

## CONCEPTUAL ELEMENTS FOR A THEORY OF VISUAL POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

**Tom Bryder**

University of Copenhagen

---

### RESUMEN

En este ensayo, estoy principalmente interesado en las perspectivas de los que construyen la propaganda visual, es decir, los propagandistas. Ellos constituyen, por así decirlo, el *supply-side* del proceso de la propaganda. Las necesidades y deseos de las audiencias constituyen *el aspecto de la demanda*. Desean tener éxito y para eso necesitan realizar una triple tarea: deben construir una marcada diferencia entre ellos, y sus competidores, a menudo en términos de blanco-negro; También pueden actuar sobre otro supuesto ligeramente diferente, a saber, el de un *granfalloon*, por ejemplo, *satanizando al enemigo* y deben aparecer como las víctimas del malvado, para que sus propias demandas parezcan razonables a una audiencia más amplia.

### ABSTRACT

In this essay, I am primarily interested in the perspectives of those who construct the visual propaganda, that is, the propagandists. They constitute, so to speak, the supply-side of the propaganda process. The needs and wants of the audiences constitute the *demand aspect*. They want to be successful and, for it, they have a threefold task to perform: they must construct a marked difference between themselves, and their enemies, often in black-and-white terms; can also operate on another, slightly different assumption, namely that of a *granfalloon*, for example, *diabolizing the enemy*. Finally, they must portray yourselves as victims of the evil-doer, so that our own demands appear reasonable to a wider audience.

---

*Key words:* propagandist, audience, granfalloon, factoids, cabalism,

### Introduction

To write and speak about *the psychology of visual propaganda* is to suggest that the content of such propaganda carries meaning, and not only meaning in a cognitive or a semantic sense, but in an emotional and evaluative sense as well. It implies that there is someone, a propagandist, that can be an individual or a group, who endows visual messages with meaning, and that such meaning has political significance because it works to produce persuasive effects for targeted audiences.

Analytically speaking, propaganda studies, visual or non-visual, work on the assumption that we should use a conceptual framework answering

the following questions: Who communicates what to whom, with which intentions, when and with which consequences? The analysis of *who* communicates is called propaganda disseminator analysis, studying the content of the messages, is content analysis, studying the targeted audience is recipient analysis, figuring out when a message is sent is concerned with framing and priming, the a concern with consequences of propaganda calls attention to the gratification of the propaganda messages among its audiences.

In communication research this paradigm is usually called the “pragmatic” paradigm since it deals with the uses of language rather than language as a system of lesser constitutive elements such as phonemes, prefixes and suffixes. In propaganda analysis the intention of the propagandist or agitator is taken for given. The purpose and intention of all propaganda is to influence the thoughts and behaviours of the targeted audience(s).

The focus on meaning and interpretation also implies that the recipients of visual propaganda, who are potential targets to be influenced, have some kind of political significance in decision making. Politics is about power, influence and authority: Who should exercise it and for which purposes should it be used? In short, when we speak about political propaganda in general and visual in particular, we must pay attention to both the denotative and connotative aspects of its political content. This also helps us to delimit relevant subjects and themes.

Such propaganda themes and subjects, as they are deemed important by both the influentials and those who are influenced and the scholarly observer varies with spatial and historical and social contexts. The historical and social contexts vary from war propaganda to propaganda used in election campaigns and on-going attempts at catching audience attention (permanent campaigning). Linguistically, composition of messages are also of relevance, hence the aspects of rhetoric are relevant.

Put in a different way, in a linguistic-psychological context the psychology of propaganda, visual or textual, deals mainly with the pragmatic,<sup>1</sup> as contrasted with the syntactic or purely semantic aspects of propagandistic messages. But what do we mean by “propaganda” in general and visual propaganda in particular?

### **Propaganda definitions**

Definitions of propaganda abound. For the sake of analytical convenience I take it that propaganda is the manipulation of symbols for the sake of controlling public opinion in contexts characterised by power, influence and authority relationships between people and groups of people. These are

typically relationships where values such as safety, wealth, prestige and deference are allocated for whole political systems: Global, national, regional, or local.

The seasoned propagandist knows that the uses of symbols must be evaluated against the background of other symbols which compete for the attention of the general public or his selected audience(s). The successful propagandists are those who can get most people to read their own meanings into what is communicated. Thus political propaganda is not so much a matter of convincing audiences about the virtues of the propagandist's own ideas and policies as an attempt to make the audience(s) believe that what is being communicated is the same as they always thought it was. Successful propagandists also know that one cannot change attitudes without the more or less active cooperation of those whose ideas they try to influence.

