

Inside the Submissive Void: Propaganda, Censorship, Power and Control

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[An excellent read, recommended to all.]

"Nothing appears more surprising to those who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye than the ease with which the many are governed by the few; and the implicit submission, with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers." -- David Hume, *Of the First Principles of Government*, 1768.

Brief:

The use of propaganda and censorship is more frequently associated with totalitarian, corrupt and/or despotic regimes, not modern democracies in the West. Yet the history of how western governments and their ever vigilant overlords in the media, financial and business spheres have controlled the political narrative of the time via these means is a long, storied and ruinous one, going back well before 1914. Along with serving the contemporaneous political objectives of its perpetrators as contrived; such activities often continue to inform our understanding, and cement our interpretation, of history. If as the saying goes, "history repeats itself", we need look no further as to the main reason why. In this wide ranging 'safari' into the disinformation, myth-making, fake news wilderness—The Big Shill—Greg Maybury concludes that "It's the narrative, stupid!"

Controlling the Proles

The following yarn may be apocryphal, but either way the 'moral of the fable' should serve our narrative well. The story goes like this: sometime during the height of the Cold War a group of American journalists were hosting a visit to the U.S. of some of their Soviet counterparts. After allowing their visitors to soak up the media zeitgeist stateside, most of the Americans expected their guests to express unbridled envy at the professional liberties they enjoyed in the Land of the Free Press.

One of the Russian scribes was indeed compelled to express his unabashed 'admiration' to his hosts...in particular, for the "far superior quality" of American "propaganda". Now it's fair to say his hosts were taken aback by what was at best a backhanded compliment. After some collegial 'piss-taking' about the stereotypes associated with Western "press freedom" versus those of the controlled media in the Soviet system, one of the Americans called on their Russian colleague to explain what he meant. In fractured English, he replied with the following:

'It's very simple. In Soviet Union, we don't believe our propaganda. In America, you actually believe yours!'

As amusing as this anecdote is, the reality of the Russian journo's jibe doesn't simply remain true now; that 'belief' has become even more delusional, farcical, and above all, dangerous. One suspects that Russian journos today would think much the same. And in few cases has the "delusional", "farcical", and "dangerous" nature of this belief been more evident than with the West's continued provocations of Russia, with "Skripalgate" in Old Blighty (see [here](#), and [here](#)), and "Russia-Gate" stateside (see [here](#), and [here](#)) being prime, though far from the only, exemplars we might point to.

Of course just recently we were all subjected to the ludicrous dog n' pony show that was the much touted London "media freedom" conference, organised under the auspices of the so-called Media Freedom Coalition (MFC), a UK/Canadian 'initiative'. As the name suggested, this was the establishment's lip-service effort to be seen to be supporting or 'defending' media freedom, and initiating strategies and frameworks for the 'protection' of journalists. For my part I can't recall another recent event that so perfectly embraced the Orwellian playbook, absent any hint of irony or embarrassment from the parties involved.

To illustrate, after noting that 'the world is becoming a more hostile place' for journalists, the MFC website then righteously intones: ...'[they face dangers beyond warzones and extremism, including increasing intolerance to independent reporting, populism, rampant corruption, crime, and the breakdown of law and order....'. The cynic might be tempted to add: 'And that's just in our Western democracies!'

And who can forget the fatuous "integrity initiative" that preceded it, whose lofty ambitions aimed to 'defend democracy against disinformation'? This is elite code for limiting free speech, already happening at a rate of knots, with the powers that be 'setting up new perimeters' online and offline. The prevailing efforts by a range of people to make it a crime to criticise Israel or boycott the country is arguably the most insidious, egregious example. As well, the attempts by the MSM to designate genuine, independent analysis by alternative media as "fake news" is another one.

Such is the sophistication and ubiquity of the narrative control techniques used today—afforded increasingly by 'computational propaganda' via automated scripts, hacking, botnets, troll farms, and algorithms and the like, along with the barely veiled censorship and information gatekeeping practised by Google and Facebook and other tech behemoths—it's become one of the most troubling aspects of the technological/social media revolution. (See also [here](#), and [here](#).)

