

## PROPAGANDA AS PSEUDOCOMMUNICATION

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AS THE COUNTDOWN TO 1984 touches five perhaps the time has come to treat Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous aphorism less as a philosophical point for discussion and more as a serious warning. If, indeed, "The limits of my language are the limits of my world,"(1) then we need to examine the environment created by the symbol systems of our technological world. As Stanley Milgram notes in *Obedience to Authority*, ". . . the social psychology of this century reveals a major lesson: often, it is not so much the kind of person a man is as the kind of situation in which he finds himself that determines how he will act."(2)

Whatever else propaganda has been in the past, in its current manifestation it is clearly the child of modern technology, the illegitimate and unwanted offspring of mass society and mass media of communication. The simple lies and personal deceptions of the past bear as little relation to modern, large-scale propaganda as the bow and arrow do to nuclear missiles.(3)

As Watergate should have taught us, the determined and deliberate mass deceptions that are promulgated via the mass media by powerful political figures cannot be detected, much less combatted, easily. Only a series of monumental, if fortuitous, blunders rendered Nixon and company vulnerable to Congressional examination and exorcism. Even now, we still have no clear understanding of the complete "scenario" (to use one of their favorite words), much less of the ultimate implications for our country and the world of the activities that went on, in, around, and under the White House during the Nixon Captivity. Despite the seemingly endless publication of books about Watergate, we still live in ignorance; at best, these books tell us what happened with a few speculations as to why, usually colored by

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the writers' prior loyalties; at worst either they are propagandistic attempts to exonerate Nixon by showing that all Presidents engaged in similar behavior or they are personal pleas for the writers' own innocence, rather in the fashion of the German generals after World War II. At this point in time (to use another example of White House argot) the most informative and insightful analysis of the entire Nixon years has been done by Jonathan Schell in the *Time of Illusion*. The final chapter poses the question central to communication in a technological age:

The immediate question that the nation faced when President Nixon took office was, at bottom, whether the President or the people would have the last word in the forum of public discourse. The Constitution required that it be the people, but strategic doctrine required that it be the President. For the doctrine of credibility, once it was challenged, could succeed only if the President was empowered to take sole charge of the nation's image. The democracy could survive, however, only if the people were allowed, in chaotic, uncontrolled democratic fashion, to demand what they pleased, and let the nation's image take care of itself. In fact, the impression that a democratic nation makes on the world can never, strictly speaking, be organized into an image. Image-making is by its very nature calculated and centralized, whereas the democratic process is by nature spontaneous and decentralized.(4)

Schell's final sentence says it all: image-making and image-projecting are not communication but propaganda, for, as Jacques Ellul reminds us, a stormtrooper shouting "democratic" slogans is still a stormtrooper.

Faced with the difficulty, perhaps even the impossibility, of obtaining all of the relevant information upon which to base important decisions, what defenses does the ordinary citizen have against massive public deceptions? The following *matrix* (a word which comes to us from the Greek for womb, thereby defining a developing process rather than a fixed product) is one attempt to provide a system for distinguishing modern, technological propaganda (pseudocommunication) from communication. Admittedly, this methodology is complex but little of what we receive via the various mass media is simple. Propaganda may be simple-minded in terms of content but never simple in terms of structure or impact on the receiver.

In attempting an understanding of how pseudocommunication operates within the larger symbol system of communication, we need to examine not only the *content* of our symbolic environments but the *structure* of the message systems and the *context* in which sender, medium and receiver all transact. Simply stated, communication attempts to distinguish between emphatic and phatic levels of meaning, between discursive and non-discursive symbol systems, and between

figure and ground in a frame, employing the former in each set in preference to the latter. This is not to maintain that we do not communicate important and valuable messages phatically, in non-discursive ways, or through use of ground in a frame; rather, it is to point out that since these messages work on our unconscious rather than on our conscious minds, on our emotions rather than on our intellects, on our tribal rather than our individual attitudes, opinions, and beliefs, they provide fertile soil for those who would sow their seeds of propaganda in the fields of our minds.

