits to lies, not any longer. There is no moral braking, as had been the case in previous generations. The meme for some decades? Greed is good. Truth and Fact are no longer the same thing, not even close -- which is likely why Fox was pleased as Punch-and-Judy to receive the court ruling that there is no obligation to tell the truth in news broadcasts. Truth is all up to the broadcasting company, whatever they would like it to be.

There haven't been any limits on lies, not for a very long time. The situation has only intensified since 12/12/2000. If you have the mind, the desire, and the discipline -- not to mention the energy and free time -- you can track down and uncover all the nuances, birthplaces, and the parentage of various wisps and awkward, tottering starts of fact and truth, and begin to see the machinations behind the current memes, especially when the so-called Truth, or Facts, run you down like locomotives over locoweed.

Such run-ins, and run-downs, and hit-and-runs, can also make you suspect your own sanity and well-being, and make your family and friends grab the Yellow Pages and start looking up *Conspiracy Theorists Anonymous*, looking for bulk-rate, discount memberships.

Facts are up for grabs, and everyone has a separate, customized version of The Real Deal, tweaked and sweetened to meet the needs of personality, convenience of the moment, or simply to allow a live test of random verbiage to see what happens when the air is exposed to absolute whacko fantasy.

Add in some heavy touches of fear, jealousy, racism, a persistent lack of critical thinking, and a high public demand for willing ignorance, and you've really got the start of a blind, runaway undercutting of a society. Blended with an absence of research, a disregard for reality, a heap of religious superstition and short-cutting, a ton of political posturing, and personality-based truth manufacturing, and you've got a real black hole of a downward spiral.

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The founders of the country relied on the sturdy foundation of citizens maintaining, and guarding, two essential elements to keeping Democracy alive: access to facts via a free press and an active voice in governance.

It is unlikely beyond measure that the founders could have foreseen a time when bald lies were the national currency of truth, and that countless constellations of entertaining distractions could create so much smothering apathy in citizens, leaving Democracy up for grabs to the highest bidder.

Who or what is in charge? Deep pockets, not deep thinking. We've all been chucked right from the deep freeze of our wistful calm to the deep fat fryer of our exploded reality.

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There was a time that I wished Democrats, being the only currently viable organization capable of mounting any sort of defense against the constant, weighty slide of unending Republican nightmares, would get off their precious patooties and join in on the wars of propaganda and language to the same, sky's-the-limit extent of the Great GOP Lie Machine.

But, Dems are disorganized, blithering bubbleheads, for the most part, and Rethugs are lockstepping loose-screw lunatics. In a war of money, which is what Democracy has been whittled down to by the One Percent, it's sane money against insane money -- and we all know who's winning. It was never a contest. The Rethugs have a clear majority of the cash, which is one key reason they have pushed so hard for the last 80 years to *make* Democracy become a war of money. Combined with citizen ignorance and disengagement, it's one of the ways they know they can win.

You can run a lot of negative ads before people pop their trances and ask *but, um, s'cuse me, but, ah, what would do instead, Mister and Miz Candidate?*

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I'm always amazed that so few people have heard of Marine General Smedley Butler, the man who stopped a near coup d'etat in the United States, mounted by fascists and financiers, during FDR's term. Among the strongest quotes I know from American history -- stuff that makes your blood freeze and your face go pale -- are these:

War is a racket..... I was a racketeer for capitalism. -- Gen. Butler

Americans don't read. -- Allen Dulles, reassuring a colleague who had doubts about the Warren Commission Report

Another, as already mentioned, is the Florida Court of Appeals ruling on behalf of Fox News that said there is no obligation to the truth in reporting news. It was the concluding step in a series begun by President Reagan's decimation of the Fairness Doctrine.

Another chiller is from Charles Townsend, former CEO of Avis, who commented that a mere 5,000 people control the "commanding heights" of the U.S. economy, and that this ruling elite *regard this country as their own whore house and they treat each president as their private towel boy.*

One other of many that could be cited: In Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens's dissent, regarding *Bush v. Gore*, he proclaimed:

... one thing... is certain. □ Although we may never know with complete certainty the identity of the winner of this year's Presidential election, the identity of the loser is perfectly clear. □ It is the Nation's confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law.

The rich and powerful, and those who strive to be, might just as well come out with it: *Rules are for little people. □ Truth is for little people. □ We make our own rules, we invent our own facts.*

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Case in point, *Exhibit A*: Welcome to the world of today.

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I'm not sure we can look at ourselves in the mirror for very long these days, unless we've gotten considerably better at suffocating our consciences, through the demand of constant practice, whether voluntary, forced, or coerced. Maybe that's why so many things are completely backwards now: Since we can't stand to look at things directly, we have to hold up a mirror to our worlds before we dare open our eyes, take a peek, see what we're doing. *To see what we've done.*

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Years ago, I took some odds and ends of cheese and was manually processing it, with one of those sharp, shiny, four-sided graters -- one of those chrome jobs that love to nick and lick your inattentive knuckles and fingertips. A thought came to me while I was making pizza at home: *I'm not grating cheese so much as I am just forcing the cheese through these sharp holes.*

Yes, you see what you are able to see, what you want to see, what you are capable of seeing. The world *I* see is a product of *me*, and who I am, just as the world *you* see is a product of *you*.

This is what I used to believe. Now, more and more, I see that we are all being squeezed through sharp holes labelled *Facts, Truth, News*.

We're seeing exactly what we're meant and supposed to see, what has been manufactured for us to see. Most of us. Thing is, these holes get sharper all the time. I shattered my mirror on purpose, but I can't stop looking at what we've done. *At what we're doing.*

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Propaganda 101:

A brief history of propaganda: <http://www.physics.smu.edu/pseudo/Propaganda/history.html>

and: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda>

Good olf Frank: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Luntz

ALEC: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Legislative_Exchange_Council

Political Awareness 101:

<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2005/02/27/95580/-The-Real-Plot-to-Overthrow-FDR-s-America#>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bush_v._Gore

News Media 101:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDKLFn0pty4>

and: <http://www.projectcensored.org/11-the-media-can-legally-lie/>

Today's Bonuses:

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Say Cheese... *burger in Paradise*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5tK-yxLms>

Say Cheese... *shop*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPN3KTtrnZM>

Say Cheese ... *Egyptian Panda Cheese*:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYz3sl0LEA4>

(*Hey, it makes as much sense as anything in *our* country!)