

The American Propaganda Machine: The Origins and Authors of Imagined Realities.

The Impossible Distinction between Information and Propaganda.

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Abstract

This is a study of the influence of propaganda, its origins, authors and breadth of influence on American society and its people. As an aspiring member of the education system, I have become concerned with one question above all: Am I learning to become a future propagandist? This goal to become a teacher; is this the initiation for indoctrination into a model that will include myself to perpetuate the myths that have placed humanity on the brink of civil, economic and ecological collapse? Using Ellul's elaborate study of propaganda and Harari's study of the 'imagined orders' that dominate every aspect of our lives, I've discovered the origins of federal control of the American Propaganda Machine, and am beginning to understand its absolute force. I have looked into the dark corners of censorship and information/disinformation seeking to expose the authors of propaganda and promote awareness of its relentless influence. Not many of us are aware of the constant pressure exerted by discreet and overt propaganda, and how deeply our behavior, individually and collectively, is influenced by the propagandist. This is a study of propaganda and the unlikely possibility that we can remove ourselves from their equation.

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The Impossible Distinction between Information and Propaganda.

The focus of this study is propaganda. I sought to uncover the origins of the American Propaganda Machine and to find some answers for becoming less susceptible to the influence of propaganda. The answer to the former took some digging, the answer to the latter is elusive due to two simple facts; we can no longer separate information from propaganda, and propaganda is a secret action. As we have entered the Age of Reason, or the Information Age, what we ultimately experience is a total saturation of unreasonable information. Thus, the impossibility to separate information from propaganda.



Figure 1: Image source CENSORED – EVERYTHING IS FINE NOBODY IS HAPPY NOBODY IS HAPPY EVERYTHING IS FINE. date CENSORED.

This image is a state of the union address, we are under the influence of invisible forces, and we adversely affected.

Consider the following image, using the astute eye of an informed propagandee. Is this an advertisement for iPhones, or is it counter-propaganda implying that we age as quickly as the technology around us? Is our temporal progress measured in symbiosis with the strategized obsolescence of our iPhones? These are questions without answers, and really answers without questions. Try to keep up.

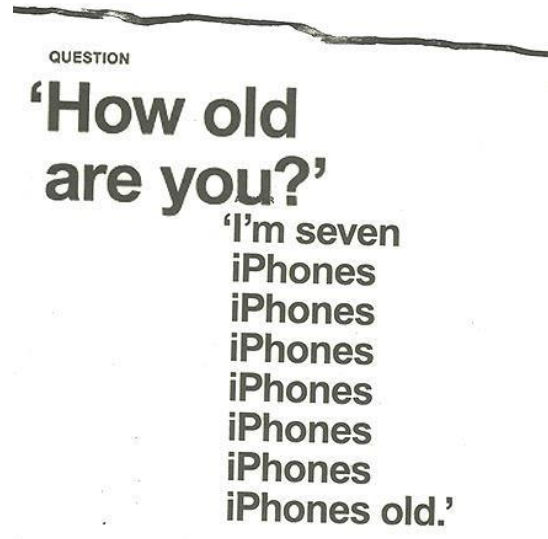


Figure 2: Image source: unknown, date, unknown; some time after the release of the iPhone 7. Propaganda or counter-propaganda?

Everyone is aware that we are being manipulated by the mass media. Without the mass media there would be no successful propaganda. Not many are aware just how much we are being manipulated, and how deeply our behavior, collectively and individually, is influenced by the propagandist.



Figure 3: Fucking Jackals; “the propagandist: hate, hunger and pride, making better levels of propaganda than love or impartiality” (Ellul).
Counter-propaganda by Paul Matczuk, 2015.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN PROPAGANDA MACHINE