Metaphorically speaking, you cannot dig a well in a desert where there is no water. Propaganda works on predispositions in the recipients. The audience has to be "primed", that is, "prepared," and the messages must then be "framed" in such a way that the pattern of elements that constitutes its core message are not in too much conflict with what the target audience thinks and has experienced. A guide to these thoughts and experiences are the "perspectives" or "cognitive maps" or "scripts" of the audience(s).

### *Perspectives*

In order to construct a political spectacle in the public mind, says the late Murray Edelman (1988, p. 3), we need to identify three elements which make up a coherent political whole, *problems, enemies and leaders*. The images and political language that becomes memorable is likely to promise security against a feared threat ("all we have to fear is fear itself," Franklin D. Roosevelt) to express hostility toward a traditional enemy (For example Germans for the French, Russians for the Swedes and the Finns), to echo common hopes ("I have a dream," Martin Luther King), or to demand sacrifices for a cause, ("I can offer you nothing but hope, fears, and tears," Winston Churchill; "Don't ask what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," John F. Kennedy). Such language elements help to construct the leader as the exceptional person ready to confront the challenges that intimidate us and others. It is, in the age of visual information, reinforced by documentary TV-broadcast and other forms of mass communication. (Edelman, 1988, p. 53)

*Problems* are those obstacles we need to tackle when we wish to promote or obstruct a cause and they are, and should usually be pictured in

propaganda as dangerous threats to us and those who are like us. *Fear appeals* can be used in propaganda both to prime audiences for more elaborate messages and to frame, in a more direct way, the message of the propagandist.

*Enemies* are those who promote the cause of evil-doing to us and they can be adversaries, aliens, heretics, competitors, and racketeers of various kinds, but their adversary is usually due to evil dispositions, culturally learned or biologically inherited.

Since politics involves conflict about moral issues, material advantages and social status, in propaganda scripts some people are always pitted against others and we tend to see them as “natural” adversaries” or as arch-enemies. Political opponents often are portrayed as having foreign ancestry, they are believers in distasteful ideologies and religions, but they are always groups that are odd or different in some respect, and the difference may be real as well as merely figments of the imagination.

Edelman says (1988, p. 66) that “They help give the political spectacle its power to arouse passions, fears, and hopes, the more so because an enemy to some people is an ally or innocent victim to others.”

*Leaders* are those who have the insights, willpower and skills to alleviate and solve our governance problems, and to lead a combat against the forces of evil, that is, the enemies and other kinds of adversaries. The classic devices in propaganda for constructing the phenomenon of the innovating leader are stylistic play with language and gestures. Churchill, making his V-sign, Mussolini and Hitler saluting with the Fascist gesture, or the Communist leaders showing the closed fist, come easily to our minds. Democratic leaders use less significant means, sometimes only rude irony or cynicism, to mark their presence. “Mr Atlee (leader of the Labour party in 1945, TBr) is a very modest man, but then he has very much to be modest about” (Winston Churchill, leader of the Conservative party in 1945).

In visual propaganda, as in other forms of propaganda, we can trace the personal origins and political functions of perspectives, both those of the political propagandists and their audiences. By a political perspective is here meant a pattern of *identifications* (who are we, who are they?), *demands* (what do we want, what do opponents want, and what can people like us realistically want, given we are of the kind we are?) and *expectations* (what are our chances for getting what we want, given we are the kind of people we are, and wanting what we want?). Identity theory, preference analysis, and reasonable choice (prospect) theory are the tools which suggest themselves for research into this.

## Propagandists

In this essay, I am primarily interested in the perspectives of those who construct the visual propaganda, that is, the propagandists. They constitute, so to speak, the *supply-side* of the propaganda process. The needs and wants of the audiences constitute the *demand aspect*.

The propagandists, if they want to be successful, have a threefold task to perform:

*In the first place*, they must construct a marked difference between themselves, and their enemies, often in black-and-white terms. When Lenin was challenged by Martov and the Mensheviks within the Russian Social Democratic party in 1905, he amplified the differences according to the psychological principle called the “narcissism of small differences.” Similarity must be constructed as big differences in order to establish distinction. At the simplest level, propagandists operate on the assumption that if you wish to communicate that your opponent is evil, you must portray him as a monster.

*Secondly*, propagandists can also operate on another, slightly different assumption, namely that of a “granfalloon”. It means that, in propaganda discourse, complete strangers can be constructed as *in-groups* using the most trivial, inconsequential categorization criteria imaginable.<sup>2</sup> A *granfalloon* is a proud and, from a purely objective point of view, meaningless association of human beings, constituted with the help of a more or less relatively meaningless label or stereotype.<sup>3</sup> You can, for example, label people after their physical appearances, their place of living, the size and ancestry of their families, all of which are presumably irrelevant for the political ideas they want to propagate or receive.

