# ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON MASS MEDIA PROPAGANDA

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Books, articles, speeches and conferences about journalism, whether produced by journalists or 'outsiders', almost always contain evaluations of how the media face their responsibilities. Usually, the authors launch their observations from a general point of view -- either a positive or negative one. They either hold that the media have enormous powers or that they are merely small cogs in the machinery of democracy, capitalism, education, and the myriad concepts clustered around the term 'public opinion'. The typical criticism usually starts out with a set of general statements concerning what the mass media should be and do. From there, the authors create their links between the media and the sophistication or ignorance of the voter, the rationality or irrationality of the consumer, the social adjustment or maladjustment of the child, and the involvement or apathy of the citizen.

Why do the authors find it so easy to make connections between the content of the media and the behavior of people? Probably because most authors, being humans themselves, hold implicit views about humanity and the types of forces and controls that make humanity what it 'is'. On the one hand, if one believes people are inherently rational and open-minded, one's books and articles will reflect the 'fact' that the mass media are merely small cogs in the formation of public opinion. Such authors will 'find' that people utilize many media and outside sources of information before making purchases, voting, or entertaining and educating themselves. From that it follows that even when people do use the media, they use them as tentative and incomplete rather than arbitrary and absolute guides for their economic, political, cultural, and educational decisions.

On the other hand, the majority of authors who criticize the media tend to believe that people in general are not completely rational or mature, and that the average citizen needs a great deal of assistance from mediated sources as he goes about the business of being a consumer, a voter, a student, and a parent. Media irresponsibility is seen by these critics (whom we may call the non-apologists, in contrast with the apologists described in the preceding paragraph) as the primary cause of consumer confusion, voter ignorance and apathy, a lessening of reading, writing and cognitive skills, and everything from violence in the streets to obscenity in and debasement of our language. Since they consciously or unconsciously picture humanity as troubled masses seeking guidance, the non-apologists have a vast arena upon which they can play the game of media criticism ... an arena of far broader scope than that available to the apologists.

Political, economic, and social conservatism or liberalism are not the only ideologies represented by journalism's critics. Even though the research of social scientists may be generally free from political, economic, or social bias, the research may nevertheless be tainted by the scientists' fundamental perceptions, especially their perceptions of how man fits into the grand scheme of things. Surely a behaviorist's media criticism will differ from a psychoanalyst's, just as criticism by an adherent of play theory (with his belief that people manipulate their media rather than vice versa) will differ from criticism by one who adheres to what has been called the "cultural norms" theory (with his belief that the media are powerful social forces, constantly manipulating and molding private thoughts and public behavior). This is because most researchers, subjected as they are to the same cultural and cognitive forces that mold the layman, hold either explicit or implicit models of man -- man is basically good, or basically bad, or basically strong, or basically weak, etc. -- which might contaminate their studies of human nature. In short, there's a little bias in all of us.

Having said this, it becomes no easy matter to propose a framework to objectively analyze the performance of the mass media. The safest approach

may be to pick and choose one's way through the 'standard' arguments, sets of expectations, codes of behavior, etc., regarding what journalism and the mass media can be and do, and couple these arguments, theories and critical approaches with as much objective evidence as possible about actual media performance and effects. The task would be overwhelming. But if one manages to utilize common orientations and empirical evidence displayed by a variety of seemingly impartial observers, social scientists, and media practitioners, the task of media analysis becomes, at least, philosophically feasible. The problem, of course, rests with the validity of the approaches, theories, and evidence utilized to produce such a mode of analysis. For the sake of the present paper, evidence mustered by students of language and semantics, students of psychology and sociology and political science, and concerned lay critics will be considered. Commonalities in these approaches will be used, especially those most obviously value-free, to propose a means whereby a layman, a media practitioner, or a media researcher might undertake a systematic and impartial analysis of mass media performance in general and journalistic performance in particular.

## PROPAGANDISTS AND PROPAGANDEES

Media standards of performance and codes of ethics, whether established by quasi-official or official agencies (censorship bureaus, courts, or legislative organs), by pressure groups, or by media organizations themselves, seem to have had one overriding principle during the twentieth century. Usually expressed in terms of 'social responsibility', it can be reduced to the argument that free, open, rational behavior on the part of highly aware citizens is necessary for preserving an open society that accepts and operates on the principles of democracy. Media practices that violate this basic premise are usually referred to as being progagandistic, biased, subjective, slanted, sensational or otherwise irresponsible. For the sake of parsimony, the entire body of irresponsible media behaviors will be referred to as propaganda henceforth in this paper.

Traditionally, propaganda has been considered as the manipulation of opinion toward political, religious, or military ends. The word 'propaganda' was first used in 1622 in reference to the spreading of the faith; since Catholicism was an accepted faith and therefore considered worth spreading, the word had positive connotations. However, the word got its

negative connotations during the early years of the present century when Americans were concerned that Axis powers were using propaganda and psychological warfare deviously. During both world wars, an important military and political role was played by propaganda. We feared that propaganda and brainwashing went hand in hand and therefore had no part to play in a democratic society unless that society was deeply engaged in a war for survival.