Notably, the MFC conference came and went after organisers saw fit to exclude legitimate Russian news outlets RT and Sputnik, an ideological 'fashion statement' thoroughly at odds with the purported premise upon which it was instigated. Moreover, there was little mention of the 'elephant in the room' Julian Assange—the person who embodies foremost the disconnect between the practice and the preaching of Western media freedom, to say little of underscoring the irony, self-serving opportunism, and double standards that frequently attend any mainstream debate about what it actually means.

Put bluntly, "media freedom" in the West is increasingly 'more honoured in the breach than in the observance', with the London confab all about keeping up appearances to the contrary, an event we might say was conceived of by soulless, demented, establishment shills, '...full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. The surreal spectacle though must have induced cognitive dissonance amongst pundits, and many head-shaking moments for Assange supporters and genuine truth-seekers alike.

As for Wikileaks and Assange himself, it's worth noting the attitude of the national security state toward him. After accusing Assange of being a "narcissist", "fraud", and "a coward", and labelling WikiLeaks a "hostile intelligence service", Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared he [Assange] was 'eager to do the bidding of Russia and other American adversaries.' Either way, his comments can be taken as more or less representative of Beltway opinion. Along with noting that official Washington's hatred of Assange 'borders on rabid', Ted Carpenter offered the following:

[Assange] symbolizes a crucial fight over freedom of the press and the ability of journalists to expose government misconduct without fear of prosecution. Unfortunately, a disturbing number of "establishment" journalists in the United States seem willing—indeed, eager—to throw him to the

government wolves.’

Lapdogs for the Government

Here was of course another surreal spectacle, this time courtesy of one of the Deep State’s most dangerous, reviled, and divisive figures, a notable protagonist in the Russia-Gate conspiracy, and America’s most senior diplomat no less. Not only is it difficult to accept that the former CIA Director actually believes what he is saying, well might we ask, “Who can believe Mike Pompeo?”

And here’s someone whose manifest cynicism, hypocrisy, and chutzpah would embarrass the much derided scribes and Pharisees of Biblical days. We have Pompeo on record recently in a rare moment of honesty admitting—whilst laughing his ample ass off it should be noted—that under his watch as CIA Director, ‘...We lied, we cheated, we stole...it was like, we had entire training courses.’ It may have been one of the few times in his wretched existence that Pompeo didn’t speak with a forked tongue.

At all events, his candour aside, we can assume safely that this reactionary, monomaniacal, Christian Zionist ‘end-timer’ passed all the Company’s “training courses” with flying colours. According to Matthew Rosenberg of the New York Times, all this did not stop Pompeo however from citing Wikileaks when it served his own interests. Back in 2016 at the height of the election campaign, he had ‘no compunction...about pointing people toward emails stolen by Russian hackers from the Democratic National Committee and then posted by WikiLeaks.’

And this is of course the CIA we’re talking about, whose past and present relationship with the media might be summed up in two words: Operation Mockingbird (OpMock). Anyone vaguely familiar with the well-documented Grand Deception that was OpMock, arguably the CIA’s most enduring, insidious, and successful psy-ops gambit, will know what we’re talking about. (See here, here, here, and here.) At its most basic, this operation was all about propaganda and censorship.

After opining that the MSM is ‘totally infiltrated’ by the CIA and various other agencies, for his part former NSA whistleblower William Binney recently added, ‘When it comes to national security, the media only talk about what the administration wants you to hear, and basically suppress any other statements about what’s going on that the administration does not want get public. The media is basically the lapdogs for the government.’ Even the redoubtable William Casey, Ronald Reagan’s CIA Director back in the day was reported to have said something along the following lines: ‘We know our disinformation program is complete when almost everything the American public believes is false.’

In order to provide a broader and deeper perspective, we should now consider the views of a few others on the subjects at hand, along with some history. In a 2013 piece musing on the modern meaning of the practice, my compatriot John Pilger recalled a time when he met Leni Riefenstahl back in 70s and asked her about her films that ‘glorified the Nazis’. Using groundbreaking camera and lighting techniques, Riefenstahl produced a documentary that mesmerized Germans; as Pilger noted, her *Triumph of the Will* ‘cast Adolf Hitler’s spell’. She told Pilger the “messages” of her films were dependent not on “orders from above”, but on the “submissive void” of the German public.