When an *in-group* is formed, there has to be an *out-group* as well. Since Anti-Semitism was not a traditional feature among the populations in Denmark or Norway during the German occupation, the enemy which the Germans wanted to project had to be constructed as a Bolshevik. The appeals of the SS in occupied Norway and Denmark against Bolshevism was typically using Nordic Viking mythology as a unifying symbol stressing tradition.

Belonging to such a group often makes group members feel pride and belongingness, and this belongingness can then be directed against non-members such as the demonized Russian Communists. The British used the symbol of the “Huns” in the same way against the Germans. (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2002, pp. 216-17).

In visual propaganda, creating a *granfalloon* is thus often achieved by *diabolizing* the enemy. This is done by using pictorial *condensation sym-*

*bols* (Elder & Cobb, 1983) such as culturally despised animals (snakes, wild dogs, dragons, etc.). When we can picture the enemy as sub-human, or as resembling animals, we can easily *label* him or her with pejorative attributes, often expressed through textual condensation symbols. Having a name for an unwanted thing induces a sense of control. From this also follows that a sense of control is required for propaganda purposes since emotionally loaded and abstract categories of human beings make it easier for us to abuse them, both symbolically and in actual behaviour.

Propaganda wars have almost always used real or faked *atrocities* to characterize the enemy as less than human. This diabolization succeeds in resolving any cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) that may be aroused by our own cruelty toward our enemies, and it is often followed by a rationalization. ("We are, after all, not as bad as the other swine," Harry Stack Sullivan, 1953, p. 346; p. 379).

*In the third place*, we must portray ourselves as victims of the evil-doer, so that our own demands appear reasonable to a wider audience. Of course, there must not, in reality, be any great difference between ourselves and our enemies, and we need not, in reality, be victims of adversaries. However, we must at least *appear*, through allusions and innuendo, as having been or being assaulted and abused by opponents using the same or similar unfair means that we ourselves propose.

#### *Factoids*

When a non-proven allegation is used in a propagandistic message, we may call it a *factoid* (Pratkanis and Aronson, 2002, pp. 103-118). A *factoid* is an assertion of fact that is not backed up by legitimate arguments or evidence, usually because the fact is untrue or because evidence or arguments in support of the assertion cannot be shown to exist. A factoid becomes a factoid with the publication and dissemination of its existence.

Moreover, those who are addressed by the propagandist will usually be unable to verify what is being said, either because they cannot access the relevant information, or because the message is deliberately designed in a way which does not allow for verification by logical or empirical methods of observation and registration. Myths and metaphysical allusions contribute to propaganda since they evade verification.

Most people know politics only through the media, and people's lack of direct access to politicians contributes to the power of factoids. The manner in which factoids are presented makes us believe that they can be treated as true.

Elaborate presentational design, film-clips, and printed -as opposed to handwritten- styles lend an artificial and official aura to the propaganda

content, as suggested by Walter Benjamin (1936). This aura contributes to the erroneous belief that what is said or shown is *objectively true*.

In everyday life, factoids appear as *city legends*, *rumours*, and *gossip*. In terms of legal practices we call factoids *inadmissible evidence*, and *hearsay*. In the media, factoids are often called *slander*, *libel*, and *innuendo*.

When factoids are reported as trustworthy news they are usually formulated in such a way that they cause sensations and scandals (Cf. Moser, 1989). Sensations and scandals, particularly those which arouse fear, appeal to our needs for security (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001, p. 104) and, more generally, they thereby also promote media sales-efforts of the political message.

### **Definition power**

Power implies an ability to make others do what they otherwise would not have done. In contrast to this, there is no widely accepted and comprehensive definition of what political propaganda is only more or less convenient conceptualizations. Besides for being an influence, power and authority game, politics is also, to a large extent, a question about how to establish meaning. In political science this is sometimes called *definition power*. Definition power is informal power and those who design statistical surveys for national census bureaus, for example, are endowed with a lot of definitional power. They may, for example, lump immigrants together with refugees, with the consequence that this *mixed* category forms an element in national political discussions about *the aliens*.

However, refugees are persons who are forced to leave their ordinary place of domicile against their own will and wishes. An immigrant is person who settles in another place than that from which they originated without the necessary existence of a threat.

Establishing what the meaning of meaning is, more generally, is outside the scope of this essay. This is so, because defining propaganda is not only a question about how words help to shape *opinion* but also about how to establish referents to politically loaded symbols, and meaning in itself is not a political symbol.

