

HIST 2175

20th Century World

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Jan 4, 2021

The Optics of 20th Century History

The Socratic Method and the Socratic Student's Final Essay: Productive Discomfort

This semester offered a unique opportunity to learn 20th Century History; what my professor referred to as the closest he has come in his career to 'The Socratic Method' of teaching. The Socratic Professor "aims for 'productive discomfort' ; should [the student, Me] cannot [be able to] articulate the values that guide [my] life, or the [my] values and beliefs [will be subject] to scrutiny".¹ My experience with 'The Socratic Method' led me to understand that the method does not succeed without the student.

Such was my experience in the Spring of 2020 Anno Domingo, the single student under the guidance of Prof. Warner/Brown. I came to understand the truth of this method, a study of the material presented in the (new, first time in Thompson academia) textbook, translated via the scrutiny of my values and my inquiry into the study of World History. What follows is an attempt at a Socratic Student's response to the Method.

Between my value and beliefs are my professor and my textbook; this is my semester's arsenal of higher education. Our shared source of information (the only textbook I have read cover to cover in my entire academic career); *The Twentieth Century World: An International History 2nd Canadian Ed.* Paired with an incredible collection of first-hand sources and documents, *Conflict & Cooperation: Documents on Modern Global History.*

Should I have left a page unturned I would have failed my professor as he came close to teaching in 'The Socratic Method'. Our seminars were spent as a reflection of my values and beliefs, my queries often leaning towards exotic words such as apparatus, border skirmish, drone strike, hegemony. Certain queries led to a kind historical vertigo, officer's clubs, secret police, the KGB and CIA, the Hamas,

¹tomprof.stanford.edu: Message Number 810

PLO, operatives, subterfuge, monarchies and princes, technocrats, Nanjing, Palestine, Warrior Prophet, the Aswar Dam, autocracies, communism, Asian Tigers and the border skirmish.

As my values and beliefs were scrutinized, I began to become aware of the strong possibility that my textbook was a piece of integration propaganda written in the US of A. Arriving at P.264 of the primary textbook, Chapter 9: Conflict in the Middle East, the authors devoted five pages to The Cradle of Civilization. The Middle East remained irrelevant to American/ European histories until the late 60s.

I have studied to great lengths 'imagined realities' and 'propaganda', methods and techniques. I became suspicious of my textbook. Jacques Ellul, master of the study of propaganda and final voice on the topic, in his tome dedicate to the study "*Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*" has this to say about education. "A related point, central in Ellul's thesis, is that modern propaganda cannot work without education: he thus reverses the widespread notion that education is the best prophylactic against propaganda. On the contrary, he says, or what usually goes by that word is the absolute prerequisite for propaganda".² This triggered my suspicion of my textbook as integration propaganda.

Propagandists are masters of optics, so I'm going to take a closer look at the optics studying the 20th Century through the lens of the primary textbook.

OPTICS: the horizon line of history

Ideas are not born, they breed. I read that and believe this to be true. The 20th century presented a complex clash of ideologies and accelerated industrialization. This made for a lethal combination of compromise, revolution, coercion and cooperation. The most fantastic truth I came across was in George Orwell's "*Homage to Catalonia*"; "It's the same in all wars, the soldiers do the fighting, the journalists do the shouting, and no true patriot ever gets near a front line trench, except on the briefest of propaganda tours".³ This statement rings true through nearly every moment that made up the transformative and most often violent world history in the last century. Orwell extrapolates on the nature of conflict, which was the nature of the 20th century, "to fight Fascism on behalf of democracy is to fight against one form of capitalism on behalf of the second which is liable to turn into the first at any moment".⁴ The paradoxical nature of what seems to be the pattern evolving between conflict and ideology. Anthropologist Yuval Harari takes this further: "When we break down the prison walls and run

² Ellul, Jacques. "*Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes*" p.vi

³ Orwell, George "*Homage to Catalonia*" - Kinney, Tracey J: "*Conflict & Cooperation: Documents on Global History*" p.121

⁴ *ibid* p.123

towards freedom, we are in fact running into the more spacious yard of a bigger prison”⁵. The secondary textbook is a concise collection of documents that accelerate the optics of the primary textbook. I will contrast exotic terms ‘Stalin purges’ and ‘Trial by Diktak’.