Since World War Two, as social scientists have come to realize that communication in and of itself does not have the absolute 'mind'-molding power once attributed to it, the fear of propaganda has lessened. But the word has taken on a broader meaning, as it has come to be associated with many areas of social and economic life in addition to the traditional political, religious and military areas. We often hear references to 'propaganda' about various products and ideas for sale. We often use the term rather loosely to cast aspersions on ideas put out by anyone whose motives we suspect. (It may be significant that the United States has a United States Information Agency; our ideological 'enemies' have propaganda agencies.) Most recently, the term propaganda has again surfaced in the literature of journalism vis-a-vis the kinds of media irresponsibilities discussed above.

What elements of the mass media lend themselves to being propagandistic? What characteristics of media-people (news reporters, public relations and advertising and film practitioners, etc.) result in some of these people sometimes behaving as propagandists? Finally, and perhaps of most importance, what characteristics of media consumers lend themselves most readily to being propagandized, and how can the inculcation of a propagandistic society be avoided?

Concerns over media propaganda are based in part on the often stated assumption that one responsibility of a democratic media system is to keep the public open-minded -- that is, to keep people curious, questioning, unwilling to accept simple pat answers to complex situations, to operate as libertarians, etc. 'Mental freedom,' they assume, comes when people have the capacity, and exercise the capacity, to weigh numerous sides of controversies and to come to their own decisions, free of outside constraints. Social-psychologist Milton Rokeach, in his seminal work The Open and Closed Mind (1960), concluded empirically that the degree

to which a person's belief system is open or closed is the extent to which the person can receive, evaluate, and act on relevant information received from the outside on its own intrinsic merits, unencumbered by irrelevant factors in the situation arising from within the person or from the outside. To him, the open-minded individual would seek out mass media that challenged him to think for himself, rather than media that would offer the easy answers to complex problems. The open-minded media consumer seeks 'free' (i.e., independent and pluralistic) media because he wants to remain free.

For generations media critics have pointed to factors in mass media that mitigate against open-mindedness. Gilbert Seldes (The New Mass Media, 1957) expressed fear that the mass media in general and television in particular had begun to inculcate in the audience a weakened sense of discrimination, a heightening of stereotypical thinking patterns, a tendency toward conformity and dependence. In the long run, Seldes argued, the mass media may discourage people from forming independent judgments. He carried his argument to the point of saying that if the mass media are brakes on the 'mental' and 'emotional' development of their followers, they are helping to make our social structure rigid. "This may help to create a people who would accept a dictatorship," he concluded (pp. 26, 50-62).

Seldes is not alone in this respect, although his view may be more extreme than most. Seldes was talking about the news and information aspects of the media, as was Harold Lasky, who a decade earlier had observed that:

> The real power of the press comes
> from the effect of its continous repetition
> of an attitude reflected in facts which its
> readers have no chance to check, or by
> its ability to surround these facts by an
> environment of suggestion which, often
> half-consciously, seeps its way into the
> mind of the reader and forms his pre-
> mises for him without his even being
> aware that they are really prejudices to
> which he has scarcely given a moment of
> thought. (Lasky, American Democracy,
> 1948, p. 670)

Likewise Charles Wright (Mass Communications: A Sociological Perspective, 1959) expressed concern over the potential cognitive damage created by the very function of news reporting and editing:

> When news is edited for him, the in-
> dividual does not have to sift and sort, in-
> terpret and evaluate, information for him-
> self. He is free to accept or reject prefa-
> bricated views about the world around him,
> as presented by the mass media. But at
> some point, it can be argued, the consumer
> of predigested ideas, opinions, and views
> becomes an ineffectual citizen, less capa-
> ble of functioning as a rational man. (p. 21)

(There is, of course, an argument that people need these predigested views, since they can't experience all of life first-hand. By definition, media come between realities and media consumers, and we are not arguing for the elimination of those media. But the logic of Jacques Ellul, in his seminal work Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes [1965], seems compelling, as he argued that man in a technological society needs to be propagandized, to be 'integrated into society' by means of the mass media. Man with such a need gets carried along unconsciously on the surface of events, not thinking about them but rather 'feeling' them. Since man has a spontaneous defensive reaction against an excess of information and since man clings unconsciously to the unity of his own person whenever he is faced with inconsistencies in his news media, man's natural defense is to deny contradictions and therefore to deny his own continuity, obliterating yesterday's news and any contradiction in his own life. Modern man, Ellul concluded, therefore condemns himself to a life of successive moments, discontinuous and fragmented -- and the news media are largely responsible. [Ellul may be implying that if there were no mass media to help man achieve this bifurcation, man would quickly find another means to achieve it.] The news becomes a form of propaganda, and no confrontation ever occurs between the event and the truth; no relationship ever exists between the event and the person, according to Ellul.