It was reported in the *Wall Street Journal* of August 14, 1978 that the Federal Trade Commission finally has realized that advertisements carry messages via symbol systems other than language. The problem is in deciding how to recognize, analyze and legislate against deceptive messages that are phatic, non-discursive and embedded in the ground. As the *Journal* reports:

In a recent speech, Tracy Westen, the bureau's deputy director, cited an ad for Belair cigarets, which he said is "dominated by a full-page, color photograph of a happy couple frolicking in the surf." The words in the ad, which tell the reader the cigarets take you "all the way to fresh," appear to be "trivial throw-aways," Mr. Westen said.

But what is the message of the ad, he asked. Perhaps it is that Belairs will make you "healthy" and "happy," a message that might be deceptive if stated in words, he said.

Because pictures, unlike words, don't have accepted meanings, it's "difficult to agree on the meaning or message communicated by a photograph—and thus difficult to agree whether a theme or message in a picture is legally deceptive in FTC terms."

It is worth noting that Mr. Westen still has not gotten the message with regard to the use of non-discursive elements to evoke discursive connections; that he thinks the slogan "Takes you all the way to fresh" is a trivial throw-away indicates that he fails to see the connection among the product, the words and pictures. As to his view that the claim that cigarettes will make you healthy and happy *might* be deceptive if advanced in words, I leave that to the Surgeon General.

Allow me to offer one other example of the use of non-discursive symbols to evoke rather definite behaviors. An ad for Silva Thins is composed of a picture of the package and another of a young, attractive, smiling woman, fashionably dressed in a suit with jacket and skirt, blouse and scarf; she's holding a folded newspaper and we see her in a three-quarter shot from the head to the knees. She is *not* smoking. Her picture comprises fully one-quarter of the ad and the picture of the package another quarter. The headline accounts for a quarter and the copy for the final quarter. Thus, non-discursive elements (the pictures) account for half of the total message system.

A simple reading of the headline and copy quickly establishes the connection between the discursive elements (the words) and the non-discursive elements (the pictures):

Here's another  
good reason why  
I'm a Thinner  
I started smoking Silva  
Thins for their looks. You  
know, long, lean and  
elegant.  
Now they're lower too.  
Low in tar. Because Silva  
Thins lowered tar 5mg.  
Which is another good  
reason for being a  
Thinner.

It is worth noting that these words are written in a graphic form similar to that employed for poetry, which may be related to non-discursive uses of language. That the girl is a "Thinner" in both looks and in smoking habits is quickly established, possibly establishing a connection between the behavior and her looks. Like the cigaret itself (the spelling *cigarette* occurs only in the mandatory warning from the Surgeon General about cigarette smoking being dangerous to your health) the girl is "long, lean and elegant." It may well be that the real problem here is that such appeals invite people to respond non-discursively not only to picture but to words as well. Just as we have difficulty agreeing on the meanings communicated by a picture we may soon come to the point of having the same difficulty in agreeing on the meaning of language itself.

Given this introduction and setting, here then is one attempt to distinguish communication from pseudocommunication, the real from the illusionary.

#### *In Communication*

1. Control tends to pass from sender to receiver in a sharing experience with power continually shifting via feedback, which influences both technique and goals, allowing the meanings of symbols to be determined by all

#### *In Pseudocommunication*

1. Control tends to remain with the sender in a non-sharing experience with power held by the message sender who determines the meanings of symbols and with feedback limited to improving the technique only.

those involved in the trans-  
action. If the passing of con-  
trol is delayed it will be for a  
limited time

Delays are always strategies  
for avoiding the passing of  
control

This concept of control may be the single most important difference between communication and pseudocommunication. As Norbert Wiener writes in *The Human Use of Human Beings*:

. . . feedback is a method of controlling a system by reinserting into it the results of its past performances. If these results are merely used as numerical data for the criticism of the system and its regulations, we have the simple feedback of the control engineer. If, however, the information which proceeds backward from its performance is able to change the method and pattern of performance, we have a process which may be called learning.(5)