All in all, Riefenstahl produced arguably for the rest of the world the most compelling historical footage of mass hysteria, blind obedience, nationalistic fervour, and existential menace, all key ingredients in anyone’s totalitarian nightmare. That it also impressed a lot of very powerful, high profile people in the West on both sides of the pond is also axiomatic: These included bankers, financiers, industrialists, and sundry business elites without whose support Hitler might’ve at best

ended up a footnote in the historical record after the ill-fated beer-hall putsch. (See here, and here.) “Triumph” apparently still resonates today. To the surprise of few one imagines, such was the impact of the film—as casually revealed in the excellent 2018 Alexis Bloom documentary *Divide and Conquer: The Story of Roger Ailes*—it elicited no small amount of admiration from arguably the single most influential propagandist of the modern era.

In a recent piece unambiguously titled “Propaganda Is The Root Of All Our Problems”, my other compatriot Caitlin Johnstone also had a few things to say about propaganda, echoing Orwell when she observed it was all about “controlling the narrative”. In this of course she is correct, though I’d suggest the greater “root” problem is our easy propensity to ignore this reality, pretend it doesn’t or won’t affect us, or reject it as conspiratorial nonsense. Yet as she cogently observes,

‘I write about this stuff for a living, and even I don’t have the time or energy to write...about every single narrative control tool that the US-centralized empire has been implementing into its arsenal. There are too damn many of them emerging too damn fast, because they’re just that damn crucial for maintaining existing power structures.’

The Discreet Use of Censorship and Uniformed Men

‘It is hardly surprising that those who hold power should seek to control the words and language people use’ said Canadian author John Ralston Saul in his 1993 book *Voltaire’s Bastards—the Dictatorship of Reason in the West*. Fittingly, in a discussion encompassing amongst other things history, language, power, and dissent, he opined, ‘Determining how individuals communicate is’...an objective which represents for the power elites ‘the best chance’[they] have to control what people think. In essence, this translates as: The more control ‘we’ have over what the proles think, the more ‘we’ can reduce the inherent risk for elites in democracy.

‘Clumsy men’, Saul went on to say, ‘try to do this through power and fear. Heavy-handed men running heavy-handed systems attempt the same thing through police-enforced censorship.

The more sophisticated the elites, the more they concentrate on creating intellectual systems which control expression through the communications structures. These systems require only the discreet use of censorship and uniformed men.’ In other words, along with assuming it is their right to take it in the first place, ‘those who take power will always try to change the established language’, presumably to better facilitate their hold on it and/or legitimise their claim to it.

For Oliver Boyd-Barrett, ‘democratic theory presupposes a public communications infrastructure that facilitates the free and open exchange of ideas.’ Yet for the author of the recently published *RussiaGate and Propaganda: Disinformation in the Age of Social Media*, ‘No such infrastructure exists.’ The mainstream media he says, is ‘owned and controlled by a small number of large, multi-media and multi-industrial conglomerates’ that lie at the very heart of US oligopoly capitalism and much of whose advertising revenue and content is furnished from other conglomerates:

‘The inability of mainstream media to sustain an information environment that can encompass histories, perspectives and vocabularies that are free of the shackles of US plutocratic self-regard is also well documented.’

Of course the word “inability” suggests the MSM view themselves as having some responsibility for maintaining such an egalitarian news and information environment. They don’t of course, and in truth, probably never really have! A better word would be “unwilling”, or even “refusal”. The MSM all but epitomise the “plutocratic self-regard” that is characteristic of “oligopoly capitalism”. Indeed,

the MSM collectively functions as advertising, public relations/lobbying entities for Big Corp, in addition to acting as its Praetorian bodyguard, protecting their secrets, crimes, and lies from exposure. Like all other companies they are beholden to their shareholders (profits before truth), most of whom it can safely be assumed are no strangers to “self-regard”, and could care less about “histories, perspectives and vocabularies” that run counter to their own interests.