(The hapless victim of information overload, according to Ellul, seeks out propaganda as a means of ordering the chaos. Propaganda gives him explanations for all the news, so that it is classified into easily identifiable categories of good and bad, right and wrong, worth-worrying-about and not-worth-worrying-about, etc. The propagandee allows himself to be propagandized, to have his cognitive horizons narrowed, according to Ellul. Propaganda in the news media fits a panoramic pattern established by

the media practitioners, who attempt to show propagandees that they travel in the direction of history
and progress. Media propaganda thus must furnish
an explanation for all happenings, a key to understand the whys and the reasons for economic and
political developments. "The great force of propaganda lies in giving man all-embracing, simple explanations and massive, doctrinal causes, without
which he could not live with the news," Ellul argued,
adding that man is doubly reassured by propaganda
because it tells him the reasons behind developments
and because it promises a solution for all the problems which would otherwise seem insoluble. "Just
as information is necessary for awareness, propaganda is necessary to prevent this awareness from
being desperate," Ellul concluded. [pp. 146-47])

The cognitive state of the media consumer, as
depicted by Seldes, Lasky, Wright, Ellul, and
others, is one in which the consumer has voluntarily
exposed himself to the myriad facts, details, explanations, and exhortations about the busy worlds of
economics, politics, geography, and so on to the
point where, as described by Ellul, "he finds himself in a kind of a kaleidoscope in which thousands
of unconnected images follow each other rapidly."
(Ellul, p. 145) Erwin Edman was referring to newspapers in particular when he observed that they are
the worst possible way of getting a coherent picture
of life of our time. "It is a crazy quilt, a jazz symphony, a madness shouting in large type." Edman
suggested that the mind of the newspaper reader, if
it could be photographed after ten minutes reading,
would not be a map, but an explosion. (quoted in
Peterson, Jenson and Rivers, The Mass Media and
Modern Society, p. 232) Given this model of man,
it is little wonder some commentators see propaganda as an inevitability -- for if man's nature is to
have a homeostatic mental set, the 'crazy quilt'
patterns of information he receives from his mass
media would certainly drive him to some superior
authority of information or belief that would allow
him to make sense of his world. At least, that is the
theory that follows from all of the above sources.

Obviously, not all commentators share this
perspective. There is at least one school of social
science and philosophy that adheres to the belief that
'homo ludens' (man at play) takes an existentialistic
delight in the 'crazy quilt' of pluralistic news, information, advertising, and persuasion. Basically apologists for media's inherent characteristics, they
sense little of the desperation expressed by Seldes,

Wright, Lasky, Ellul, and Edman. Homo ludens can
either rise above the propaganda through his heightened self-awareness experiences when alone in a
mass (a theory directly contradictory of Ellul's), or
he doesn't take it seriously enough to be affected by
it. Either way, propaganda is not much of a concern
to these theorists. (A criticism of this approach is
made by Gordon in Persuasion: The Theory and
Practice of Manipulative Communication, 1971.)
Between the pessimism of the first group of observers, and what must be described as the optimism
of the second group, lies a large group of analysts
who remain uncertain about the ultimate effects of
the media, but who continue their investigations with
a 'wait and see' attitude. The latter are quite unready
to suggest a cause-effect relationship between media
characteristics and audience reactions. Unfortunately, their research findings to date, largely fragmented
and lacking in comprehensiveness, do not yet lend
themselves to a broad enough theoretical model of
man the propagandist and man the propagandee to
satisfy the needs of the present study.

Obviously, each analyst's model of man -- whether he sees man as strong and rational or weak and
manipulable -- will determine whether he calls for
more or less propaganda in the media. Those believers in democratic man, following the arguments
of propaganda researchers such as Qualter (Propaganda and Psychological Warfare, 1962), would insist that the danger to libertarian man is a lack of
conflicting propaganda. Those who follow analysts
such as Ellul decry the present inevitability and apparently want a decrease in that propaganda -- though
Ellul never advocated a major change in the status
quo, but merely deplored it. Regardless of one's
model of man, however, there may be a good deal of
validity in the observation of Ellul that:

> ...it is evident that a conflict exists bet
> ween the principles of democracy -- par
> ticularly its concept of the individual --
> and the processes of propaganda. The no
> tion of rational man, capable of thinking
> and living according to reason, of con
> trolling his passions and living according
> to scientific patterns, of choosing freely
> between good and evil -- all this seems
> opposed to the secret influences, the mo
> bilizations of myths, the swift appeals to
> the irrational, so characteristic of propa
> ganda. (p. 233)

## PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES IN THE NEWS MEDIA

It is appropriate at this point to investigate whatever elements of propaganda that are said to exist in the news and information media. The treatment of propaganda in the entire mass media is less possible in these pages than is the treatment of news media propaganda, but it will be noted that a great many of the thoughts about news media propaganda can be expanded readily to include entertainment and persuasion media.

Such an investigation is surely no simple task. Many books and articles have pointed to this or that piece of 'propaganda' or 'propaganda campaigns' in the news media. Many studies of media bias are basically studies of media propaganda; most critics tend to assume an intentional propaganda or bias in the media, and some few have commented upon the possibility of unintentional bias in these media. The present investigation assumes a little of each, for the investigation focuses on the characteristics of the manifest content of those news media, and any such investigation must be careful about assuming cause (the intentional or unintentional bias of the reporters, editors, etc.) and effect (the possibility or lack of possibility of affecting opinion change or action). The following short review is representative of positions taken by propaganda students, and is not intended to be comprehensive.