More basically, the establishment of meaning is a question about how to interpret political action into politically specific “frames of meaning” or “cognitive schemata” and “scripts,” and to convince others of the relevance of this. We establish meaning when we are able to place unknown phenomena and actions within known contexts. (Heradstveit-Bjørgo, 1987, p.11). Those who do so convincingly have definitional power.

## **Propaganda and Rhetoric**

Political influence can only occur through some kind of communication. Communication which aims at *persuading*, is usually called rhetoric, so since rhetoric is part of a persuasive or promotional effort, it is also propagandistic. Note however that political rhetoric is not limited to the uses of written and oral expressions of communication, but includes a more general use of symbols and signs, such as they appear in visual propaganda, including film and TV-programs. Film, cartoons and photos with contrast messages may here be more effective than traditional rhetorical devices such as *the list of three* and *the method of contrasting pairs* in spoken communication.

Persuasion is built on the ability to organize the perception of reality and experience for those who are about to be persuaded, so that these views and actions that the propagandist has established in a pre-persuasion (priming) appear natural and self-evident when a direct propaganda-message is framed.

In this sense propaganda is neither good nor bad, though in common parlance it is usually associated with cheating, manipulation or unfair arguments.

Lasswell's description of the agitator is worth recalling here (1930, p. 73): "The agitator easily infers that he who disagrees with him is in communion with the devil, and that opponents show bad faith or timidity. Agitators are notoriously contentious and undisciplined; many reforming ships are manned by mutineers. The agitator is willing to subordinate personal considerations to the superior claims of principle. Children may suffer while father and mother battle for the 'cause.' But the righteous will not cleave to their families when the field is ripe for the harvest. Ever on alert for pernicious intrusions of private interests into public affairs, the agitator sees 'unworthy' motives where others see the just claims of friendship. Believing in direct, emotional responses from the public, the agitator trusts in mass appeals and general principles."

Propagandists and agitators must portray the prospects of winning the political conflict with the enemy in *optimistic terms*, ("Major operations in Iraq have come to an end" – George W. Bush on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003) but at the same time it is also necessary to emphasize that winning the battle involves *sacrifices from all of us* and *demands leadership qualities* beyond those we usually find among ordinary men and women.

## **Audience needs served by propaganda**

At this point we may stop and ask, from a political psychological point of view, why factoids seem to have strong persuasive powers.

*In the first place*, as I have already suggested, factoids often meet one or several *psychological needs* in the audiences, to whom they are pre-



sented. One such need can be seen when we observe factoids which enhance our *self-esteem* by demonstrating that we have knowledge of processes and facts that are not visible to all and everyone. The audiences are told, or think by themselves, that they have a *special gift* which enables them to know or *see through the real state of affairs* if they accept the message of the propagandist.

“Cabalism” (Cf. Lane, 1963; 1973; Bryder, 1975), as special ideological style of thinking about politics, informs the audience that politics is run by a tightly knit group of people and not by the ones who are democratically elected. They may be *top-dogs* or *under-dogs* depending on issues and situations, such as “Communists,” “Wall Street” or “The gnomes of Zürich.” Cabalism is part of a paranoid set of political beliefs and explanations and the point is that such explanations, however fantastic they may seem to the seasoned political observer, is still an explanation where other, easily grasped, explanations are missing. It has the appeal of focusing on that which is hidden, and stimulates our desire to know complex patterns. Hence the appeal of the used symbols of *masks* and *unmasking*. The mode of reasoning is, “then we believed, now we know” or “already then we knew, although in a rudimentary way, and now we know.” The revelations are usually explained as coming like “a bolt from the blue.”

The whole idea that we have a special ability which enables us to *see through* appearances (“throwing the masks off”) and to reveal the *real* content of what is contained in the enemy’s messages, provides us with a *sense of superiority*, a *sense of strength* and a *sense of superior intelligence*. And who does not want to have such qualities?

The previous outline makes it evident that utilizing factoids in political propaganda creates power relationships. However, factoids are, by definition, almost impossible to evaluate or to scrutinize by ordinary means of investigation or arguments, either because the allegations are *vague* and *ambiguous*, or because they are based on *metaphysical arguments* or suggested by *contra factual* questions, that is, questions which, from a logical and empirical point of view, are impossible to answer in a true and precise manner.

*In the second place*, factoids can often also have the form of axiomatic or unconditional postulates. They usually have the form that “it is in the nature of things,” and “as everyone knows,” when this is actually not the case. In this way they set the key for the continued discourse and perform the function of *pre-persuasion*. (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001, pp. 112-13; for a similar, but linguistically inspired analysis of metaphors, cf. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

*Propaganda appeals and their psychological functions*

Anti-Communism, like coercive ideologies, such as Communism itself,<sup>4</sup> must be built upon *fear appeals*. Political fear arises in contexts of private troubles and public problems. Those, to whom the propagandistic message is addressed, must be able to link their *private troubles with public problems* and their own *problem solving capacities* with those within the reach of the political leaders and people like themselves.