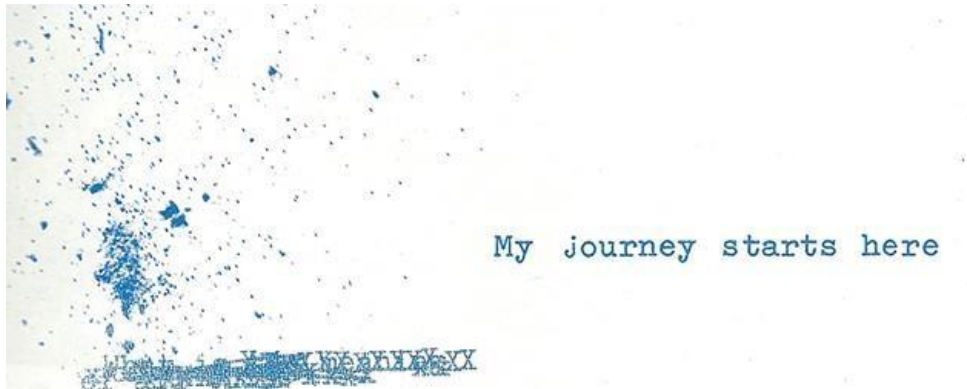


Figure 4: My journey starts here. Looking behind the looking glass is dangerous, peering into places you shouldn't look is cause for cynicism, possibly causing psychic paralysis. I am stronger than them. Image by Paul Matczuk, 2000.

My research led me to the first implementation of federal governance using information (as propaganda) to cultivate patriotism as a “sordid if not lethal emotion” (Postman, (1998) p.1). This is the original bureaucracy to create war-time propaganda. Established by President Woodrow Wilson, April 6,

THE AMERICAN PROPAGANDA MACHINE

1917, was the Committee of Public Information (CPI), which subdivided into the Division of Pictorial Publicity. “One of the first realizations of the importance of pictorial publicity in building morale, arousing spiritual forces of the nation, and stimulating the war will of the people” (Cogswell,(1968) p.51): Note the emphasis on war will of the people, the nation cannot enter any conflict without national support, and for the propagandist, war is sexy. The American Propaganda Machine is now federal mandate.

A more discrete (though entirely indiscrete) influence of propaganda took root in the motion picture industry prior to the establishment of the CPI. “[...] as soon as the cinema’s civic potential became evident after 1914, it was placed under house arrest and brought under a system of regulation based on the methods of wartime black propaganda” (Virilio, (2000) p.41). This epiphany of ‘civic potential’ became nationally apparent after D.W. Griffith’s release of “Birth of a Nation” circa 1915. (The observant would notice a temporal disconnect, 1914 was when Griffith turned to the US military to borrow soldiers and equipment to film his ‘epic’ battle scenes. 1915 was when the film was released).

This is the time when the film industry became a government ‘hostage’, between production and release. This tactic by Griffith created a side-effect that continues to this very day, the motion picture as a weapon of psychological warfare (Virilio, (2000) [...]). As agitation propaganda, this film inspired an incredible resurgence of white supremacy (latent) nationwide, unspeakable violence against African Americans was unleashed across the US of A. To state that the white people painted as African Americans were misrepresented in the film is an understatement of epic proportion. They were portrayed as murderous bestial drunken rapists, and it was the South’s very own Klan that rode in and saved everything. The film as propaganda perpetuated the as yet unresolved race war in the US.

President Woodrow Wilson called the epic ‘lighting on film’. This ‘Civil War’ masterpiece was essentially a two and a half hour call for KKK recruits (agitation propaganda), and it worked.

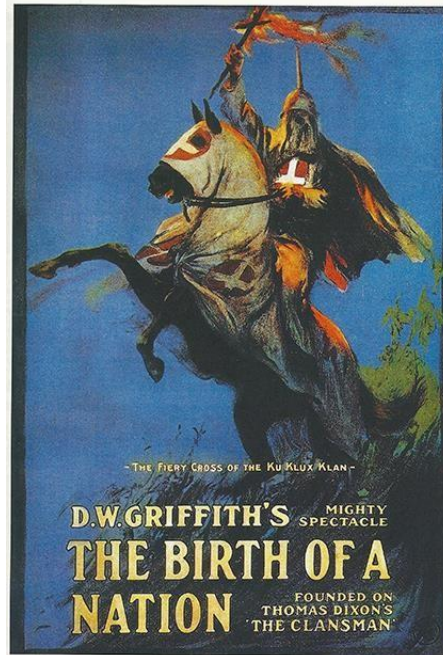


Figure 5: Birth of a Nation: Movie Poster, 1915. Image credit Chronicle of the Cinema (Kindersley, Dorling, London UK, BREPOLs, (1995) p.111.

