

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

## Number 9, Part 7.3

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

#### THAT SUGGESTS THE DEGREE OF EROSION OF CONSCIOUSNESS, THOUGHT, AND PERCEPTION THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE ALREADY IN THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

#### THE CLOSING PARAGRAPHS OF CHAPTER ONE, “WATCHING AMERICA GO BLIND”

Or take a supposition more political in nature. Consider, once again, what Marilynne Robinson wrote<sup>1</sup> about the language of contemporary experience. Then consider the essential fact that twenty years, two entire decades, have passed since she did so. And *then* consider that for this entire time there has been firmly in place an omnipresent, omnivorous mass media—a “*language of contemporary experience*”—that can and will tell only *one* truth and *one* story, will be forced along no “unaccustomed path,” and will remain solely and only in the service of advancing corporate (which is to say also governmental) power and profit—a language that can and will tell the story only of a diminished, enervated, lessened, under-individualized, “softened,” consumerized population, a population that serves the *corporations’* purposes and that lives with a blind and adamant faith both in its own *right* to so live and in the *goodness* of its so doing. For someone—like, say, Marilynne Robinson—still able to see *through* that language, still able (or wishing to be able) to see outside of the story that *that* language makes up—for such a person—an American writer, say—wouldn’t the most urgent and meaningful thing be to witness and testify to the extent and degree of the *loss*, the extent and degree of simplification of the self and of the mind and of thought itself, inside academia and out, a simplification whose result is that government and the “*language of contemporary experience*” can redefine experience in whatever way they wish in order to protect the growth of corporate profit—by, for example, taking lies and declaring them truth, taking invasion and declaring it preemption, bringing destruction and declaring it liberation, enacting coups and declaring them fair elections, or exercising tyranny and declaring it freedom, all the while with the population’s concurrence because the only language the population knows is the language that tells *that* story and no other?

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<sup>1</sup> “Writers and the Nostalgic Fallacy,” *New York Times Book Review*, October 13, 1985.

To my way of thinking, were such a situation to become actuality—as it is becoming, may become, or has become—it would indeed be for me the most important and meaningful thing not only about being American, but also about being an American *writer*. And so I can't help but wonder, again, why not even one of <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/writers/> the fifteen essayists wrote about it, alluded to it, or gave the least hint or intimation or whisper of *any* evidence that they'd ever heard of it, seen it, experienced it, or even so much as imagined its existence.

*If*—this, of course, is pure supposition and only that—*if* any of them failed to do so because they felt they “couldn't”—because, that is, they knew that <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/writers/> the State Department would refuse to publish any essay written on this particular “most meaningful” subject and so they *purposely* wrote instead on “less” meaningful or “less” true or even *untrue* subjects—if any writer did anything of this kind, then, in place of being declared merely unable to think or to see or to write, he or she would have to be declared instead a hypocrite and liar, a traitor to the truth, a traitor to art, and a traitor to our nation.

If, on the other hand, all of the writers failed to write about these most meaningful things about being an American or an American writer because they didn't or don't *see* them, then it seems to me possible only to conclude that evidence does indeed show that the Age of Simplification is real, that representative Americans and American writers have indeed gone blind, have become, like the fish unaware of the water it swims in because it has never known anything to compare it with, unaware of the very-most intellectual and aesthetic oppression and tyranny that they are in fact living inside of and that surrounds them just as water surrounds the fish.

That is, evidence suggests that 1984 did come, that it is here, the strongest aspect of this evidence being that no one is aware of its having happened. Orwell had it right, except that he had a small error in chronology for us on this side of the Atlantic, where we got to work at it in 1947, a year earlier than in England, where they didn't really get down to business on it until 1948, the publication year that Orwell originally gave as the title of his brilliant but hopeless novel.

If there were a god, I would say, pray for us all.

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