The primary textbook is a collection of the facts, presented chronologically and accurately, whereas the secondary textbook accelerates the optics and fractures history into human moments. I can only compare the optics to altitude. Virilio is very concerned with optics, the velocity of information. The primary textbook is written at a high altitude, always with the eyes on the horizon, a straight intelligible line. From a distance the study of history reveals patterns, similar to seeing the patterns in the landscape from 1000 feet up. Patterns are visible, very much like the patterns that are revealed in the study of history.

When [I] the student freezes one moment in history and zooms in on it, primary textbook an exotic term such as ‘The Stalin Purges’, then presented in the secondary textbook presenting the interview of a woman arrested suffering ‘Trial by Diktak’, same but conflicting presentations of the same moment in history. The second accelerated and made very human, very personal and very painful. Evgeniia Ginzburg’s account of her trial by the state during the purges of 1937. The interrogators “were all sadists, of course. And [in the end] only a handful found the courage to commit suicide”,⁶ once the sadism of these men came to light the depths of their depravity revealed. As for the verdict, after months in the Gulag and long endless days of interrogation and torture, “I checked the time at the beginning and end of the trial. Seven minutes. That neither more nor less, was the time it took [...] Dmitriev, People’s Commissar for Justice of the Russian Republic – resembled the expression of his eyes [...] You may never have been in Leningrad, but it was your accomplices who killed him, and that makes you morally and criminally responsible.” Guilty without innocence even a remote consideration.

I use this example to contrast the optics of both textbooks, two dynamic visual impressions. “When you are at 2000 metres you can’t see the ground approaching [and the horizon line remains horizontal]. Herein lies the paradox between continuity and acceleration. When you reach the 800 to 600 metre mark, you start seeing in ‘coming’. [...] The apparent diameter of objects increases faster and faster and you suddenly have the feeling you are not seeing them getting closer but seeing them move apart suddenly, splitting apart.”⁷ This is the contrast between textbooks. The primary holds a horizon

⁵ Harai, Yuval Noah, ‘*Sapiens*’ p.28

⁶ Ginzburg, Evgeniia, “Journey into the Whirlwind” - Kinney, Tracey J. “*Conflict & Cooperation: Documents on Global History*” p.117

⁷ Virilio, Paul “Open Sky - The Perspective of Real Time” p.29

line, the secondary accelerates into the human truths, ideas and desires to shape that moment in history. The combination is very effective to the student when studying Socratic Method.

The study of history, “at a certain distance, at a certain moment, the ground no longer approaches, but parts and splits open, going suddenly from a ‘whole’ dimension with no receding lines [the optics of a the horizon], to a fractional dimension in which the visible space gapes open.”⁸ This is optics. Freezing history and zooming in on any given moment presents this fractional dimension, any moment has forces seen and unseen pressed on the resistant. Yet the optics of the horizon can pass over the exotic yet incredible terms like atomic proliferation, civil war, annexation and terrorism.

All of which involve incredible networks of people driven by the same ideal, and yet, “Cooperation’ sounds very altruistic, but is not always voluntary and seldom egalitarian. Most cooperation networks have been geared towards oppression and exploitation.”⁹ Republics, hegemonies, idealism; “ Armies, police forces, courts and prisons are ceaselessly at work forcing people to act in accordance”¹⁰. The apparatus and police states and order. Exploit the worker, fill the factory floors, dig the Panama canal, and ask

Networks of co-operation so accelerated over the 20th century it is no small wonder the atmosphere and planet are so polluted. The accelerated industrialization of almost every corner of the planet building wall and weapons and the Maginot line. All of these events are covered in the primary textbook, exotic words like *Modus Vivende*. Facing a historical moment “hitherto impossible goals of arms control, disengagement and détente.”¹¹ How to disarm a world capable, and willing to use WMB’s. Exotic acronyms for the systems of mass destruction like “land based [ICMS’s], Minutemen, submarine based [ICBM’s], Posiedon, Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles, MIRVs, greatly increased the destructive power [of the US, for a moment in history the only nuclear power in the world].”¹²