Qualter suggested that a student of propaganda should not limit himself to a review of the editorial or opinion pages of the newspaper (or, to project his argument, to the editorial functions of other media).

> At one time it was customary to distinguish the expression of opinion on the editorial pages of a paper from the straight-forward presentation of facts on the news pages. With the growing appreciation of the extent to which opinion governs the selection and manner of presentation of news, it has been concluded that this division is unrealistic and it is now generally admitted that the news columns can also contain propaganda. This is especially true of news magazines such as Time and News-week where the selection and presentation of news items is an expression of editorial policy. (pp. 91-92)

Even Goebbels recognized this to be true. Doob quoted from Goebbels' diary that "the best form of newspaper propaganda was not 'propaganda' (i.e., editorials and exhortation), but slanted news which appeared to be straight. ("Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda," in Schramm, Process and Effects of Mass Communication, p. 524)

This need not necessarily be the result of a conscientious effort on the part of the journalist, however, if one is to believe Hohenberg's statement that:

> The temptation is great, under the pressures of daily journalism, to leap to conclusions, to act as an advocate, to make assumptions based on previous experience, to approach a story with pre-conceived notions of what is likely to happen. To give way to such tendencies is to invite error, slanted copy, and libelous publications for which there is little or no defense. An open mind is the mark of the journalist; the propagandist has made up his mind in advance. (The Professional Journalist, p. 330)

From Hohenberg's description, one might generalize that a journalist does not have to be consciously biasing his copy to earn the label of propagandist -- but it helps. And, some might add, the media consumer who shouts about propaganda in his media might have the same types of semantic and belief systems blockages that he is accusing the journalist of possessing. Syndicated columnist Sydney Harris observed that journalistic accounts of events are sometimes distorted because of ignorance, sloppiness, incompleteness, or unconscious bias. But, more often, he added, when people disagree with the report of an event they have been close to, it is less a matter of the reporter's deficiency than of the people's own foreshortened perspective. "You can't see the picture when you are in the frame," he concluded. ("Strictly Personal," Toledo Times, Aug. 14, 1972)

By and large, however, discussions of media propaganda insinuate that the journalist is aware that he is behaving in a way that will bring biases to his story, and result in his audience's having distorted views of the reality he is supposedly depicting. John Merrill has developed two different lists of ways in which this may take place. His first list dealt with biases in Time magazine; his second was a more general discussion of biases and propaganda techniques in the news media in general.

In his 1965 Journalism Quarterly article "How Time Stereotyped Three U. S. Presidents," Merrill evaluated the newsmagazine on the basis of six different 'bias categories': attribution bias, adjective bias, adverbial bias, contextual bias, outright opinion, and photographic bias. His investigation was said to demonstrate clearly that Time operated with negative stereotypes of President Truman, positive stereotypes of President Eisenhower, and ambivalent stereotypes (or no stereotypes) of President Kennedy. In his summary, Merrill listed twelve principal techniques used by Time in subjectivizing its reports: 1) deciding which incident, remarks, etc., to play up and which ones to omit or play down; 2) failing to tell the whole story; 3) weaving opinion into the story; 4) imputing wisdom and courage and other usually admired qualities by use of adjectives, adverbs, and general context or by quoting some friend of the person; 5) dragging into the story past incidents unnecessary to the present report; 6) using one's opinion to project opinion to this person's larger group -- the "one-man-cross-section device"; 7) imputing wide acceptance, such as "the nation believed" without presenting any evidence at all; 8) transferring disrepute to a person by linking him or his group to some unpopular person, group, cause, or idea; 9) playing up certain phrases or descriptions which tend to point out possible weaknesses, paint a derogatory picture or create a stereotype; 10) creating an overall impression of a person by words, an impression which is reinforced from issue to issue; 11) explaining motives for Presidential actions, and 12) telling the reader what "the people" think or what the nation or public thinks about almost anything. (JQ, Autumn, 1965, pp. 563-70)

In his more recent text, Merrill has offered a far broader compendium of propagandistic characteristics of journalists. He referred to journalists as propagandists when they 'propagate' or spread their own prejudices, biases and opinions -- trying to affect the attitudes of their audiences. Merrill's list at this point is thus of purposive, manipulatory propaganda techniques, consisting of 1) the use of stereotypes in simplifying reality; 2) the presentation of opinion disguised as fact; 3) the use of biased attribution; 4) the process of information selection or card stacking (a propaganda technique only when a pattern of selection becomes evident, according to Merrill); 5) the use of misleading headlines, based on the assumption that people come away from stories with the substance of the headline -- not the story -- in their 'minds'; 6) biased photographs; 7) censorship or "exercising news prerogatives" through a)

selective control of information to favor a particular viewpoint or editorial position, and b) deliberate doctoring of information in order to create a certain impression; 8) repetition of certain themes, persons, ideas, and slogans; 9) an emphasis on the negative, selecting targets in line with preexisting dispositions of the audience; 10) appeal to authorities, well-known and reputable sources; and 11) fictionalizing, creatively filling the gaps in a story, making up direct quotations, etc. Merrill generalized that the mass media and their functionaries generate propaganda and spread the propaganda of others to a far greater extent than most citizens believe. (Merrill and Lowenstein, Media, Messages, and Men, pp. 221-26)