It was Aussie social scientist Alex Carey who pioneered the study of nationalism, corporatism, and more so for our purposes herein, the management (read: manipulation) of public opinion, though all three have important links. For Carey, the following conclusion was inescapable: ‘It is arguable that the success of business propaganda in persuading us, for so long, that we are free from propaganda is one of the most significant propaganda achievements of the twentieth century.’ This former farmer from Western Australia became one of the world’s acknowledged experts on propaganda.

Prior to embarking on his academic career, Carey was a successful sheep grazer. By most accounts, he was a first-class judge of the animal from which he made his early living, and one wonders if this expertise gave him a unique insight into his main area of research! In any event, Carey eventually sold the family farm and travelled to the U.K. to study psychology, apparently a long-time ambition.

From the late fifties until his death in 1988, he was a senior lecturer in psychology and industrial relations at the Sydney-based University of New South Wales, and his research was lauded by such luminaries as Noam Chomsky and John Pilger, both of whom have had a thing or three to say over the years about The Big Shill. In fact such was his admiration, Pilger described him as “a second Orwell” in his prophesies, which in anyone’s lingo is a big call.

Carey unfortunately died in 1988, interestingly the year that his more famous contemporaries Edward Herman and Chomsky’s book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* was published, the authors notably dedicating their book to him. Though much of his work remained unpublished at the time of his death, a book of Carey’s essays—*Taking the Risk Out of Democracy: Corporate Propaganda Versus Freedom and Liberty*—was published posthumously in 1997. It remains a seminal work. In fact, for anyone with an interest in how public opinion is moulded and our perceptions are managed and manipulated, in whose interests they are done so and to what end, it is as essential reading as any of the work of other more famous names. This tome came complete with a foreword by Chomsky, so enamoured was the latter of Carey’s work.

For Carey’s part, the three “most significant developments” in the political economy of the twentieth century were:

- a) the growth of democracy;
- b) the growth of corporate power; and
- c) the growth of propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against

Carey’s main focus was on the following:

- a) advertising and publicity devoted to the creation of artificial wants;
- b) the public relations and propaganda industry whose principal goal is the diversion to meaningless pursuits and control of the public mind; and
- c) the degree to which academia and the professions are under assault from private power determined to narrow the spectrum of thinkable (sic) thought.

For Carey, it is an axiom of conventional wisdom that the use of propaganda as a means of social and ideological control is ‘distinctive of totalitarian regimes’. Yet as he stresses:the most minimal

exercise of common sense would suggest a different view: that propaganda is likely to play at least as important a part in democratic societies (where the existing distribution of power and privilege is vulnerable to quite limited changes in popular opinion) as in authoritarian societies (where it is not). 'Conventional wisdom' becomes conventional ignorance, and "common sense", not so much.

For Sharon Beder, the purpose of this propaganda barrage has been to convince as many people as possible that it is in their interests to relinquish their own power as workers, consumers, and citizens, and 'forego their democratic right to restrain and regulate business activity. As a result the political agenda is now largely confined to policies aimed at furthering business interests.'

In the increasingly dysfunctional political economy we inhabit then, whether it's widgets or wars or anything in between, few people realise the degree to which our opinions, perceptions, emotions, and views are shaped and manipulated by propaganda (and its similarly 'evil twin' censorship,) its most adept practitioners, and those elite, institutional, political, and corporate entities that seek out their expertise.

Making the World Safe for Plutocracy

It is now just over a hundred years since the practice of propaganda took a giant leap forward, then in the service of persuading palpably reluctant Americans that the war raging in Europe at the time was their war as well. This was at a time when Americans had just voted their then president Woodrow Wilson back into office for a second term, a victory largely achieved on the back of the promise he'd "keep us out of the War." Americans were very much in what was one of their most isolationist phases, and so Wilson's promise resonated with them.

But over time they were convinced of the need to become involved by a distinctly different appeal to their political sensibilities. This "appeal" also dampened the isolationist mood, one which it has to be said was not embraced by most of the political, banking, and business elites of the time, most of whom stood to lose big-time if the Germans won, and/or who were already profiting or benefitting from the business of war.

For a president who "kept us out of the war", this wasn't going to be an easy 'pitch'. In order to sell the war the president established the Committee on Public Information (aka the Creel Committee) for the purposes of publicising the rationale for the war and from there, garnering support for it from the general public. Enter Edward Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud, who's generally considered to be the father of modern public relations.