Consider for a moment that the optics of having the biggest guns had an obvious effect on the balance of power which the USSR would not tolerate. Spies and stolen secrets allowed the Soviet Republic (let’s give mention to the treasonous and executed Rosenbergs, caught selling atomic secrets to the Soviets, “The Rosenbergs were executed by electric on June 19, 1953, at Sing Sing

⁸ Virilio, Paul “Open Sky” p.30

⁹ Harai, Yuval Noah, ‘*Sapiens*’ p.1

¹⁰ Harai, Yuval Noah, ‘*Sapiens*’ p.24

¹¹ Eds. Bannister, J. Keylor, W. Kinney, J. “The Twentieth Century World: An International History” p.254

¹² *ibid* p.254

Prison in Ossining, New York.”¹³, the only two spies (and US citizens) to be executed on American soil during the Cold War. The couple would in some way assist the Soviet atomic apparatus to successfully detonate in 1952 an exact replica of Little Boy (the bomb dropped on Hiroshima). This would balance the superpowers, each with enough atomic weapons to destroy the planet hundreds of times over. Either directly or indirectly through client states and mandates. See image below and compare the bombs, top left US atomica, bottom right, Soviet atomica. The execution of the ‘traitors’ was presented as optics, America needed someone to blame and ‘Communism’ was the ideological threat to the ‘free world’. Propaganda has been forced to adapt, because every lie ever told incurs a debt to the truth. The modern propagandist “ has long disdained the ridiculous lies of past and outmoded forms of propaganda. It operates instead with many different kinds of truth, half-truth, limited truth, truth out of context.”¹⁴

The propagandist, always, according to Ellul, a member of the upper middle class. The wealthy are too far removed from reality to create effective propaganda, but certainly fund campaigns, and the poor are susceptible mostly only to agitation propaganda and are therefore an easy target for the authors, “the most trenchant distinction is between agitation propaganda and integration propaganda. The former leads men from mere resentment to rebellion; the latter aims at making them adjust themselves to desired patterns.”¹⁵ This is what I call optics. The optics of any moment in history are focused through a certain lens, and almost always are not what they seem.

The result of accelerated industrialization and militarization throughout the 20th century has left the world in economic ruin, the majority of the world’s wealth in the hands of “a powerful ruling alliance between a few very large corporations and [...] wealthy politicians [and the elite] in Russia, the billionaire private players “the oligarchs”; in China, “the princelings”; in Chile “the piranhas”; the US have “the pioneers”.¹⁶ This unholy trinity of corporate agenda, political nepotism and mercenary economics have left and overall “worldview that has harness the full force of the US military machine in the service of a corporate agenda.”¹⁷ The optics of this hazy anthropomorphic elite are obscured from public view, yet even in plain sight the wealthy shape and control the dissemination of information, revealing a public consensus, which begs this very important question: “How exactly does the bourgeoisie accomplish this? [...] the answer seemed clear: by bombarding the working classes with

¹³ History.com – Seven, John. “Why were the Rosebergs executed?” Sept. 19 2019

¹⁴ Harai, Yuval Noah, ‘*Sapiens*’ p.39

¹⁵ Ellul, Jacques. “ *Propaganda*” p. iv

¹⁶ Klein, Naomi “*The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*” p.17

¹⁷ Klein, Naomi “*The Shock Doctrine*” p.17

advertising, brainwashing them into thinking that cheap consumer goods could make them happy. [...] After all, the Germans had been completely brainwashed by the Nazis. Why not us? And if we were the victims of total brainwashing, how would we know?”¹⁸ Have we fallen prey to selective information dissemination? Should we believe the truth as it is presented to us or should we be more concerned with the optics of the manner in which the information is presented? Can we tell what is truth and what is propaganda? What is emerging from first the War on Terror, now the War on Biology reveals this truth, “Western democracies as simply more subtle variants of the basic fascist state apparatus.”¹⁹ Should the trend of civil unrest and racial clashes in North America continue, the apparatus’ next logical step is total authority, a police state with a population under constant surveillance, enforced by true believers.