Establishing a link between the private sphere and the public sphere is one of the most important tasks of the propagandist because politically motivated persons displace their private motives onto public areas of contest and discontent and then rationalize their proposed solutions in terms of the common good. In short, it is the key to political *motivation*.<sup>5</sup>

If political propaganda consists of symbols manipulated for the control of public opinion, it follows that symbols can be classified as propaganda in terms of their *intended effect* on public opinion. Thus, propaganda is essentially *teleological*.

The problem of anyone who would manipulate a particular symbol is to reinforce its competitive power by leading as many individuals and groups as possible in society to read their private meanings into it. This is done through persuasive or threatening appeals.

There are a variety of appeals which we can observe when studying propaganda in general and visual propaganda in particular.<sup>6</sup> Among them we find: Appeals to authority; Recruitment appeals; “Sugar-coating” appeals; Attack-slogans; Appeals to prejudice and stereotypes; Appeals to special interests; Appeals to partisan abilities; Appeals limiting alternative choices; Appeals transforming stolen concepts into a partisan vocabulary; Appeals using clichés, and Appeals built on false cause and effects. *Post hoc – ergo propter hoc* (“After this – because of this”).

*Fear appeals* are cutting across these types – because they make us concentrate on *plans* for getting rid of our problems, rather than on considerations about *the nature* of the alleged problem. They divert our attention away from the ordinary manner in which we usually and rationally handle our more or less personal troubles.

Political appeals in propaganda messages, verbal, textual and/or visual, which are directed and constructed in order to produce fear, must be located in our imagination about *the operations of social and personal forces*. They must carry assumptions which *appear* effective or can be *expected* to be effective. This satisfies a need to feel that we are *in control*.

### *Personal inadequacy and fear appeals*

People with *low self-esteem*, and this includes persons with many and serious general and real *personal troubles*, may be unable to search for *social solutions* or *explanations* for that which makes them anxious. When the world is complex, the *instant solution* is preferred to the logical and time-consuming solution, and instant solutions are more often than not of a private character.

People with low self-esteem do not seem to know how to cope adequately with vague or specific threats to themselves. A high-fear message, pictorial or linguistic, will almost automatically overwhelm them and make them put their head into the sand like the proverbial ostrich. This is a consequence of how our psychological defence mechanisms work (Fenichel, 1946, pp.463-541).

Summarizing what we know from psychological research about fear appeals, they are most effective when they *strongly upset* those against whom they are directed, when they contain an element which has the form of a *specific recommendation* for alleviating the fear-conditioning threat, when this specific recommendation is regarded as an *effective means* for coping with the threat, and when the message promises that the threatened person can herself or himself *actually perform the specific action*, suggested by the propagandist, to do away with the treat.

### *Emotions, stereotypes and prejudice*

As already mentioned, propaganda is part of more general processes of social influence and it involves the dextrous use of symbols, slogans and images which appeal to our *emotions, stereotypes* (Lip Mann, 1965) and *prejudices* (Saenger & Flower, 1954; Allport, 1954). It upsets our emotions when we see innocent people, like women, elderly and children, being killed, maimed or otherwise hurt. Hence the often used image of mothers and children in war propaganda (which also, in our culture alludes to the religious symbols of “Holy Mother” and the “child”). Our stereotypes for handling complex and uncomfortable situations, as contrasted with this, reach a primitive level when the enemy is portrayed as a serpent or a mad dog.

Propaganda, as contrasted with *brainwashing, subliminal conditioning* and other forms of more or less forced compliance with directives advanced by the propagandist, is distinct in the sense of the *voluntarism* experienced by the recipient. The ultimate goal is not to get the victims of propaganda to *repeat* what propagandists tell them, but to get them to sincerely believe that the content of what they tell them is really *their own position*. The au-

dience must remember, store and recall what the propagandist has said, not just make a parrot repetition.

This point is perhaps pertinent for a comparison of Nazi and Non-Nazi propaganda, since the repetition element was made part and parcel of all instructions to the Nazi propagandists (cf. Goebbels, 1992). While repetition can be effective, it is – however – not the only thing which promotes propagandistic influence, as psychological research has shown.

#### *Visual aspects relating to audiences*

Propaganda advisors, analysts and “spin-doctors” have repeatedly pointed out that the specific function of *visual propaganda*, such as for example the political poster, is to attract the attention of the amorphous crowd, not in educating those who are already educated or who are striving for information, education, knowledge or wisdom (for analytical details, cf. Wasmund, 1987). As a consequence of this, its effect must most often be aimed at *emotions*, and only marginally at *cognitions* and *evaluations*.