*The New York Times* of June 16, 1975 provided two interesting, and different, examples of control in politics. In Iran only one political party is legal and the premier, Amiee Abbas Hoveida, wisely told the people, "It does not make any difference which of the Rastakhiz candidates you vote for as long as you register your political coming of age through casting your vote." Obviously, our age of mass communication has made it convenient, perhaps even necessary in order to maintain an illusion of participatory government, to have the people "vote" even when the vote has no meaning, except as an approval of those in power. Interestingly enough, a failure to vote will have to be explained to the party since this would be regarded as "a breach of discipline." In our own country, then President Ford, on February 3, 1975, detected a consensus emerging from his policies, saying, "Most Americans are not only solidly agreed on the problems we must solve—but they are agreed that solutions must be forthcoming soon." Like his immediate predecessor, Ford seemed to possess magical skills for discerning the thoughts of some "silent majority." The *Times* of June 19, 1975 reports that Mr. Ford was planning a series of "Town Meetings" across the country to identify and solve domestic problems. As James M. Cannon, the President's senior advisor for domestic affairs, put it: "There is some kind of a current running against too much government interference not only in the lives of businessmen, but of ordinary citizens." Perhaps this is an accurate report but, as the *Times* pointed out, "Verification of such a trend through cross-country forums would coincide, by accident or design, with the development of the theme on which Mr. Ford is expected to base his appeal for a full term in the White House."

*In Communication*

2. The Stated and Observed Purposes tend toward similarity in that the stated purposes are clear and open to verification by empirical observation using methods of the choosing of all of those involved in the transaction

*In Pseudocommunication*

2. The Stated and Observed Purposes tend toward being different in that the stated purposes are unclear, hidden, or contradictory to the observed purposes, or in that the stated purposes are not verifiable by empirical observation, or in that the methods of analysis are determined by the sender only

This is nothing more than a plea for openness and empiricism in our public utterances; unfortunately, in our technological society, it becomes increasingly difficult to verify statements ourselves. It may be that given the widespread reliance on various mass media for our information we are no longer able to verify much of what bombards our senses each day. Perhaps the answer here is to distrust most, if not all, "communication" that comes to us in unverifiable form. In short, we have to be wary of accepting statements and conclusions from people who claim secret or private knowledge, whether they be transcendental meditators, astrologists, future tellers, government officials, advertisers, teachers, or reporters. As a simple exercise, try verifying the following statements:

1. "Revlon, the people who help make the world a little more beautiful." (TV commercial)
2. "I don't think anybody could say we don't have some people who wouldn't want to overthrow the government." (Senator Barry Goldwater on investigating the C.I.A.)
3. "With your popularity at a peak now, you'll probably have more invitations than you can handle, so select thoughtfully. Instead of wasting time on several projects, figure out priorities beforehand and concentrate on the most important, worthwhile ones." (Horoscope for Cancer in June)
4. "Rockefeller Finds No Kennedy Link With Death Plots. But He Indicates White House Must Have Known About Major C.I.A. Actions." (Headline in *N. Y. Times*, June 16, 1975)

- 5a. "Does TV Violence Affect Our Society? YES." (article in *TV Guide*, June 14-20, 1975, by Neil Hickey)
- b. "Does TV Violence Affect Our Society? NO." (article in *TV Guide*, same issue, by Edith Effron)

*In Communication*

3. the Thinking required tends to be individual and critical in that both sender and receiver are expected to reach their conclusions independently from observing the same information and by using whatever methods of analysis chosen by each

*In Pseudocommunication*

3. the Thinking required tends to be collective and non-critical in that the sender tries to control both the information flow available to the receiver and the methods of analyzing that information available to the receiver

Whether the President of the United States or the Premier of China, the Surgeon General or the Tobacco Institute of America, Ford or Volkswagen, Gleem or Crest, *Playboy* or *Ms.*, the message is the same: believe in me, do as I want.(6) A half century ago, another leader put it most succinctly in *Mein Kampf*:

The purpose of propaganda is not to produce interesting divertissements for blasé young gentlemen, but to convince the masses. The masses, however, are slow-moving, and they always require an interval of time before they are prepared to notice anything at all, and they will ultimately remember only the simplest ideas repeated a thousand times over.(7)