The trends presented in the primary textbook revealed a pattern that consistently led to failed ideologies and authoritarian regimes. According to Klein, the incarnations of ideologies and economics “share a commitment to the policy trinity. The elimination of the public sphere and skeletal social spending.”²⁰ The optics of the holy trinity of disaster capitalism and the events that are shaping world history are referred to by Klein as “the time-space image.”²¹ Virilio refers to the same concept as “kinematic optics.”²² Optics shape opinion and drive perception, and are shaped by propagandists. What we see in broadcast media, what we learn in university and preschool is a selective process, “what makes [history] is its dissemination, not its objective reality.”²³ These are some of the reasons I was wary of my primary textbook as an American textbook discreetly shaping the optics and selection of historical events, written by Americans for Americans, peppered with Canadian history. Once I become a teacher, am I to indoctrinate youth into a set of values and imagined orders that I don’t agree with? “You also educate people thoroughly. From the moment they are born, you constantly remind them of the principles of the imagined order, which are incorporated into anything and everything.”²⁴ The idea of imagined orders are central to Harari’s thesis in his book “*Sapiens*”, everything that shapes our actions within our society are a collective order, “There are no gods in the universe, no nations, no human rights, no laws and no justice outside the common imagination of human beings.”²⁵ We are subjects to the imagined order, we behave according to the rules and laws in place to sustain this order. The 20th

¹⁸ Heath, Joseph & Potter, Andrew, “The Rebel Sell: Why Culture Can’t be Jammed” p.25

¹⁹ Heath, Joseph & Potter, Andrew, “The Rebel Sell” p. 22

²⁰ Klein, Naomi “*The Shock Doctrine*” p.17

²¹ Klein, Naomi “*The Shock Doctrine*” p.45

²² Virilio, Paul “Open Sky” p.30

²³ Ellul, Jacques “*Propaganda*” p.48

²⁴ Harai, Yuval Noah, ‘*Sapiens*’ p.113

²⁵ Harai, Yuval Noah, “*Sapiens*” p.28

century imposed these orders by leaders and despots and tyrants and created what academics call 'legal fictions'. Harari extrapolates "The kinds of things people create through this network of stories are known in academic circles as 'fictions', 'social constructs', or 'imagined realities'. An imagined reality is not a lie. There is nothing special about lies. [...] as long as the communal belief persists, the imagined reality exerts force on the world."²⁶ These networks are what we are born into, and we are taught from birth to become a functional unit with said network, wherever you may be on the planet.