The dawn of cinema as wartime black propaganda. All he did was borrow some shit from the US army. Cause & effect. Cause & effect, the motion picture industry is now a government sponsored propaganda machine. This particular motion picture as agitprop put people of color in very real danger all across the US.

Following Griffith's enormous success (and the NAACP's totally failure at slowing the spread of this film's message) with 'Birth of a Nation', "he was the only American filmmaker to go to shoot propaganda footage for the Allies [in WWI]" (Virilio, (2000) p.17). What Griffith discovered on the front lines was not the great battles he had depicted cinematically. He saw trench warfare and an enemy impossible to catch on film, let alone see at all. According to Virilio, most of his propaganda films were entirely staged. The audience, of course, was unaware (and remains unaware as to what is staged and what is not). The propaganda films were effective with soldiers and civilians alike. In today's cinema with seamless CGI and Technicolor optical utopia, who knows what is staged and what is not. It is literally impossible to know, unless you are the propagandist.



Figure 6: War is Sexy. This is the message. How could we possibly believe that? Image by Paul Matczuk, 2012. War. It's all so absurd. Of all human activities, violence is the most difficult to implement. (Harari)

A recently declassified CIA report, working in tandem with a myriad of government branches (Treasury, DOD, FBI, NSA, NSC, OSS, OPA, PCA) stated this simple objective, "To exploit the potentialities of the motion picture as a weapon of psychological warfare for the United States" (CIA, (1947) p.1). And exploit the industry these agencies did with impunity. You wouldn't believe, since 1947, the number of motion pictures and television programs that fell under the sway of the US Propaganda Machine. Failure to cooperate with the feds meant dire consequences for producers and directors. Non-cooperation usually meant the movie didn't even make it to production. Special Advisors (to the CIA), or Entertainment Liaison Officers (ELO) were either on set or re-writing scripts avoiding anything potentially 'un-American' (Alford & Secker, (2017) [...]).

The aim of using the motion picture as propaganda was to be “employed on most of the major psychological warfare ‘fronts’: A: They can be aimed at civilians and armed forces of the United States [...] to create attitudes favorable to the United States and unfavorable to the enemy” (CIA, (1947) p.6). The CIA outlined an elaborate, exacting plan with extreme precision. You wouldn’t believe the federal control over the motion picture industry, tens and tens of thousands of productions, in cinema and television. The motion picture as propaganda was and is extremely mercenary.



Figure 7: The Mercenary Motion Picture Industry, counter-propaganda by Paul Matczuk circa 2016.

What is important at this point is that “the concern here [...] is not with film history, but with the osmosis between industrialized warfare and cinema” (Virilio, (2000) p.58). The constant production of cinematic propaganda alongside US conflicts (WWI, WWII, The Korean War, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, to name a few) have delivered a carefully designed ‘appearance’ of the American Ideal; the unapologetic righteousness of democracy. There have been some misfires along the way; public opposition to global conflict, but in the end, it was nothing the National Guard couldn’t handle.

The US military-industrial machine performs “violence which moralizes itself as just and which is unrestrained by consequences” (Heath & Potter, (2004) p.28). This is substantiated by Jacques Ellul, (social critic and sworn enemy to propaganda) written over half a century ago; “When the United States poses as the defender of liberty – of all, everywhere and always – it uses a system of false representation” (Ellul, (1962) p.60). This false representation, using mass media and education combine

techniques: “Sociological propaganda, agitation propaganda, [innuendo, operational words], shock propaganda, infiltration and integration propaganda. They must all be used in combination, the propagandist uses a keyboard and creates a symphony” (Ellul, (1962) p.10). The symphony has grown to a cacophony. 9/11 gave rise to a world without truth, only information, or propaganda, or information. Who can really tell anymore? That is one of the goals of propaganda, using facts to blur the truth until it is so out of focus it is no longer visible. Try to keep up.

Overnight, the Department of Homeland Security became a 200 billion-dollar sector (Klein, (2008) p.15). State sanctioned domestic surveillance is now very real, only an idiot would think otherwise. Stage a tiny revolution and start encrypting your online communications. The “War on Terror” was the reason we waved our privacy rights. The internet (now being real-time mapped for strategic cyber-military initiatives by DARPA, the mad-scientist wing of the Pentagon) “has always been and continues to be a prime theatre for warfare. Please govern yourselves accordingly” (Anonymous (2015) [...]). Every keystroke logged, data-mined, can be turned loose on its users at any moment, an inverted totalitarianism.