In a very real sense it may be that the best way to uncover pseudocommunication is to read the great propagandists themselves. Men like Hitler and Goebbels, as well as the lesser lights from American politics and Madison Avenue, frequently provide the rest of us with tremendous insights into how to corrupt language, thought and behavior. Dr. Paul Josef Goebbels (Ph.D. in romantic drama from Heidelberg), a most attentive pupil of the master, wrote these words in his diary for January 29, 1942:

... the rank and file are usually much more primitive than we imagine. Propaganda must therefore always be essentially simple and repetitious. In the long run only he will achieve basic results in influencing public opinion who is able to reduce problems to the simplest terms and who has the courage to keep forever repeating them in this simplified form despite the objectives of the intellectuals.(8)

Both Hitler and Goebbels, I suspect, would have had lucrative careers as communication consultants to both Madison Avenue and Washington D.C.

*In Communication*

4. the Symbol System employed tends toward a close and organic relationship between the symbols used and their referents, with a limited number of possible referents for any symbol, always noting clearly the differences between signs and symbols

*In Pseudocommunication*

4. the Symbol System employed tends toward a confusion of symbols and signs, implying (but not establishing) close relationships between symbol and referent by employing symbols that allow for ambiguity in interpretation

The more obvious violations of this aspect of language use usually make amusing anecdotes. Consider, for example, this gem from the *New York Times*, June 11, 1975:

Saying that it is "a mockery" to use American flags as scarecrows, the American Legion in New Hampshire has asked Arthur Richard of Suncook to replace them with flags of Communist countries. Mr. Richard, replying that Old Glory had kept the crows away from his corn for four years, said, "I don't want Communist flags—I'm not a Communist. Let them put them in their own gardens."

At first, one is reassured by Mr. Richard's seeming sanity with regard to the operational effectiveness of the "flags" as "scarecrows," but, sad to relate, he quickly succumbs to the delusion that the symbol is the referent. The question of the loyalty of the crows is left open.

Currently, President Carter's promise to bring openness to the communication between President and people appears suspect with the recent appointment of Gerald Rafshoon as chief of White House communications. It seems that this former public relations expert and campaign manager for candidate Carter has become the Chief Gatekeeper(9) of the Palace. Midge Constanza's resignation, partly in response to the chastisement she received for accepting an invitation to appear on a television newsprogram, is only the public part of the operations that serve to present one clear image of Mr. Carter and the Presidency. In the name of unity we are offered conformity. This orchestration of messages leads not to improved communication but to an attempt to sell an image to the public. Indeed, many of Mr. Carter's appearances on television have been more image than reality.



The burning log in the fireplace and the blue sweater for the energy crisis talk were only the more obvious attempts to influence the public via non-discursive symbols (e.g., the burning log + President's sweater = conservation of fuel). What we have here is one more bit of public relations that allows President Carter to engage in image-manipulation while maintaining a facade of openness and honesty. In a significant sense, on the phatic, non-discursive and ground level, the President has become all symbol, all image, all package. What we have here is not a failure to communicate. What we have here is all shadow and no substance.

*In Communication*

5. the Appeals used are directed toward the rational, with an emphasis on clear relationships between the message and supporting data

*In Pseudocommunication*

5. the Appeals used are directed toward the emotional, with an emphasis on finding emotional connections between the receiver and the message

Incidents to illustrate this distinction are readily available from any daily newspaper, television show, or magazine. Allow one small but, since it involves academia, perhaps significant story to suffice. In the December 2, 1974 issue of *Time* there was a story concerning the hiring of a professional gag writer to supply jokes for use by professors at the University of Southern California. It seems that the students find many of the lectures somewhat boring, and Dean Donald Lewis was a bit "impatient with 'typically inept' professors who read old and boring lecture notes to freshman, most of whom are accustomed to watching fast-paced television." Right on, Dean Lewis! Rather than finding professors who might give fresh and intellectually stimulating classes, the Dean hired a gag writer to spice up the "old and boring lecture notes" with a few snappy one-liners. It is bad enough when the phone company employs Henny Youngman, Phyllis Diller, Rodney Dangerfield and others to amuse us with "Dial-a-Joke" (sort of a layperson's answer to "Dial-a-Prayer"), but now it seems that professors must compete with Johnny Carson's opening monologue. Here is an example of the contributions made by the gag writer, Mr. Eric Cohen, to the lectures of a psychology professor who had been rated as one of the worst teachers: "I consider myself particularly qualified to discuss troubled people because I've been both a student and a teacher here at U.S.C." Although the professor left the room to a standing ovation, his contract was not renewed. Perhaps his ratings were not high enough.