One of the most often cited lists of propaganda techniques is that of seven devices proposed by the Harvard Institute for Propaganda Analysis before and during World War Two. While not all of these techniques are applicable to the news function of the mass media, several of them are, and others are applicable to the entertainment and persuasion media. The list included the name calling device, the glittering generalities device, the transfer device, the testimonial device, the plain folks device, the card stacking device, and band wagon device. (Institute for Propaganda Analysis, "How to Detect Propaganda," Propaganda Analysis, I [Nov., 1937], pp. 1-4) All of them, to one degree or another, take advantage of people's tendencies to confuse language and its referents. Those most applicable to the news media may be name calling, when a reporter merely repeats the names one person or group calls another, or even resorts to creating names or labels in hopes of confusing people and distracting their attention from the reality; glittering generalities, when a reporter uses broad, sweeping statements to categorize people and events; and especially card stacking, in which the reporter either stacks the deck with information to create a certain impression, or he unconsciously passes along the stacked deck he picked up from his news sources. Reliance upon these seven techniques as a tool or weapon for the layman to use against propaganda may result in a cynical doubting Thomas, according to Hayakawa. The realization that man cannot always be rational and avoid emotionalism is bound to result in cynicism, since the layman does not tend to act 'scientifically' because he lacks the intellectual tools of the scientist and tends to automatically jump to conclusions about 'facts' when such conclusions are not warranted and would not be made by the scientist. ("General Semantics and Propaganda," Public Opinion Quarterly [April, 1939], p. 205)

Several other listings or discussions of propaganda are available and have direct application to the news media.

J. A. C. Brown's list includes 1) the use of stereotypes; 2) the substitution of names ("The propagandist frequently tries to influence his audience by substituting favourable or unfavourable terms, with an emotional connotation, for neutral ones suitable to his purpose..."); 3) selection ("The propagandist, out of a mass of complex facts, selects only those that are suitable for his purpose... Censorship is one form of selection and therefore of propaganda."); 4) downright lying; 5) repetition ("The propagandist is confident that, if he repeats a statement often enough, it will in time come to be accepted by his audience. A variation of this technique is the use of slogans and key words..."); 6) assertion ("The propagandist rarely argues but makes bold assertions in favour of his thesis... the essence of propaganda is the presentation of one side of the picture only, the deliberate limitation of free thought and questioning."); 7) pinpointing the enemy (It is helpful if the propagandist can put forth a message which is not only for something, but also against some real or imagined enemy who is supposedly frustrating the will of his audience...); 8) the appeal to authority. (Techniques of Persuasion, pp. 26-28) Brown's list is quite similar to Merrill's, and the applications to the mass media should be apparent.

A discussion limited exclusively to the media is found in Robert Cirino's Don't Blame the People, in which he offered a "catalog of hidden bias," as his Chapter 13 is titled. Most of the examples in his thirty-six page chapter relate to biases in the news and information selection and handling; a few relate to editorial bias. His broad categories of bias in the news are: 1) bias in the source of news, including wire services and handouts; 2) bias through the selection of news stories to be printed or aired; 3) bias through the omission of news or parts of news stories available; 4) bias in the treatment and use of interviews, particularly in the selection of types of people to be interviewed, and especially on television news; 5) bias through the placement of stories on the front or back pages of the newspaper or as lead or tail stories on the air; 6) bias through 'coincidental' placement or juxtaposition of stories, headlines or pictures that subtly contrast the editors' loves and hates; 7) bias in the headlines, especially considering the tyrannies of space and vocabulary needed to summarize and attract attention to stories;

8) bias in words, however subtle, used to describe persons, thoughts, or situations; 9) bias in news images used to persuade audiences to hate, condemn, disapprove or laugh at persons representing a position contrary to the favored policies and special interests of the communicator; 10) bias in photograph selection; 11) bias in captions; 12) the use of editorials to distort facts, as covers in order to persuade the listeners to think and feel as the broadcaster wants them to; 13) the hidden editorial, found either in advertisements that appear to be news items or in the personalized opinion tacked onto otherwise 'objective' news stories. Cirino concluded that the great volume of news, the way it must be processed and the public's need to make some kind of order out of the chaos of news events, make bias inevitable. (pp. 134-179)

Although he offers no comprehensive list of propaganda techniques in mass media, Qualter suggests several ways in which the journalist may find himself and the mass medium may find itself acting propagandistically. The popular newspaper has developed a vocabulary and literary style distinctively its own, designed to arouse the appropriate reaction, Qualter maintained.