Therefore, all successful visual propaganda builds on dispositions which can be related to the case at hand and the context in which it is used. But how do we know which the dispositions are?

#### *Information*

One of the characteristics of the cognitive model for explaining the success or failure of propaganda is that the process of information has several *stages*.

We must, *in the first place*, identify what kind of attraction a propaganda message has for the recipient’s *attention*. The “frame of attention” is important and can be analyzed by studying the frequencies with which potent catch-words and buzz-words are used by a communicator or a recipient of an intended message. It is the ideal object of quantitative content analysis. If we know the attention frame of our listeners, we can manipulate their emotional reactions to our messages through symbol associations. Ignored messages have little or no persuasive influence.

If we know that the subject, to whom we wish the audience to pay attention, is largely outside its *attention frame*, one has to construct such a frame through *pre-persuasion*, which in the modern language of political propaganda is called *priming*.

*In the second place*, we must also be certain that the message, which we wish to convey, can be *understood* by the recipient, and therefore it becomes necessary to make an *audience analysis*. *Third and finally*, just conveying a message or an image is not enough. The recipients or the recipient

must also *learn* the arguments, pro and con, and the adequate *emotional responses* contained in, or suggested by the message, and come to accept them as true and as something they have always themselves known.

### *Message simplification*

The condition of effective learning through propaganda is built on the idea of *parsimonious explanations*, not elaborate arguments. This explains the role played by agitation and such institutions as Meyerholdt's "Agit-prop" in Moscow the years after the Russian Communist revolution. Since in well-designed visual propaganda we encounter only abbreviated messages and since there is a limit to the size of a message's attention frame, the political poster can hardly be anything than persuasive if well-designed.

Design implies the use of colour schemes (blue for freedom, red for solidarity and equality), composition (strong figures in the forefront), and short textual comments. Detailed descriptive, rational and extended arguments cannot be conveyed through posters, as the Nazis soon came to realize, after having made attempts to convince Communists by means of elaborate posted text-leaflets. Physically, on effective propaganda posters, there is obviously no room for explanations, only slogans with strong connotations.

The persuaders' main task is to teach *simple arguments* supportive of the cause, not to compare one's own cause with that of the enemy<sup>7</sup> in other than very crude manners. The logic of this is that the propagated ideas must be easily remembered and come easily to mind in the audience when the place and time is appropriate. At the end of the day, the audience must be taught, or predisposed, to act on the propagated information, when there is an incentive for it. A persuasive propaganda message is only learned, accepted, and acted upon if it is rewarding to do so. (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2002, pp. 27-8).

Summarizing what I have said above, the persuasiveness of visual propaganda in general can be discussed under four headings. *The first* of these is concerned with the *context* of the persuasive effort. The propagandist must attempt to take control of the situation and establish a favourable climate of opinion and sentiments for the message, a process which demands audience analysis, and is called *priming* or *pre-persuasion*. It refers to how the issues areas structured, and how the decisions about what the audience should believe, are framed. Usually we encounter a *simplification process*, where alternatives are presented in "black-and-white" terms, such as when the Nazis, on a poster, supply the message: "Sieg – Oder – Bolschewismus" (Victory – or – Bolshevism).

*Secondly*, the propagandist must establish a favourable image of himself in the eyes of the audience. We call this element *source* or *communicator credibility*. This is done by appearing likable, authoritative, and trustworthy, and was studied throughout the 1950s at Yale University by the social psychologists Irving Janis and Carl Hovland (Hovland, Janis and Kelly, 1953; Hovland et al, 1957; Bryder, 1981).

*The third* approach consists of constructing and delivering a message that focuses on the audience's attention, feelings and thoughts, that is, on exactly what the communicator wants them to think about. This is the essence of "framing." The propagandist can, for example distract the audience's attention with vivid, suggestive and powerful appeals, so that he or she induces the audiences to continue the persuasion process themselves (autosuggestion). Appeals to vanity, greed, being clever and proud are among the appeals that are very helpful in auto-suggestion.

*Fourth and finally*, effective visual propaganda implies controlling the *emotions* of the audience and this follows a simple rule: First arouse the relevant emotion and then offer the audience a way of responding to that emotion. The Nazi exhibitions of *Entartete Kunst* and *Entartete Musik* were of this kind (Cf. Bryder, 2004). McCarthyite anti-Communist propaganda in the United States could focus on emotional attention in the same way by selectively using, for example, fears of Russian Middle-Range missiles in Cuba, and neglecting to mention the American Middle-Range missiles in Turkey, (Barson and Heller, 2001) often in contexts where "infotainment" dominated.