The point to all of this is that this story illustrates once more the attempt to sell the sizzle instead of the steak, to focus on the image instead of the reality. That the students responded positively to this packaged humor speaks profoundly for their past experiences and their present judgments. This packaging of products by giving the customers what they have been conditioned to want may be good business (*somebody* ate those those 25 billion McDonald burgers) but it is decidedly not good communication; it is an invitation for us to suspend our reason and to turn to emotion.

While the emotional appeals of God, mother, Big Macs, and patriotism seem old-fashioned in these technological days, emotionalism has not vanished; it has only become more difficult to detect. At any given moment I am invited to join in any number of emotional campaigns: the Committee Against Racism invites me to combat "the racist theories of Jensen, Shockley, Herstein, Moynihan, Banfield, etc."; the Students International Meditation Society invites me to partake of the "Science of Creative Intelligence" which, they promise, "Brings fulfillment in every field of knowledge"; scientists from the Stanford Research Institute invite me to accept Uri Geller's psychic powers as "scientifically valid." And the beat goes on. In each of these three examples cited, attempts at "scientific" verification are employed but the total message is dependent upon the receiver being a true believer. The need to believe leads otherwise sober researchers to accept as rational evidence the special pleadings of interested parties.

The end result of this kind of response can be seen in a news story from the *New York Times*, June 19, 1975: "Laos Is Schooling Civil Servants To Rid Them Of 'Erroneous Ideas.'" As one civil servant put it regarding this exorcising of critical judgment, "We intellectuals must allow this judgment to be restrained by the necessity of reaching the objective of the new system." And, in a pathetic echo of 1984 in Oceania and the rhetoric of the 60s in America, "The accent will be on the people, and the intellectual must identify with the people."

#### *In Communication*

6. Justification for methods and goals tends to be based upon a presentation of all available evidence using analytical techniques that are open to all and are validated by the consensus of judgment reached independently by all participants

#### *In Pseudocommunication*

6. Justification for methods and goals tends to be based upon appeals to outside authorities, inside information, or to secret knowledge, mystical revelation and similar private and non-sharable ways of knowing

This category seems to describe the world that is ever becoming too much with us. The "if-only-you-knew-what-I-know-you-would-agree-with-my-position" approach has become the standard not only for Presidents and the Pentagon but for every pitchperson in a shell game. Daily, I am invited to accept all manner of behavior and goals based upon some appeal to authority or to secret knowledge or to divine revelation. It may be fitting that India, a land of caste system (very much in operation but officially not discussable) and private meditations, has given us a clear example of how to control democracy before it goes too far. Then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi overcame her conviction for election law violations by having the law changed retroactively. Of course she did take the precaution of locking up most members of Parliament who opposed her. As Law Minister K.R. Gokhale explained, "This bill seeks to remove loopholes in the act." Not content with this bit of doublespeak, he made a serious bid for achieving the Doublespeak Hall of Fame with this gem: "It was not introduced for the benefit of any single individual, and if any individual benefits from it, that does not affect the merits of the legislation." One bill designed to strengthen "democracy" in India renders the Prime Minister immune to all legal actions during her/his time in office. This method of preserving democracy is rather like the now-celebrated American major who said of Ben Suc (in some reports, Ben Tre): "We had to destroy the town in order to save it."