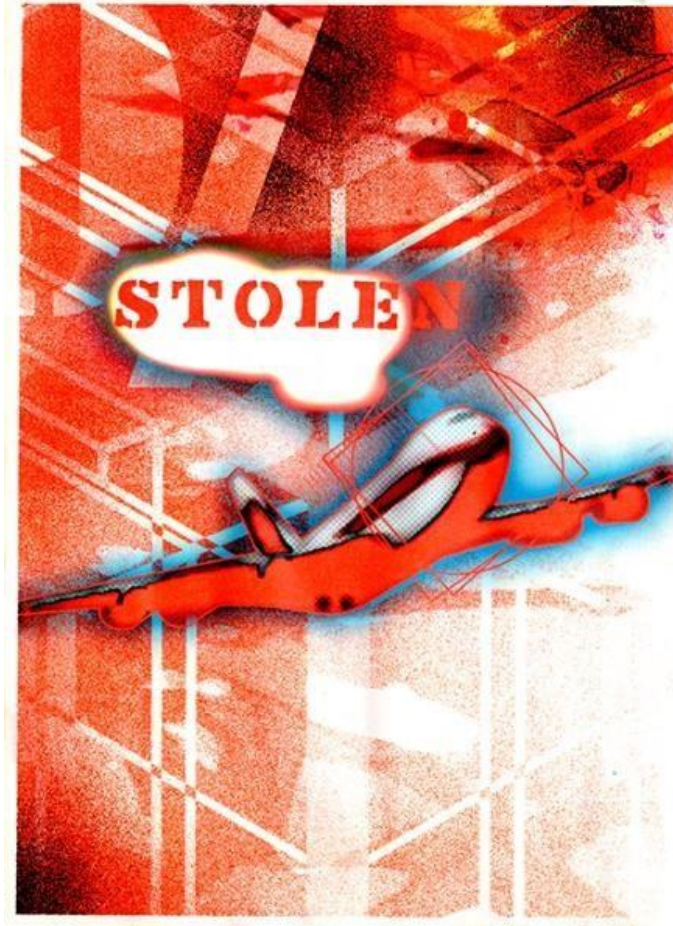


Figure 8: Unintentional AgitProp Post-9/11 by Paul Matczuk, "Stolen", 2001 . After posting this on-line after 9/11 I started being flamed and receiving threats from 'the meta-sensitive' who took offence to my work. Art can be agitprop/counter-prop and has power.

Most Americans still turn on the news seeking the truth of things in the world, a neutral view and neutral opinion. Truth is not fact, as mentioned, and fact is not truth. Propaganda relies on facts to create truths (try to keep up). The news is not a neutral source of information, in fact the news (and news-like media, the press, radio, docs, etc.) fell to corporate and military influence almost a century ago. "In the 1920s, long before the New Deal, the US media [press and radio] lost its neutrality as they fell under the industrial-commercial interests of economic warfare" (Virilio, (2000) p.54). The result of this constant push of propaganda into every aspect of our lives has left America at the (merciless) mercy of "a mad utopian doctrine foisted on modern society by an unholy alliance of economists, businessmen

and technocrats” (Connell & Dados, (2014) p.120). This unholy alliance has perfected the holy trinity of propaganda: Information, education and dissemination. I repeat, it is now impossible to distinguish information from propaganda, nor can the complicity of the propagandee be measured.

Ellul warns of the dangers of becoming cynical, once the observant recognize that we are so deeply immersed in propaganda that we see only what we are allowed to see. This realization can cause psychic paralysis and/or paranoia. This, according to Ellul, is counter-productive to the individual and ultimately, serves the propagandist. Harari makes an interesting argument for the cynic, “a cynic who believes in nothing is unlikely to be greedy [...] this is why true cynics don’t build empires” (Harari, (2014) p.112). Not building empires is anathema and contradictory to the American pursuit of money, sex and power, therefore un-American.