## **Epilogue**

In our enlightened and *cognitively mobilized* world, there are still enemies to be diabolized, problems to be solved and heroic leaders who promise that they can do the job of alleviating those fears and redeem those promises through which visual and other forms of propaganda gains its strength. In our times, it is difficult to imagine growing up without pictures and moving visualizations. Pictures play an integral role in the way modern people communicate, the way they learn and, more generally, the way we all represent and understand the world.

Among those of us who got our political experiences in the 1960s, there were many who thought that the danger of susceptibility to Communist propaganda was a thing of the past. But recent propaganda examples after September 11, 2001 show that the general principles, by means of which propaganda works, still hold.

Although almost no explicit references have been made in this essay to the propaganda of the recent past, it has still been the purpose of the examples used for illustration to argue that we cannot only resist propaganda by burying our heads in the sand or arguing by means of convictions.

The person who is easiest to persuade is the person whose beliefs are based on slogans that have never seriously been challenged or examined. Retrospectively one can perhaps suggest a modest hypothesis, namely that the radicalization of students in the 1960s was partly a consequence of bad Communist (mostly Russian) and anti-Communist (mostly American) propaganda.

When it became clear that much of the anti-Communist propaganda had been exaggerated, paranoid,<sup>8</sup> cheap and deliberately fabricated, many young people challenged the anti-Communist myths, but committed the logical error of assuming that their opponents, the Communists, had probably been right. This is what psychologists call the “basic attribution error.”<sup>9</sup>

The danger of such a logical error with respect to Islamic terrorism is hardly imaginable since Islamic terrorists differ culturally from us in ways which were not so self-evident when the Communists were depicted as the main enemy.

Anti-communism became significantly silent after the fall of the Soviet Union and Communist-backed regimes in Eastern Europe in 1991. The fear of a worldwide Communist takeover was no longer widespread, and although the propaganda discourse now included the depiction of *the axis of evil* and *rogue states* as major enemies, these symbols’ persuasive powers could no longer appeal to as many as Ronald Reagan’s *Empire of evil* had done.

It was, perhaps, an inevitable irony that the former US allies in Afghanistan during the years of Russian occupation, the Talibans, after September 11, 2001, became the incarnation of all evil in the world, and that Saddam Hussein in Iraq, whom Donald Rumsfeld had hugged in a widely broadcast film-sequence, now became depicted as a deadly enemy of the United States, which had provided him with weapons of mass destruction when he was at war with the mullahs in Iran.

These final examples, however, tell us that propaganda, when used with psychological skill, is a powerful weapon of political agitators of whatever persuasion to which they pledge allegiance. The analysis of spin and propaganda is not yet at the end of the journey to insight and understanding but we are, perhaps, heading in the right direction.

**References**

- Allport, G. W. (1954): *The Nature of Prejudice* Cambridge Mass. Addison-Wesley.
- Almond, G. (1954): *The Appeals of Communism*. Princeton N.J. Princeton Univ. Press.
- Barson, M. – Heller, S. (2001): *Red Scared! The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- Benjamin, W. (1936): L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée. In *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. Jahrgang 5, 1936, pp. 40-68 (with abstracts in German and English).
- Billig, M. (1976): *Social Psychology and Intergroup Relations*. London: Academic Press.
- Bryder, T. (1975): *Power and Responsibility. Contending Approaches to Industrial Relations and Decision Making in Britain 1963 - 1971*. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup. Dissertation.
- Bryder, T. (1981): Actor Reliability. Some methodological issues. In Karl Erik Rosengren (Ed.). *Advances in Content Analysis*. Beverly Hills and London: SAGE Publications, 1981. pp. 69 - 88.
- Bryder, T. (2001): Motivational Approaches to the Study of Political Leadership. In *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, Vol. 104, 2, 2001, pp. 115-137.
- Bryder, T. (2004): *Essays on the policy sciences and the psychology of politics and propaganda*. Växjö : Växjö Univ. Press.
- Edelman, M. (1977): *Political Language. Words That Succeed and Policies That Fail*. New York: Academic Press.
- Edelman, M. (1988): *Constructing the Political Spectacle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Elder, C. D. and Cobb, R.W. (1983): *The Political Uses of Symbols*. NY.: Longman
- Festinger, L. (1957): *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford U.P.
- Goebbels, J. P. (1992): *Tagebücher in Fünf Bände*. München und Zürich: Piper.
- Hovland, C. I., Irving, J.R., Kelly H. H. (1953): *Communication and Persuasion*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hovland, C. I. et al (1957): *The Order of Presentation in Persuasion*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Heradstveit, D. - Bjørge, T. (1987): *Politisk kommunikasjon. Introduksjon til semiotikk og retorikk*. Oslo: Tano.
- Lakoff, G. - Johnson, M. (1980): *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lane, R. E. (1963): *Political Ideology*. New York: The Free Press.
- Lane, R. E. (1973): Patterns of Political Belief. In Jeanne N. Knutson (Ed.) *Handbook of Political Psychology*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Lasswell, H. D. (1930): *Psychopathology and Politics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lasswell, H. D. - Kaplan, A. (1950): *Power and Society*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lippmann, W. (1965, orig. 1920): *Public Opinion*. New York: The Free Press.
- Moser, H. (1989): *L'eclat ce'est moi. Zur Fascination unserer Skandale*. Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag.
- Pratkanis, A. R. - Aronson, E. (2002): *Age of Propaganda. The everyday use and abuse of persuasion*. New York: Holt.
- Keckskemeti, P. - Leites, N. (1947/1948): Some Psychological Hypotheses on Nazi Germany, in *The American Journal of Social Psychology*, (1947), 26, 141 - 183.; (1948), 27, 91 - 117; (1948), 27, 241 - 270; (1948), 28, 141 - 164.
- Saenger, G. - Flowerman, S. (1954): Stereotypes and Prejudicial Attitudes. In *Human Relations*, 1954, Vol. 7., 2, pp. 217ff.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1953): *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc.