> The cliche thus becomes, not a mark of laziness or ignorance, but an essential tool in newspaper communication. Carefully selected, it will almost automatically elicit the desired response from the casual reader. It has, of course, a greater influence on the large proportion of readers who do no more than skim the headlines and the main points of a story. The constant repetition of the same phrases to cover certain situations or to convey certain situations saves the reader the effort of thought and interpretation... (pp. 90-91)

Each paper demonstrates propaganda significance, according to Qualter, when it makes its own decisions on the importance of a given story, and the decisions are reflected in the page on which the story appears, its position on that page, and the size and style of type used in the headlines. "Devices such as special type, illustrations or unusual layout may all serve to attract the readers' attention," he concluded, noting that other factors include the length of the story, the manner in which it is rewritten and the extent to which its importance is emphasized by

editorial comment and background feature articles. Other forms of propaganda in the newspaper are paid advertisements on political themes by organizations, and the free copy submitted to newspapers by the public relations officers of the various interested groups in the community. (pp. 91-92)

Qualter's inclusion of public relations handouts as propagandistic elements of newspapers is echoed in several fronts, including a journalism primer by Nelson and Hulteng. Without discussing 'propaganda' in the news per se, they noted that public relations has characteristics of delayed propaganda if the readers of newspapers do not recognize that many of the stories they are reading originated from 'interested sources'.

> Not that the PR man minds. He knows
> that the credibility of the information
> about his client is enhanced if the reader
> believes that a working journalist rather
> than a propagandist originated the story
> and wrote it. It is better to have a friend
> tell others how good you are than for you
> to do it yourself. (The Fourth Estate:
> An informal appraisal of the news and
> opinion media, p. 278)

Finally, to conclude this brief annotation of references about propaganda in the news media, one can see in a 1977 textbook for reporting students renewed emphasis on bias and distortion in the news. Ryan and Tankard conclude a chapter on that subject with advice to reporters on how they can help eliminate bias and distortion from news copy by categorizing information as reports, inferences or judgments, and by a) verifying the accuracy of a questionable report with a second source; b) avoiding the use of personal inferences and judgments in news stories; c) using inferences and judgments from qualified sources with extreme care; d) asking a source whether an inference or judgment made by a first source seems logical and proper; e) using an inference or judgment from an unqualified source only if the person is prominent or influential and the reporter considers it important to indicate to readers what that person's state of mind about a subject is, and f) reporting the evidence on which a source bases a judgment. (Basic News Reporting, p. 167)

As noted in the introduction to this study, any attempt to offer a framework that purports to objectively analyze the performance of the mass media is fraught with dangers. The past several pages have

demonstrated a broad variety of arguments, hypotheses and orientations about how the mass media supposedly operate as propagandistic agencies. Some of the arguments, etc., are contradictory. But there have been enough commonalities among them to integrate basic assumptions about propaganda into a broad-based and perhaps theoretically sound perspective, one couched in the lexicon of the social psychology of belief systems and semantic orientations.

## BELIEF SYSTEMS AND SEMANTIC ORIENTATIONS

In an effort to understand the basic nature of how people perceive the world and how they communicate their perceptions, social psychologist Milton Rokeach spent years developing his theory of belief systems. Of significance to a student of journalism is Rokeach's basic breakdown of people into categories of relatively open- or closed-mindedness. Rokeach demonstrated empirically that the basic characteristics defining the closed-minded or dogmatic person are a) a very heavy reliance upon 'authority figures' to whom he turns for guidance in making decisions and solidifying perceptions; b) irrational forces, which bias his perceptions and communications; c) a narrow time perspective, in which he overemphasizes or fixates on the past or present or future without appreciating the continuity that exists among them; d) little cognitive discrimination between differing sets of information, beliefs, and consequent actions. On the other extreme, a non-dogmatist a) evaluates and acts on information independently on its own merits; b) is governed in his actions by internal self-actualizing forces and less by irrational forces; c) perceives the past, present and future as being intrinsically related; d) resists pressures exerted by external sources to evaluate and to act in accordance with their wishes; e) distinguishes between information received about the world and information received about the source during a communication or persuasion situation. (The Open and Closed Mind)

Rokeach's research has been validated in numerous studies (see especially the extensive review by Vacchiano et al.), and is of use here because it offers a relatively objective framework within which one can analyze the behavior of both media practitioners and consumers. (It is 'objective' in the sense that it is a generalized framework, unemcumbered by the socio-politico biases that pervaded earlier studies of prejudice and authoritarianism. Rokeach's 'map' of the human 'mind' resulted from a dozen years of wide-ranging experiments, freeing it from the singular bias that may exist in more limited studies.

Finally, an understanding of the fundamental belief systems of journalists should be a more valid means of understanding their biases and behavior than would an understanding of their socio-politico orientations. The same should be true of media consumers.)