Our only weapons against propaganda are awareness and/or total isolation (off the grid). To be aware and skeptical is healthy, a sign of intelligence, but cynicism can be self-defeating. Total isolation is a commitment of which myself and not a single person I know is capable, without going insane.



Figure 9: God I'm Lonely. Source: "the American Mantra". The Prayer Bank (Heaven's Archive). "Religion is an operating system, language is code and prayers are just so much fucking spam" (Neil Gaiman, American Gods, 2001). Lots of American adults still have imaginary friends.

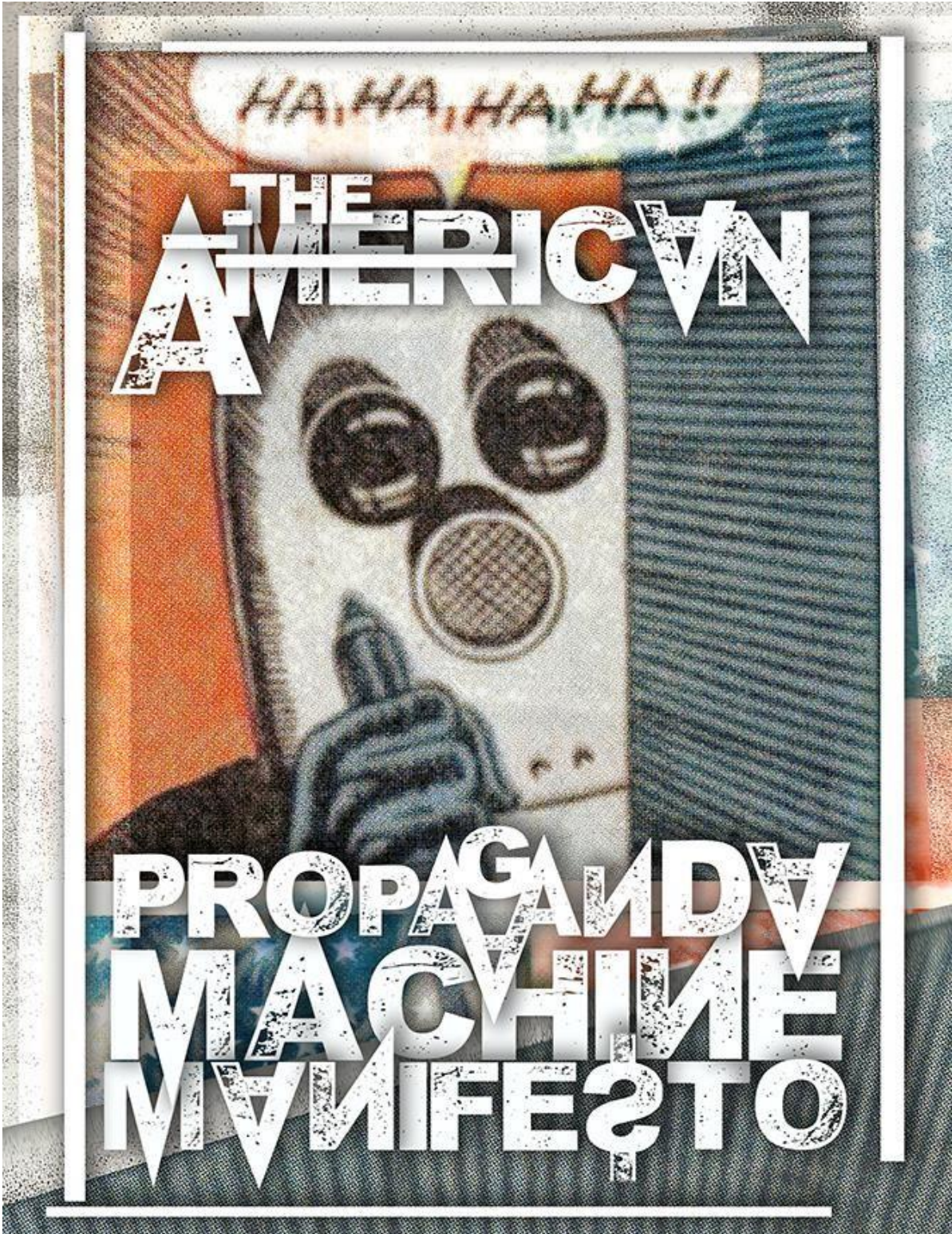


Figure 10: Image source unknown, date, five thousand years in the future. IMAGINED FACE OF THE AMERICAN PROPAGANDA MACHINE.