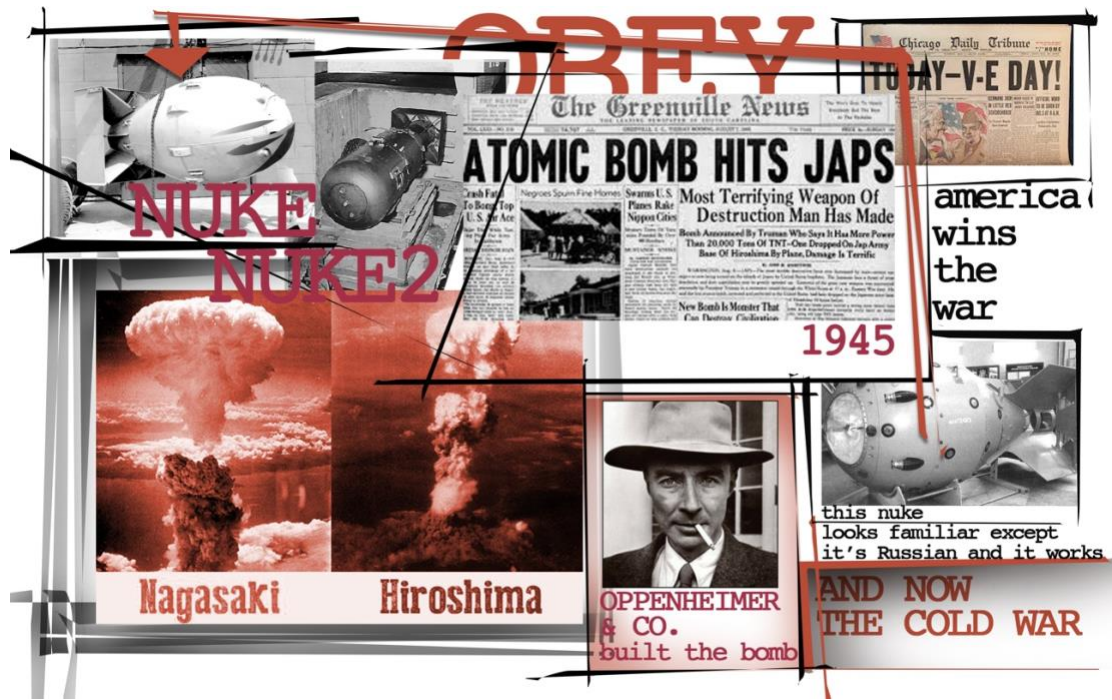


Image by Paul Matczuk. The Age of Atomica and Nuclear Proliferation, THE BOMB Featuring Nagasaki and Japan, President Truman's inheritance from FDR, as for the Soviets, "their first atomic weapon. It was an exact copy of the American bomb."²⁷

IDEAS ARE BOT BORN, THEY BREED...

²⁶ Harai, Yuval Noah, "Sapiens" p.26

²⁷ Sheinkin, Steve, "Bomb: The Race to Build – and Steal – The World's Most Dangerous Weapon" p.45

The tremendous violence of the 20th century was either the clash of ideologies, a general disagreement on how to make a society function."The immense diversity of imagined realities the sapiens invented, and the resulting diversity of behavior patterns, are the main components of what we call 'cultures'. Once cultures appeared, they never ceased to change and develop, and these unstoppable alterations are what we call 'history'."28 As a student of history this is an excellent summary of the tremendous forces of these 'social constructs', communism, capitalism, the Vatican, the Catholics and their Puritans and Opus Dei, Islam and Muslim, the Califate and the IMF. All exert tremendous influence on the world, all are driven by collective co-operations, unfortunately " 'Cooperation' sounds very altruistic, but is not always voluntary and seldom egalitarian. Most cooperation networks have been geared towards oppression and exploitation."29 This is an uncomfortable truth of people and history, there is always a caste system simplified into the oppressor and the oppressed. The primary textbook demonstrated time and time again that populations can be controlled, the authoritarian apparatus emerges and countries are left in perpetual civil war. The optics are controlled and accelerated by the propagandist when opinion and ideas must be perpetuated, in the form of myths, faiths or facts (truths?).

The oppressed will revolt, either brutally silenced by their oppressors, or radicalizing the idea that the oppressors can be overthrown. Due to this truth, "radical [counter] politics took a significant turn away from this pattern of thought. Instead of treating the masses as an ally, the people began to be regarded, with an ever-increasing degree, as an object of suspicion."30 This suspicion in many cases was well warranted, the people united to overthrow or undermine 'the system' and its elite as the oppressor, "The idea that the bourgeoisie could be controlling the entire culture seemed even more far-fetched. How could the whole culture be nothing but a scam? It seemed hard to believe that a fraud could be perpetuated on such a scale. It got a whole lot easier to believe, however, after the rise of Nazi Germany."31 The system as a scam designed by the elite, the smoky unseen hand that shapes policy moving tremendous wealth away from the countries that held the resources into the hands of the oligarchs or piranhas or the pioneers, or the ultimate economic power, the IMF and the World Bank. The union of economists, corporations and politicians opening the world to free trade had to control the optics "as the images of violent conflicts were televised around the world, the security fence came to epitomize the ideological gulf between those who supported international free trade and those who