The growing body of research on perception and belief systems seems to be concluding that man constantly strives for cognitive balance as he views and communicates about the world, and that man will select and rely upon information consistent with his basic perceptions. This holds true for the journalist as well as the journalist's audience. To do otherwise runs contrary to an apparently basic human need, which helps explain why open-mindedness is an elusive objective for the journalist. A recent Journalism Quarterly study by Donohew and Palmgreen, for instance, showed that open-minded journalists underwent a great deal of stress when having to report information they weren't inclined to believe or agree with, because the open-minded journalists' self- concepts demanded that they fairly evaluate all issues. Closed-minded journalists, on the other hand, underwent much less stress because it was easy for them to make snap decisions consistent with their basic world views, especially since they were inclined to go along with whatever information was given to them by authority figures. (JQ, Winter, 1971, "An Investigation of 'Mechanisms' of Information Selection," pp. 627-39, 666) In short, it appears to be far more difficult and stressful for both journalists and media consumers to keep their pluralistic orientations. What Donohew and Palmgreen seem to be telling journalists is that if they are not undergoing any mental stress, it may be that they aren't opening their minds long enough to allow belief discrepant information to enter. And, one might imagine, the same holds true for audiences. If they don't undergo some 'mental' strain upon reading their daily papers or viewing their television news or listening to their radio news or reading their weekly newsmagazine, it may be that they are closing their 'minds'.

This is not to say that stress and strain in and of themselves make for open-minded media behavior. They may just make for confusion, and result from confusion. But if journalists and news audiences never find themselves concerned over contradictory information, facts that don't add up, opinions that don't cause them to stop and think, then they are behaving as Hohenberg's and Seldes' closed-minded journalists and members of the public, and as purveyors and passive receivers of propaganda.

Most of the empirical findings of belief systems researchers are entirely consistent with the body of knowledge referred to as 'general semantics', as both study how people perceive the world and how they subsequently communicate their perceptions or misperceptions. Recent empirical studies of semantic behavior have begun to validate many of Alfred Korzybski's original statements (Science and Sanity, 1933) that unscientific or "Aristotelian" assumptions about language and reality result in semantically inadequate or inappropriate behavior. Studies of children and adults trained in general semantics principles have demonstrated that semantic awareness results in such diverse achievements as improved perceptual, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Berger, Glorfield, Haney, Livingston, Ralph, True, Weaver, Weiss, Westover), generalized intelligence (Haney, Steele), decreased prejudice (John Black), decreased dogmatism (J. J. Black, Goldberg), and decreased rigidity (J. J. Black). These studies offer substantive refutation to early criticisms of general semantics as an overly-generalized and pedantic system of gross assumptions about language behavior. From the studies emerges a series of semantic patterns typifying the semantically 'sane' or 'un-sane' individual, patterns reflective of Rokeach's typologies of the open-minded or closed-minded individual and of propaganda analysts' descriptions of the non-propagandistic or propagandistic individual.

Highlighting general semanticists' descriptions of 'sane' language behavior are such concepts as 1) awareness that our language is not our reality, but is an inevitably imperfect abstraction of that reality, and that tendencies to equate language and reality (through the use of the verb "to be" as an equal sign) are setting up false-to-fact relationships. This is seen in the "intensional 'is-of-identity', " and is to be replaced by "extensionalized" analysis and description of reality as we perceive it; 2) awareness that the use of "to be" to describe something usually tells more about the observer projecting his bias than it does about the object described. This is seen as the "intensional 'is-of-predication'" and is to be replaced by "extensionalized" awareness of our projections; 3) awareness that people and situations have unlimited characteristics, that the world is in a constant process of change, that our perceptions are limited and that our language cannot say all there is to be said about a person or situation. This is seen in attempts to replace a dogmatic "allness orientation" with a multi-valued orientation that recognizes the "etc., " or the fact that there is always more to be seen and

observed and described than we are capable of seeing, observing, or describing;  4) awareness that a fact is not an inference and an inference is not a value judgment, and subsequent awareness that receivers of our communications need to be told the differences; 5) awareness that different people will perceive the world differently, and we should accept authority figures', sources', and witnesses' viewpoints as being the result of imperfect human perceptual processes, and not as absolute truth, and 6) awareness that persons and situations are rarely if ever two-valued; that propositions do not have to be either 'true' or 'false', specified ways of behaving do not have to be either 'right' or 'wrong', 'black' or 'white', that continuum-thinking or an infinite-valued orientation is a more valid way to perceive the world than an Aristotelian two-valued orientation.

Numerous other semantic formulations exist, but this half-dozen can begin to offer a framework for semantic analysis.  As noted above, awareness and application of these formulations have resulted in empirically improved levels of perception, reading, writing, speaking, generalized intelligence, and open-'mindedness'.  And, as in the case of being open-'minded', it can be seen that being semantically 'sane' or sophisticated is <u>not</u> the easiest way to go through life, because it tends to result in a mass of often contradictory perceptions and language behavior that the semantically unsophisticated or 'un-sane' individual never has to worry about.  But such is the responsibility of the professional journalist, and the fate of the mature media consumer.

## PROPAGANDA -- A NEW DEFINITION

At this juncture, insights from propaganda analysts, journalistic critics, social psychologists and general semanticists can be amalgamated into a reasonably objective insight into journalistic performance... both the performance of journalists and media consumers.