Figure 11 (A): Image source Paul Matczuk, dat e2019. The ACTUAL IMAGINED FACE OF THE AMERICAN PROPAGANDA MACHINE.

Fighting in the desert for oil and opium. OPERATION BRAINSTORM. You're fucked!

THE AMERICAN PROPAGANDA MACHINE MANIFESTO

First of all, “there are no gods in the universe, no nations, no human right, no laws and no justice outside the common imagination of human beings” (Harari, (2014) p.28). That being said, the world around is (outside of natural law) composed almost entirely of ‘imagined orders’. These ‘orders’ enable the cooperation of thousands, if not millions of people. The network of cooperation (known as society) is based on shared myths, “and myths, it transpired, are stronger than anyone could have imagined” (Harari (2014) p.103). These shared myths enabling “cooperation sounds very altruistic, but it is not always voluntary and seldom egalitarian. Most cooperation networks have been geared towards oppression and exploitation” (Harari, (2014) p.104). Imagined orders are difficult to accept and an uncomfortable truth. We are indoctrinated from birth into ‘imagined orders’, a near-Pavlovian conditioning (roll over, play dead, go to school, pay taxes, go to war, consume, etc.). “How do you get people to believe in an imagined order such as Christianity, democracy or capitalism? First, you never admit the order is imagined” (Harari, (2014) p.112). These ‘orders’ are an obvious sociological phenomena, and imagined orders are sustained by propaganda, “which exists and thrives; it is the Siamese twin of our technological society” (Ellul, (1962) p.i). We have, as a society, completely embraced mass media, and can no longer separate information from propaganda, this is “because propaganda is a secret action” (Ellul, (1962) p.x). Expanding on the former, “propaganda is a manipulation of symbols [and myths] of which the listener is not conscious” (Ellul, (1962) p.xi). 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” (Ellul, (1962) p.xvi). 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” (Harari, (2014)

p.112). 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 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” (Harari, (2014) p.111). Myths, via propaganda, can be perpetuated ad infinitum. “In order to safeguard an imagined order, continuous and strenuous efforts and imperative. Some of these efforts take shape of violence and coercion. Armies, police forces, courts and prisons are ceaselessly at work forcing people to act in accordance with an imagined order” (Harari, (2014) p.111). The aforementioned cooperation networks are where we find the true believers. “The myth has such motive force that, once accepted, it controls the whole of the individual who [then] becomes immune to any other influence. This explains the totalitarian attitude that the individual adopts – when a myth has been successfully created – and that simply reflects the totalitarian action of propaganda on him” (Ellul, (1962) p.111). Thus, in extreme abbreviation, our lives consist (outside of natural laws) entirely of imagined orders and the propaganda that sustains them. This next statement by Ellul could make the student of propaganda (in higher education) dangerously cynical, “no control can be tolerated between teaching and propaganda, between the critical spirit formed by higher education and the exclusion of independent thought” (Ellul, (1962) p.12). As mentioned in my introduction, pursuing a career in higher education, will I become a trained propagandist? I am approaching critical mass and becoming dangerously cynical, because “there is no way out of an imagined order. When we break the prison walls and run towards freedom, we are in fact running into the more spacious yard of a bigger prison” (Harari, (2014) p.118). (My tiny revolution against the prison walls is to paint windows on the walls of my cell). If, in fact, everything we believe in as a society is fabricated, “propaganda carries within itself, of intrinsic necessity, the power to take over everything that can serve it” (Ellul, (1962) p.14). As per the human condition so easily exploited by the propagandist, “hate, hunger and pride make better levels of propaganda than do love or impartiality” (Ellul, (1962) p.38). Finally, “man obviously a

very limited capacity for attention and awareness, one event pushes the preceding one into oblivion. And man's memory is short, the event that has been supplanted by another is forgotten" (Ellul, (1962) p.44). This is a natural law the propagandist exploits without cessation. This is how the propagandist, using all the tools at his disposal, can rewrite history, myths can be changed or deleted, and how imagined orders are sustained. And if you think you know better than the propagandist, "we find the maximum deviation between public opinion and latent private opinion, which are either repressed or progressively eliminated" (Ellul, (1962) p.94). Have we been collectively fully conditioned as operators within imagined orders, to the extreme extent of being brainwashed? Is individuality a myth or do we simply function within the accordance of our conditioning? Have we all been brainwashed? Lastly, the ultimate question, "If we were the victims of total brainwashing, how would we know?" (Heath \$ Potter, (2004) p.28). Answers without questions, questions without answers, this is the American Propaganda Machine, and it is in the garden of the mind. The Machine is anything and everything.