28 Harai, Yuval Noah, "*Sapiens*" p.37

29 Harai, Yuval Noah, "*Sapiens*" p.104

30 Heath, Joseph & Potter, Andrew, "*The Rebel Sell*" p.18

31 Heath, Joseph & Potter, Andrew, "*The Rebel Sell*" p. 21

saw it as a tool of economic oppression.”³² Free trade opened the world and called it globalization, but many saw this opening of economic possibilities as oppression, called “to voice their opposition to what they regarded as an undemocratic organization [WTO] dominated by corporate interests.”³³ Essentially, global commercial warfare controlled by the WTO. In the end we see the full might of the American military machine at the service of corporate agendas. The optics of globalization was presented as opening borders for trade, a global economy, crossing cultural boundaries through trade. Many third world countries had an acute shortage of working capital, thus a model designed around Milton Friedman’s Chicago boys was written in the fine print of loans to third world countries, “underlying the strategies of both the commercial banks and the official lending organizations was the expectation that this massive flow of capital would generate a spurt in exports from third world countries that would earn sufficient foreign exchange to service their burgeoning foreign debt.”³⁴ Therefore this ‘altruistic’ economic maneuvers came with stipulations, “the IMF loan packages required currency devaluation, cuts in government spending, and the reduction of subsidies on basic commodities to balance budgets [...] causing widespread social unrest that brought with it political instability.”³⁵ The debtor countries threatened ‘debtor cartels’ which would have created economic chaos, to the advantage of the debtor countries. The idea was to collectively refuse to comply with the IMF’s stringent repayment criteria. This ‘debtor cartel’ as a revolutionary force would have altered the economic landscape for any country in debt. Unfortunately this cartel failed to materialize and could not free themselves from Friedman’s holy trinity of economic reform, anything not generating profit for a debtor country would be sold off to corporate interests (privatized), currency would be devaluated (often resulting in hyper-inflation) and social spending would be reduced dramatically. This is what globalization really meant, but optics showed the opening of free markets.

The conflict generated by this economic ‘shock therapy’, which in theory would balance a suffering economy within months, ended in conflict. Civil war or attacks on surrounding countries that held the treasures needed to cure suffering economies. “Now wars and disaster responses are so fully privatized that they are themselves the new market; there is no need to wait until after the war for the [economic] boom- the medium is the message.”³⁶ The result is the IMF and Friedman school of economics “protected the flame of pure capitalism, untarnished by Keynesian attempts to pool

³² Eds. Bannister, J. Keylor, W. Kinney, J. “*The Twentieth Century World: An International History*” p.453

³³ *ibid* p.453

³⁴ *ibid* p.453

³⁵ *Ibid* p.455

³⁶ Klein, Naomi “*The Shock Doctrine*” p.13 -14

collective wealth to build more just societies.”³⁷ Profit transcends justice. The New World Disorder. As Jello Biafra, lead singer of the Dead Kennedys stated with prescience, “the comfort you demanded is now mandatory.”

Counter to this, “189 countries adopted the ‘Millennium Declaration’ [circa 2000] – a commitment to extend freedom, equality, solidarity tolerance, respect for nature [...] the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, the achievement of universal primary education, the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, the reduction of child mortality, reduction of HIV/AIDS,”³⁸ utopian idealism, despite all signatories these lofty humanitarian aspirations were not profitable and therefore untenable. The failure to implement these altruistic aspirations left countries in debt. Populations suffered a rise in ethnic, religious and social tensions [at the hands of the propagandist, blaming certain ethnic groups as the cause of social tensions and widespread poverty]. In developing states and states in the midst of rapid [economic] transitions, they can lead to fragmentation and even the destruction of the nation-state itself.”³⁹ My professor shared a map of countries in transition today, leaving much of Africa in perpetual civil war, the Middle East perpetual civil war, the former states of the USSR in a state of perpetual civil war, and most of South America also in a state of perpetual civil war. Authoritarian regimes today outweigh ‘free countries’ just as they did for most of the 20th century. If history repeats itself as it seems to be doing so, our planet will surely suffer a Third World War. As postulated by my professor and substantiated by the textbook, the Third World War will be against the climate. “As the 21st century dawned, no one issue attracted greater attention than concerns over climate change [...] the industrial revolution [...] alarming melting of the polar ice caps [...] and the damage done by industrial pollutants [...] global warming is unequivocal [...] however, public awareness remained minimal and government policy change virtually non-existent.”⁴⁰ The optics concerning the damage inflicted on the planet by accelerated industrialization were downplayed, scientists insisting that our atmosphere went through cyclical changes, not dramatic trauma inflicted by the human race creating an ocean of plastic, an ozone layer full of holes, accelerated extinction of 99% of all animal life on the planet, with no signs of the human race correcting itself to slow the destruction of the planet. “Of particular concern, [DDT, Agent Orange], carbon dioxide emissions produced by the burning of fossil fuels, by large scale agribusiness and by deforestation.”⁴¹ If we do not radically change our ways our