Taken in their extremes (and recognizing that people fall somewhere along the continuum at any given time, rather than resting at a pole), the pictures of propagandists/propagandees and non-propagandists/non-propagandees as uncovered by the preceding discussion show very definite patterns of behavior.

On the one hand, the dogmatist (typical of both propagandist and propagandee) may be characterized as having a heavy reliance upon authority figures, a narrow time perspective, a tendency to make irrational evaluations, and display little sense of discrimination between differing sets of information.  On the other, the non-dogmatist (typical of both non-propagandist and non-propagandee) faces a constant struggle to remain open-'minded' as he evaluates and acts on information independently of its own merits, is governed by self-actualizing attitudes rather than irrational ones, doesn't get hung up on what is being said or by whom, recognizes contradictions, incomplete pictures of reality, and the interrelationship of past, present and future.

The above typologies help lead us to an original definition of propaganda, one that can be applied not only to mass media studies but to a broad range of communications behavior in everyday life.  The definition is broad enough to apply to creators of messages, the messages themselves, the media in which the messages are carried, and the receivers of those messages.  It goes as follows:

While it may or may not emanate from individuals or institutions with demonstrably closed belief systems, the manifest content of propaganda contains characteristics one associates with dogmatism;  while it may or may not be intended as propaganda, this type of communication seems non-creative and seems to have as its purpose the evaluative narrowing of its receivers.  While creative communication displays expectations that its receivers should conduct further investigations of its observations, allegations, and conclusions, propaganda does not appear to do so. Rather, propaganda is characterized by at least the following:

1)  a heavy or undue reliance on authority figures and spokesmen, rather than empirical validation, to establish its truths or conclusions;
2)  the utilization of unverified and perhaps unverifiable abstract nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, rather than empirical validation, to establish its truths, conclusions, or impressions;
3)  a finalistic and fixed view of people, institutions, and situations, divided into broad, all-inclusive categories of in-groups and out-groups (friends and enemies), situations to be accepted or rejected in whole;
4)  a reduction of situations into readily identifiable cause-effect relationships, ignoring multiple causality;
5)  a time-perspective characterized by an under- or over-emphasis on the past, present, or future as disconnected periods, rather than a demonstrated

consciousness of time flow, and

　　6) a greater emphasis on conflict than on cooperation among people, institutions, and situations.

This definition allows for an investigation of mass media behavior in its full range. News media in particular (plus, of course, advertising, public relations, photography, editorials, entertainment, etc.) can be investigated as falling somewhere along a propaganda—non-propaganda continuum. Since most people expect the advertisements, public relations programs, editorials and opinion columns to be biased and persuasive, they may tend to avoid analyzing these items for propagandistic content; but the arguments in the present paper hold that ads, public relations programs, editorials and opinion columns can meet their basic objectives without being propagandistic. Indeed, persuasive media that are propagandistic, as defined herein, would appear to be less likely to attract and convince open-'minded' media consumers than they would to reinforce the biases of the true believers.

## CONCLUSIONS

We are not suggesting that the necessity for mediating reality inevitably results in propaganda. Far from it. But we might suggest that when there is a pattern of behavior on the part of media practitioners that repeatedly finds them jumping to conclusions, acting as advocates, making assumptions based on previous experience rather than the evidence at hand, and approaching their assignments with preconceived notions of what is happening and how the event should be depicted... when they have this pattern of behavior, we can say they are acting as propagandists. THEY MAY BE DOING IT UNCONSCIOUSLY. They may not be attempting to propagandize or ever be aware that their efforts can be seen as propagandistic. (In this sense our definition of propaganda differs from many standard ones.) It may well be that their view of the world is such that their work habitually follows propagandistic patterns.

But this doesn't excuse them.

Nor does it excuse the media audience member who readily accepts the distorted pictures of reality. Surely, if people want spokesmen and authority figures to run their lives, they'll swallow what they're told by 'our usually reliable sources'. If they want to believe in simple explanations for complex issues, they can find them. If they want to believe in simple explanations for complex issues, they can find them. If they want to believe that everybody of one race or sex or religion behaves one way, that things never change, that everything is a conspiracy, that the newest and most heavily advertised products are indeed panaceas, they'll find enough evidence in their mass media to perpetuate their beliefs. If they want to subscribe to only one type of newspaper, magazine, book club, or view only one type of television program or movie or listen to only one type of music, rejecting all others, they are probably acting as unwitting propagandees.

More than one observer has noted that no society has ever had a media system much better or worse than the society deserved. That may be something to think about.

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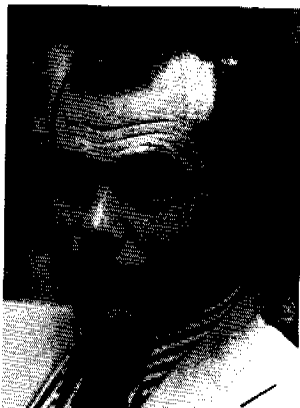


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