Wasmund, K. (1986): *Politische Plakate*. Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag.

Zamansky, H. S. (1968): 'Paranoid Reactions.' In *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. New York: The Free Press and MacMillan, 1968, Vol. 11.

**Tom Bryder** works at the Political Science Department, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. He is an ex president of The International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP) where he was previously also a board member and vice president since the early 1980s. He also works in the fields of electoral behaviour, political propaganda, advertisement, marketing and cultural diplomacy. Between your books we highlight "The Human Face of Politics", 1998 and "Party Systems, Party Behaviour and Democracy", 1993. He is at present working on two books, one with the preliminary title "The Structure and Uses of Arguments in Politics and Political Science", the other called "The Scientific Study of Political Propaganda: Transdisciplinary approaches to the analysis of social persuasion and self glorification." tbr@ifs.ku.dk.

**Address:** University of Copenhagen. Department of Political Science Center for Health and Society. P.O. Box 2099. Øster Farimagsgade 5, DK.1014 Copenhagen K. Denmark

<sup>1</sup> Pragmatism in linguistic studies deals with the relations between the communicator and the communicated messages, and the relations between the communicated message and the audiences interpreting the message. It means, in the terminology of Ferdinand de Saussure, that which he called *la parole* as contrasted with *la langue*, where the latter is the subject of study for those who study linguistic rules and language systems. Pragmatism in *philosophy*, which is different from *language studies*, was founded by Dewey, James and Peirce, and had a strong influence on the Chicago school of sociology, social psychology and political science, especially through the works of George Herbert Mead.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of granfalloon was first suggested by the late Henri Tajfel, and later elaborated in terms of ingroup-outgroup theory by Michael Billig, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> *Stereotype* is a Greek word which means, literally "fixed impression." In sociology, psychology and political science it means a fixed, exaggerated, and preconceived description about a certain type of person, group, or society. It is based on *prejudice* rather than fact, but by repetition and with time, stereotypes become fixed in people's minds, resistant to change or factual evidence to the contrary. The term, originally used for a method of duplicate printing, was adopted in a social sense by *Walter Lippman* in 1922. Stereotypes can prove dangerous when used to justify persecution and discrimination, as in *Racism* generally, and in *Anti-Semitism* in particular. Sociologists believe that stereotyping reflects a power structure in which one group in society uses *labelling* to keep another group "in its place" ("scape-goating").

<sup>4</sup> For a sophisticated analysis of the non-coercive parts of Communist ideology, cf. Almond, 1954. Additional materials can be found in Lasswell & Lerner, 1966.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview, see Bryder (2002).

<sup>6</sup> For a study of the positive contents of Communism, cf. Almond, 1954; For a similar kind of study of German Nazism, cf. Leites & Keckskemeti, 1948a; 1948b; and 1948c. The notion of appeals and imagery is also analyzed by Erik H. Erikson (1942 and 1973).

<sup>7</sup> Market researchers know that if you wish to sell Persil washing powder, you should not speak specifically about other brands.

<sup>8</sup> Paranoia is a psychotic disease, but there are milder versions called *paranoid states* which perhaps are better descriptions of what we usually find in political propaganda. Cf. Zamansky, 1968.

<sup>9</sup> Just because a rose smells better than a curly-flower, this does not mean that it also is a better base for soup.