Figure 12: Image source: Censored: Manifesto for a New World Order, 2015. The future has been created by the propagandist to exist simultaneously within a permanently fixed present. It is paradoxical yet effective. The state of 'presentism' is causing temporal dislocation. Is my uncertainty of the future a declaration of my complicity with the propagandist? These are questions without answers and answers without questions. They must be asked, and we must accept that we will never get any answers.

Between imagined orders and the propaganda that sustains them, I have tried to peer behind the screen, behind the media, the news, the internet. I tried to discover who is responsible for the information/disinformation that bombards me daily. My research led me to the origins of the American Propaganda Machine, but its authors remain elusive.

Ellul argues that propagandists are always upper-middle class citizens. The elite control the direction of propaganda but are unable to create it. Being super-rich creates a disconnection; they have no understanding of the requirements of propaganda. The target of the American Propaganda Machine is the educated middle-class, who have an erroneous tendency to assume that propaganda is indiscreet and obvious. Thus the educated middle-class are especially vulnerable, as they feel 'free' to choose which discreet propaganda they unconsciously fall prey to. The poor and illiterate are susceptible only to agitation propaganda. Being economically marginalized are, to the propagandist, largely irrelevant. Education is propaganda's most effective vehicle, (hence my apprehension of career choice). Again, it is impossible to distinguish information from propaganda or propaganda from information.

And, as a society, we keep buying, and buying it. We avert our gaze from the obvious. The propagandist has succeeded absolutely. The design of inverted totalitarianism is in place, and it happened in full view. We did nothing to stop the growth of the Machine. It has grown into myth, beyond the scope of human imagination. We did this. They did this. We are complicit. This is all by design. Today, by looking we are really looking away, the spectacle is the seduction, the distraction is programmed, psych-tested, color-coded, sexy and perfect.

The Dead Kennedys put it best; the comfort you demanded is now mandatory. If you think you can fight the Machine, your revolution is limited. You can either disappear from the economy, which is almost impossible. Maybe start by encrypting your online activity, your emails and text messages. This doesn't seem like much of a revolution, but it will certainly piss off those Homeland Security folks with

their great big domestic surveillance campaign. Tiny revolutions, tiny victories. At this point in time, we cannot do more. Art has immense power to counter the propagandist, there are also guerilla tactics, slow-work, music, punk, dubstep, encryption, awareness; we have a few tools at hand to fight the Machine, all tiny revolutions to create tiny victories. If enough us engage the Machine, we might stand a chance.

In 1967, Leo Marx stated, "To change the situation, we require new symbols of possibility, and although the creation of these symbols is in some measure the responsibility of artists, it is in great measure the responsibility of society" (Cogswell, (1968) p.57). I believe in the power of art to illicit change, but Marx is right, the responsibility to change our possibilities and break free of this prison of information rests on all of us. In the meantime I am going to paint windows on the walls of my cell. We all should paint windows on our prison walls, or giraffes, unicorns, eggplants, whatever.

Know this, "the [propaganda] machine is, indeed, in the garden [of the mind] and will not go away" (Cogswell, (1968) p.57). We must remain aware of the Machine, stay vigilant. We must learn to recognize the Machine and its inevitability.

We have to remember our own truths, believe in love, our humanity. We have to restore empathy to a world far gone.



Figure 13: Image source Anonymous, date unknown. "It's still a world where we're aware of what's happening. We've yet to cross the line into a fully realized skyless reality. And in a world dominated by disinformation and the conspiracy-fetishizing paranoia it breeds, awareness is the greatest weapon of all.

The trick is figuring out how to use it" (Anonymous, (2015) Censored).

If I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behave so well? Henry David Thoreau.

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