*In Communication*

7. the Ends and the Means (i.e., the message and the medium) are viewed as being intrinsically connected and interrelated, and cannot be separated

*In Pseudocommunication*

7. the Ends are seen as justifying the Means; conversely, the means are viewed as value-free and not open to criticism

The classic defense of this pseudocommunication technique was frequently used during the hysteria exploited by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950's: "His tactics may be questionable but his goals are worthwhile." Or, as Senator Barry Goldwater put it in his Cow Palace acceptance speech in 1964, "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." In short, the ends justify the means. That this gambit is not restricted to the conservatives is aptly demonstrated by a news item in the *New York Times* of March 6, 1975 that reports on the behavior of Mr. William Kunstler, defense lawyer at the Attica trial, who argued that juries had the right to make inferences about a witness's use of client-lawyer privilege and the Fifth Amendment. Mr. Kunstler is quoted as replying to the

judge's instruction that client-lawyer conversations were protected by law, "I don't think that the privilege should exist when we have so much at stake." When the judge reminded the lawyer, "Mr. Kunstler, that's the law and you know it," Kunstler replied, "I know that's the law, but we're dealing with something more serious." To William Kunstler, at least, Senator Goldwater was right about extremism and moderation. In the end, we are asked to rely on the purity of heart of those who seek to sell us "virtuous" goals while asking that we ignore how these goals are reached.

*In Communication*

8. the Universe is viewed as basically complex and not open to total understanding; large degrees of tentativeness and uncertainty are included in any analysis

*In Pseudocommunication*

8. the Universe is viewed as basically simple and open to total understanding; analysis tends to be certain and capable of being contained in a word, a phrase or a slogan

This distinction seems crucial to me since the pseudocommunicator is always endeavoring to have us accept a simplified view of life.(10) In pseudocommunication, a ready answer is always available and provides the receiver with a ready defense against conflicting evidence. As Hitler stated it in *Mein Kampf*:

The receptivity of the great masses is extremely limited, their intelligence is small, their forgetfulness enormous. Therefore, all effective propaganda must be limited to a few points and they should be used like slogans until the very last man in the audience is capable of understanding what is meant by this slogan. As soon as one sacrifices this basic principle and tries to show the many facets of a problem, the effect is frittered away, for the masses can neither digest nor retain the material offered to them.(11)

Daily, we observe this technique in operation. Consider McDonald's assertion that "You, you're the one, the only one we're working for"; this seems a bit odd since over 25 billion burgers have been sold and I, for *one*, have yet to consume even one. Or consider the assertion that all of the problems confronting us are the results of (check off your favorites) capitalism, communism, imperialism, colonialism, militarism, pacifism, racism, sexism, materialism, atheism, monotheism, you-name-it-ism. The slogan has become the standard weapon not only of Madison Avenue, the White House, and the Pentagon, but of nearly everyone who transmits any message via the

mass media. Ms. Shirley MacLaine, an actress turned social theorist, led a group of women on a trip through China. The group was composed of such a cross-section of feminism that one instantly recalls the representative bomber crews in World War II Hollywood movies: a white-haired New Englander, a teenager from California, a Navaho from Arizona, a Texan, a black from Mississippi, a doctor, a Puerto Rican, and—of course—a movie star. *A China Memoir*, telecast over PBS, contains such gems as Ms. MacLaine's asking of a China worker: "What is there about American imperialism that he hates the most?" During a studio discussion following the showing of the film, Dr. Rosa Marin from Puerto Rico observed about the Chinese, with evident approval: "They are emphasizing the training of children in the values they want to have them believe." Ms. MacLaine's comment on this point is worthwhile: "Our mistake is to call this teaching 'brain-washing'." Later, Dr. Marin provided a list of "freedoms" that exist presently in China: "freedom from hunger; freedom to have a roof over your head; freedom to have a dress." Compare this last with Orwell's: "The word *free* still existed in *Newspeak*, but it could only be used in such statements as 'This dog is free from lice' or 'This field is free from weeds.' It could not be used in its old sense of 'politically free' or 'intellectually free' since political and intellectual freedom no longer existed even in concepts, and were therefore of necessity nameless." In summing up her observations about what she had learned from her China trip (explicated more fully in her book, *You Can Get There From Here*), Ms. MacLaine seems to have found the secret for individual development in a collective society; she opts for "creative contribution but not individual revisionism." Right on.