³⁷ Klein, Naomi “*The Shock Doctrine*” p.21

³⁸ Eds. Bannister, J. Keylor, W. Kinney, J. “*The Twentieth Century World*” p.472

³⁹ *ibid* p.472

⁴⁰ *Ibid* p.474-475

⁴¹ *ibid* p.475

planet will only sustain us for two or three generations before the air becomes unbreathable, overpopulation creates a Malthusian curse, agriculture becomes impossible as soil becomes alkaline or crops become entirely synthetic. Fresh water sources will become the most coveted geopolitical areas on the planet, coveted and protected militarily.

Such will be the problems left for the next generations to solve. This may be impossible if current economic models remain and multinationals continue to evade borders, embargos and compliance with economic protection laws. Witness the burning of the Amazon rain forest last year, a heat bloom seen from outer space. The result of environmental protection laws circumvented by a despot. The lung of the world has been torched to make room for pastures, with China being Brazil's primary export for beef. More assaults on the earth mother.

The primary textbook demonstrates repeated attempts at governance, and repeated failures. The revolutions will fail to overthrow the modern totalitarian state, "society might use more psychological control, and much less overt violence, in order to indoctrinate the masses. Many others thought that totalitarianism would insinuate itself into daily life in even more subtle ways."⁴² This is where Ellul's thesis on propaganda techniques come into consideration, controlling the optics of history and the history that is to come, but in the meantime, "Consumerism produced a simulacrum of happiness, but only by enslaving individuality and the imagination, making it impossible for the working classes to see how much more there could be to life, or to imagine a better world."⁴³ Should the revolution ever come to fruition, the revolutionaries and dissidents will suffer the fact that "overt repression must be employed and 'the violence inherent in the system' is revealed."⁴⁴ The revolution will not be tolerated.

Most of us quietly submit to the status quo imposed on us. Thus, imagined orders sustained by the propagandist relies on the simple truth that "man is terribly malleable, uncertain of himself, ready to accept and follow many suggestions, and is tossed about by all the winds of doctrine."⁴⁵ Indoctrination and perpetuation of 'imagined orders' is a constant, "you also educate people thoroughly, from the moment they are born, you constantly remind them of the principles of the imagined order, which are incorporated into anything and everything."⁴⁶ In order to sustain the imagined orders we need skilled propagandists and true believers. "There is no chance that gravity will cease to function tomorrow, even

⁴² Heath, Joseph & Potter, Andrew, *"The Rebel Sell"* p.26

⁴³ Heath, Joseph & Potter, Andrew, *"The Rebel Sell"* p.38

⁴⁴ Heath, Joseph & Potter, Andrew, *"The Rebel Sell"* p. 32

⁴⁵ Ellul, Jacques. *"Propaganda"* p. vii

⁴⁶ Harai, Yuval Noah, *'Sapiens'* P.142

if people stop believing in it. In contrast, an imagined order is always in danger of collapse, because it depends on myths, and myths will vanish when people stop believing in them.”⁴⁷

I would like to fast forward into the now. A world in the midst of its first pandemic since the outbreak of the Spanish Flu after WWI, which claimed as many lives as the war itself. A body count of roughly 20 million dead of the contagion. The Covid-19 pandemic, “the supposed biological [pandemic] has shown that they [the propagandists] are capable of carrying on a full campaign of agitation [and isolation], of accusing others, decreeing one fine day that the danger has passed only to revive it days later.”⁴⁸ The resulting isolated public with access only to selective broadcast for information combined with a stringently regulated economy (by controlling what people can buy and how they can do it) coupled with agitation propaganda based on biological fear. With all elements of personal movement regulated, the entire world is one step away from authoritarianism/totalitarianism. “The civic and technological good will and the enthusiasm for the right [corrected by decree] social myths will have finally solved the problem of [free] man.”⁴⁹ A chilling warning found in the primary textbook concerning the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972 “revealed the same melancholy but incontrovertible truth, any competent biologist working with standard equipment can breed bacteriological agents with lethal properties that could be placed at the disposal of renegade governments.”⁵⁰ We are at the mercy of so many elements of mankind’s lethal embrace of means of murder, all developed throughout the 20th century.

