

FOOD FOR THOUGHT  
Number 14, Part 2  
(NEW SERIES—2007)

**AN EXCERPT FROM**  
  
***A NATION GONE BLIND:  
AMERICA IN AN AGE OF  
SIMPLIFICATION AND DECEIT***

**THAT SUGGESTS  
THE DEGREE OF EROSION OF THE  
INDIVIDUAL ABILITY TO JUDGE AND  
PERCEIVE REALITY AS AND  
FOR ITSELF**

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From Chapter Three,  
“Consumerism, Victimology, and the  
Disappearance of the Meaningful Self”

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A disconnect—this is the word that comes to mind, in its recently-acquired psychological sense. For the American mind does seem to have been unplugged in regard to certain things, unable to see them or, as I’ve said, even to entertain the possibility of them. The word “junta,” for example, can’t be used, can’t be taken as being even remotely or conceivably applicable to anything that is happening or has happened in the United States. It’s unreal. But what if we define “junta” as a power group that takes office by non-electoral, pseudo-electoral, or extra-electoral means and then passes laws depriving its citizens of liberties and freedoms that were previously guaranteed and that, if such now-curtailed liberties and freedoms were in fact exercised, could be obstructive to the interests of that power group?

In other words, a definition of the Bush administration. If one uses the word “junta,” on the other hand, the idea immediately seems crazy and unbelievable, since the word brings with it powerful connotations and associations that have nothing to do with the condition, flavor, or atmosphere of daily life in modern America. “Junta?” a person on the street might respond. “No, of course it’s not a junta. If it were a junta, things would be weird, strange, extreme, crazy. But everything is normal. Everything is regular and familiar. Everything looks the same as always. So it can’t be a junta.”

And there, indeed, lies a very big problem. Insofar as things appear to be the same as always, they’re likely to be taken by people as being the same as always. This kind of assumption, up to a point, is a matter of perfectly natural common sense. If someone looks and sounds healthy, and claims to feel fine, we’re likely to assume that that person is healthy, even though there may be a disease within, asymptomatic and hidden. But we’ve got to look at the question of the determining power of the familiar, and at the question of judging things by their looks, much more deeply than just on the common sense level if we ever hope to understand what Americans see—and what they don’t see—and why.

That is, we’ve got to go back to what I called, in the first chapter, the aesthetic of the mass media and the fruits that that “aesthetic” has born after its almost sixty-year existence. Governed by its only purpose, of protecting and increasing corporate profit and national economic growth, this aesthetic—that is, the whole of the mass media—has never from its inception had any allegiance to truth, but has, in effect, for almost six decades, consisted essentially of all lies all the time. The big central lie, ever present and subtly interwoven among all the small and middle-sized lies, is the single and fundamental lie that everything is simpler than it really is. Products, the effects they’ll have, the things they’ll achieve for you, life’s social elements and personal affairs, all of these and myriad other things are incessantly portrayed and unvaryingly presented as simpler than they really are. Even beyond this, the look of things, the sense, the shape, the aura, the feel of life are all made to seem simpler than they really are. The result of this unbroken program of falsification and simplification, kept indefatigably at work over a period of six decades, all the while enjoying the ever-increasing attention of an ever-growing audience and taking advantage of an ever-improving technology allowing its own ever more effective, powerful, and thorough delivery—the result of all this is that people no longer decide for themselves what’s to be taken as real or true, but the media do this choosing and deciding for them.

The simplification itself is part of what comes to be taken for reality, and, as this quality of simplification throughout daily life and thinking becomes more and more familiar, it comes also to be taken more and more automatically or unthinkingly as normal. One outcome of the entire process is that complexity begins to disappear: It fades away, tends to be forgotten, disappears as a habit of thought, expectation, or seeing. Simplification thus feeds simplification, the simplified becoming the normal. The entire process brings about another outcome as well, which is that thinking itself diminishes. This is partly because thinking is, of course, discouraged and unrewarded while impulse

and desire—throughout the system of consumerism—are encouraged and putatively rewarded. But there's an even worse outcome in regard to thinking and thought, and this is that thinking as it was once conceived of essentially begins coming to an end. This is because intangibles begin falling away and falling out of use and becoming less and less familiar, replaced by the far simpler phenomena of tangibles, which themselves come to be relied upon more and more. Finally, "thinking" occurs only without the aid of abstractions or intangibles, not with the aid of them; it occurs, once this point has been reached, only by and through and in response to tangibles, things seen, externals, and surfaces.

Consumers might be said to have come to a point of perfection once they've been brought to this condition, since now they are freed of the ability to see beyond the surfaces of things, freed of the habit of doing so, and freed of the desire to do so. Once large enough numbers of the population have been brought to this condition, neither politics nor national elections as they were once known can any longer exist, since ideas can't be a part of an electoral contest, but only looks and appearances. This is why one candidate will invariably look, talk, behave, or act essentially like another. What has happened is that the familiar itself has become the true and is to be accepted, while all else is untrue and not to be entertained. This explains why, for example, nothing new must ever appear on television, or nothing unlike things that have appeared before. Only the familiar can be allowed, and, in this sense, there must never be news, because real news would, by definition, be unfamiliar.

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