Adolf Hitler, whose disdain and contempt for what he labeled "the masses" were so profound that he never attempted to hide his true feelings, provides us with yet another clear statement of intent:

The function of propaganda is . . . not to weigh and ponder the rights of different people, but exclusively to emphasize the one right it has set out to argue for. Its task is not to make an objective study of the truth . . . ; its task is to serve our own right, always and unflinchingly.(12)

#### *In Communication*

9. the Receiver is encouraged, even required, to take Responsibility for his actions, to be self-actualizing in terms of his/her own behavior

#### *In Pseudocommunication*

9. the Receiver is encouraged to avoid Responsibility by assigning it to others, to act as an agent for some higher authority

This tendency toward what Stanley Milgram calls "agenting" and which he examines in frightening detail in *Obedience to Authority* may be one of the most seductive techniques of pseudocommunication since it provides the receivers with a ready-made alibi for whatever actions they commit. After all, if I am only obeying orders, how can I be held accountable? This defense, based upon "higher orders," has long been with us, but has been raised to a fine art in the last thirty years; it has been used as a shield by such disparate groups and individuals as the Nazi defendants at Nuremberg, the American defendants at the My Lai trials, the members of the White House staff about Watergate, the C.I.A. and F.B.I. about illegal wiretaps, to name but a few of the more prominent. In *Teaching As A Subversive Activity*, Postman and Weingartner, with their usual disregard for elegance, labeled this particular behavior as "creeping Eichmannism," and the label is a useful one as labels go because it reveals this avoidance technique for the shallow cover it is. Orders alone, however, do not provide the perfect defense; for that we must reinforce obedience with ignorance. In Theodore White's *Breach of Faith*, a Nixon speechwriter, one Raymond Price, after learning of the contents of the June 23, 1972 tape which clearly showed that Nixon had lied about the cover-up, is quoted as saying: "The President had done me a favor by deceiving me. It meant that I'd been able to write for him honestly."

Irving Janis (13) of Yale University has isolated eight characteristics of this kind of behavior in groups; according to Janis "groupthink" can be identified by the following:

1. an illusion of invulnerability
2. a tendency to ignore warnings and to construct rationalizations to discount any warnings
3. an unquestioned belief in the inherent morality of their ingroup actions, ignoring any ethical and moral considerations of their decisions
4. a holding of stereotyped views of the leaders of *enemy* groups
5. an application of direct pressure on any individual who momentarily expresses doubt about any of the shared illusions or who questions the validity of the group arguments
6. self-censorship of deviations from consensus
7. the turning of unanimity into an idol
8. the emergence of self-appointed mindguards to protect the group from adverse information

Such behavior may achieve questionable success in such trivial exercises as winning football games, but it poses serious questions for a free society when it becomes standard procedure for government officials.

*In Communication*

10. disorganization and misunderstanding are assumed to be due to a general tendency toward entropy, which is not a power in itself but a measure of the weakness of our systems of information and communication; this Augustinian devil can be overcome by intelligence

*In Pseudocommunication*

10. disorganization and misunderstanding are assumed to be caused by an outside evil force that consciously tries to overcome us and will continually change tactics; this Manichaeian devil *cannot* be overcome by intelligence

The recent successes of *The Exorcist* and *Jaws* attest to this most atavistic of all beliefs about good and evil. (14) "The Devil made me do it" is both a punchline of a joke and a comment on how the world is viewed by pseudocommunicators. Almost the entire content of television programming is predicted upon the belief that outside evil is trying to destroy us, from the simpleminded plots of daytime soap operas to the clichés of the seemingly endless police and crime shows that are common in the evening shows. Regardless of how many times the good guys and gals of *CHiPS*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *The Rookies*, *S.W.A.T.*, *Police Story*, *Police Woman* and *Adam-12*, capture the bad guys; despite the endless efforts of *Mannix*, *Cannon*, *Barnaby Jones*, *McCloud*, *Columbo*, *Kojak*, *Baretta*, *Rockford*, the *Incredible Hulk*, *Starsky and Hutch*, *Quincy*, *Kaz*, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *Charlie's Angels*, and *Wonder Woman*, in fighting the forces of evil, the evil lives on, ever-renewing itself, ever-changing its form. In any season, the crime rate on prime-time America makes the South Bronx look like Disneyland.