The most lethal weapons may in the end be infectious disease, the Serin gas attack in the Tokyo subway in 2005, Hussein’s impudent use of gas attacks, the Mustard gas attacks in WWI. All as lethal as the atomic weapons dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima only much more personal. The more enduring weapon of mass destruction is the AK47, the Kalishnokov. America and her allies have privatized war, and business is better than ever.

This is my response, as a student to this semester’s Socratic Method, a course that reflects my values and the result of my ‘productive discomfort’. This is not your typical research essay, but my experience studying 20th century history was far from typical. The lessons were unique and it was an honor being able to study in such a fashion. Focusing on the optics of my primary and secondary textbooks, deeply concerned with the facts that the textbooks were selective and borderline

⁴⁷ Harai, Yuval Noah, ‘*Sapiens*’ p.112

⁴⁸ Ellul, Jacques. “*Propaganda*” p. xviii

⁴⁹ Ellul, Jacques. “*Propaganda*” p. 48

⁵⁰ Eds. Bannister, J. Keylor, W. Kinney, J. “*The Twentieth Century World*” p.460

propaganda. I must bear in mind that studying history in a university in Moscow or China would carry a much different perspective, one that would obviously be written to accommodate a much different history. There is truth to the statement that the primary textbook was written from an overarching perspective, with eyes on the horizon. The perspective was far from the chaos and madness that occurred if one were to freeze the moment and accelerate into a given moment in history. The optics of education, of the text and freedom of thought and inquiry during class time were an educational experience I will never forget. The Socratic Method is not one typically used in higher education in the here and now and I will never forget this experience. More students should be able to experience academia through the lens of personal values and experience. I hope that mine were demonstrated throughout the semester and are summarized in this, my final paper.

I would like to close my paper with an image, concerning propaganda circa WWII. It is agitation propaganda to rally Americans and allies against the Japanese, a war in which the soldiers fought in what they called Indian Country. The parallels between the war in the Pacific and Westward expansion are chilling, including soldiers keeping trophies, human scalps, severed fingers. The industrialization of war did nothing to reduce the barbarity, but the enemy was Japanese. Foreign, exotic and tenacious. A formidable enemy forced to surrender by the detonation of two of the world's most formidable weapons. If you look closely there are two Hitlers, the Austrian vegetarian psychopath who created a new word in the English language for human atrocity: genocide. Eugenics still exist, in fact every doctor who gives birth to a child has the choice to consider the infant viable, or not viable.



WWII propaganda; the Japanese, illustrated with such exaggeration it's amazing the propaganda was taken seriously, two posters warning of the Third Reich, and the article written about Executive Order 9066, which ordered the internment of American Japanese into camps all over south western US. This is agitation propaganda. What I learn in school is integration propaganda. I can no longer discern between information and propaganda in today's world of truths, half-truths, and truths out of context. AKA fake news. Composite illustration by author.

Ideas are not born; they breed.

It's not about the man himself I'm worried about, just the mindworms he's carrying in his head, the sordid little dream, the meme, that pulls his strings and pushes his buttons. Looking to lay its sick spores in the empty thoughts of all the hate-filled whores and motherfuckers too dumb to see what's happening. Language lives my friend, information with intent, aware, awake inside us. Call them gods call them demons, they're the archons of our world. These fucking mindworms, spawned in speeches, nurtured in newspapers, feeding our fears and desires. Ideas are not born, they breed. And behind every good demagogue is a bad idea. I should know, I'm a myth myself. It's time...

Author unknown/ date unknown

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