In his film *Rule from the Shadows: The Psychology of Power*, Aaron Hawkins says Bernays was influenced by people such as Gustave le Bon, Walter Lippman, and Wilfred Trotter, as much, if not more so, than his famous uncle. Either way, Bernays 'combined their perspectives and synthesised them into an applied science', which he then 'branded' "public relations".

For its part the Creel committee struggled with its brief from the off; but Bernays worked with them to persuade Americans their involvement in the war was justified—indeed necessary—and to that end he devised the brilliantly inane slogan, "making the world safe for democracy". Thus was born arguably the first great propaganda catch-phrases of the modern era, and certainly one of the most portentous. The following sums up Bernays's unabashed mindset:

'The conscious, intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.'

The rest is history (sort of), with Americans becoming more willing to not just support the war effort but encouraged to view the Germans and their allies as evil brutes threatening democracy and freedom and the 'American way of life', however that might've been viewed then. From a geopolitical and historical perspective, it was an asinine premise of course, but nonetheless an extraordinary example of how a few well chosen words tapped into the collective psyche of a country that was decidedly opposed to any U.S involvement in the war and turned that mindset completely on its head. '[S]aving the world for democracy' (or some variation) has since become America's positioning statement, 'patriotic' rallying cry, and the "Get out of Jail Free" card for its war and white collar criminal clique.

At all events though it was by any measure, a stroke of genius on Bernays's part; by appealing to the basic fears and desires of people he could engineer consent on a mass scale. It goes without saying it changed the course of history in more ways than one.

That the U.S. is to this day still using a not dissimilar meme to justify its "foreign entanglements" is testament to both its utility and durability. The reality as we now know was markedly different of course. They have almost always been about power, empire, control, hegemony, resources, wealth, opportunity, profit, dispossession, keeping existing capitalist structures intact and well-defended, and crushing dissent and opposition.

It is instructive to note that the template for 'manufacturing consent' for war had already been forged by the British. For twenty years prior to the outbreak of the war in 1914, the then stewards of the British Empire had been diligently preparing the ground for what they viewed as a preordained clash with their rivals for empire the Germans. To begin with, contrary to the opinion of the general populace over one hundred years later and the bog standard narratives of thousands of history textbooks written since that time, it was not the much touted German aggression and militarism, nor their undoubted imperial ambitions, which precipitated its outbreak.

And neither did the Europeans 'sleepwalk' into this conflagration. The stewards of the British Empire were not about to let the Teutonic upstarts chow down on their imperial lunch as it were, and set about unilaterally and preemptively crushing Germany and with it any ambitions it had for creating its own imperial domain in competition with the Empire upon which Ol' Sol never set.

The "Great War" is worth noting here for other reasons. As documented so by Jim Macgregor and Gerry Docherty in their two books covering the period from 1890-1920, we learn much about propaganda, which attest to its extraordinary power, in particular its power to distort reality en masse in enduring and subversive ways. In reality, the only thing "great" about World War One was firstly the degree to which the masses fighting for Britain were conned into believing this war was necessary, and secondly, the way the official narrative of the war was sustained for posterity via propaganda and censorship. "Great" maybe, but not in a good way!

In their seminal tomes—World War One Hidden History: The Secret Origins of the First World War and its follow-up Prolonging the Agony: How the Anglo-American Establishment Deliberately Extended WWI by Three-And-A-Half Years—Macgregor and Docherty provide a masterclass for us all of the power of propaganda in the service of firstly inciting, then deliberately sustaining a major war. The horrendous carnage and destruction that resulted from the war was of course unprecedented, the global effects of which linger on now well over one hundred years later.