Of course, the evil on television is only make-believe and, depending upon which "authority" you believe, is harmless, harmful, or beneficial to the viewers. But the "devil theory" does more than just provide targets for TV cops. Hitler and the Nazis succeeded in selling to the German people the seemingly contradictory beliefs that the Jews were, at one and the same time, in control of Wall Street and international banking and in league with the Kremlin in a world-wide plot to destroy Germany. That the "evil" could be arrayed as *both* capitalism and communism is a simple trick if one believes in a Manichaeian devil who is both crafty and undefeatable through intelligence and knowledge; obviously, only a superhuman hero can save us. At present, there is no end to the manifestations of evil among us; take your pick: the oil companies, the communists, the Pentagon, the White

House, the Symbionese Liberation Army, the F.B.I., the C.I.A., Coca Cola, to list but a few. It may well be that more suffering results from ignorance than from evil; the demons that stalk our nights are more the products of our projections than of some outside evil. The witches are gone now, except in the pitiful fancies of the lunatic fringe, but the witchhunts continue.

These ten categories, then, are an attempt to provide some understanding of the complexity that is modern pseudocommunication. The categories are neither magical nor free from fault, but are offered as a model upon which to base some analyses. Like all models, this one leaks; its analogies are just that, analogies. And any analogy can take us just so far before it breaks down and we must find a new approach. At the very least, we must attend to Adolf Hitler's first axiom of propaganda: ". . . the basically subjective and one-sided attitude it must take toward every question it deals with."(15) In brief, we must learn to take an objective and multivaried attitude toward the important questions facing us and our technological society.

One of Ludwig Wittgenstein's most important influences was a Viennese journalist and critic, Karl Kraus, who wrote that it is vital to ". . . show that there is a distinction between an urn and a chamber pot and that it is this distinction above all that provides culture with elbow room. The others, those who fail to make this distinction, are divided into those who use the urn as a chamber pot and those who use the chamber pot as an urn."(16)

If we are to provide our technological culture with thinking room we need to discern the distinction between our own urns and chamber pots, between communication and pseudocommunication.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Wittgenstein's constructs concerning language can be found in his seminal work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuiness, with an Introduction by Bertrand Russell (International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Method, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961; New York: Humanities Press, 1961); see also *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) and *Philosophical Investigations*, edited by G.H. von Wright and G.E.M. Anscombe, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953).
2. For a full explication of the experiments and results upon which Milgram bases this conclusion see his *Obedience To Authority* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975).
3. For this point of view I am indebted intellectually to Professor Jacques Ellul, whose approaches to the problems posed by technology and propaganda are central to an understanding of the roles and effects of persuasion in the



- modern world; see, in particular, *The Technological Society*, translated by John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964) and *Propaganda, The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, translated by Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).
4. Jonathan Schell, *The Time of Illusion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 371.
  5. Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (New York: Avon Books, 1967), p. 84.
  6. For a discussion of the impossibility of collective critical thinking see Ellul's *Propaganda*, pp. 169-178; see also Robert H. Ennis, "A Concept of Critical Thinking," *Harvard Educational Review* (Winter, 1962), pp. 81-111.
  7. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, translated by Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), p. 185.
  8. *The Goebbels Diaries*, edited, translated, and with an introduction by Louis P. Lochner (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1948), p. 56; see also *Final Entries, 1945, The Diaries of Joseph Goebbels*, translated by Richard Barney, edited, introduced and annotated by Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1978). Of the numerous works concerning Nazi propaganda the best is Ernst K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925-1945* (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1965).
  9. For an enlightening, and amusing, story of how the function of the gatekeeper operated in the Hafsid dynasty in 14th Century Tunis, see the references to Ibn Khaldun's history of Tunisia in A.J. Liebling, *The Press* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1961), especially pp. 9-13; it would seem that the *hajib*, or Guardian of Access, has been with us for some time.
  10. For a discussion regarding the importance of this concept for both science and life see J. Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), pp. 353-374.
  11. Hitler, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-181.
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
  13. Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink, A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), pp. 197-198.
  14. For a discussion of the implications of these two types of thinking about the world see Wiener, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 41-66.
  15. Hitler, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
  16. Quoted in Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 89.