Such was the enduring power of the propaganda that today most people would have great difficulty in accepting the following; this is a short summary of historical realities revealed by Macgregor and Docherty that are at complete odds with the official narrative, the political discourse, and the school

textbooks:

- a) It was Great Britain (supported by France and Russia) and not Germany who was the principal aggressor in the events and actions that led to the outbreak of war;
- b) The British had for twenty years prior to 1914 viewed Germany as its most dangerous economic and imperial rival, and fully anticipated that a war was inevitable;
- c) In the U.K. and the U.S., various factions worked feverishly to ensure the war went on for as long as possible, and scuttled peacemaking efforts from the off;
- d) key truths about this most consequential of geopolitical conflicts have been concealed for well over one hundred years, with no sign the official record will change;
- e) very powerful forces (incl. a future US president) amongst U.S. political, media, and economic elites conspired to eventually convince an otherwise unwilling populace in America that U.S. entry onto the war was necessary;
- f) those same forces and many similar groups in the U.K. and Europe engaged in everything from war profiteering, destruction/forging of war records, false-flag ops, treason, conspiracy to wage aggressive war, the dissemination of propaganda, and direct efforts to prolong the war by any means necessary, many of which will shock.

But peace was not on the stewards' agenda. When, by 1916, the military failures were so costly and embarrassing some key players in the British government were willing to talk about peace and discuss what that might mean. This could not be tolerated. The potential peacemakers had to be ditched. The unelected European leaders had one common bond. They would fight Germany until she was crushed.

Prolonging the Agony details how this secret cabal organised the change of government without a single vote being cast. David Lloyd George was promoted to prime minister in Britain and Georges Clemenceau made prime minister in France. A new government, an inner-elite war cabinet thrust the Secret Elite leader, Alfred Milner into power at the very inner-core of the decision-makers in British politics. Democracy? They had no truck with democracy. The voting public had no say. The men entrusted with the task would keep going till the end and their place-men were backed by the media and the money-power, in Britain, France and America.

Propaganda Always Wins

But just as the pioneering adherents back in the day might never have dreamt how sophisticated and all encompassing the practice of propaganda would become, nor would the citizenry at large have anticipated the extent to which the industry has facilitated an entrenched, rapacious plutocracy at the expense of our economic opportunity, our financial security, our physical environment, and increasingly, our basic democratic rights and freedoms.

We now live in the Age of the Big Shill—cocooned in a submissive void no less—an era where nothing can be taken on face value yet where time and attention constraints (to name just a few) force us to do so; [where] few people in public life can be taken at their word; where unchallenged perceptions become accepted reality; where 'open-book' history is now incontrovertible non-negotiable, upon pain of imprisonment fact; where education is about uniformity, function, form and conformity, all in the service of imposed neo-liberal ideologies embracing then prioritising individual—albeit dubious—freedoms.

More broadly, it's the "Roger Ailes" of this world—acting on behalf of the power elites who after all are their paymasters—who create the intellectual systems which control expression through the communications structures, whilst ensuring...these systems require only 'the discreet use of

‘censorship and uniformed men.’ They are the shapers and moulders of the discourse that passes for the accepted lingua franca of the increasingly globalised, interconnected political economy of the planet. Throughout this process they ‘will always try to change the established language.’

And we can no longer rely on our elected representatives to honestly represent us and our interests. Whether this decision making is taking place inside or outside the legislative process, these processes are well and truly in the grip of the banks and financial institutions and transnational organisations. In whose interests are they going to be more concerned with? We saw this all just after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) when the very people who brought the system to the brink, made billions off the dodge for their banks and millions for themselves, bankrupted hundreds of thousands of American families, were called upon by the U.S. government to fix up the mess, and to all intents given a blank cheque to so do. That the U.S. is at even greater risk now of economic implosion is something few serious pundits would dispute, and a testament to the effectiveness of the snow-job perpetrated upon Americans regarding the causes, the impact, and the implications of the 2008 meltdown going forward.

In most cases, one accepts almost by definition such disconnects (read: hidden agendas) are the rule rather than the exception, hence the multi-billion foundation—and global reach and impact—of the propaganda business. This in itself is a key indicator as to why organisations place so much importance on this aspect of managing their affairs. At the very least, once corporations saw how the psychology of persuasion could be leveraged to manipulate consumers and politicians saw the same with the citizenry and even its own workers, the growth of the industry was assured.

As Riefenstahl noted during her chinwag with Pilger after he asked if those embracing the “submissive void” included the liberal, educated bourgeoisie? “Everyone,” she said.

By way of underscoring her point, she added enigmatically: ‘Propaganda always wins...if you allow it’.

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