



A Review of “The Stupidity of Communications”

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Opinion

The Stupidity of Communications focuses exclusively on human communication and the roles that both words and the media play in distorting our perceptions of reality. Learning, unlearning and relearning are examined in the context of defining verbalizations which determine how we misperceive our natural and cultural environments. Language gives human communication its distinctive flair by both inhibiting and subverting awareness. The article stresses words as the defining essence of human cultural life and emphasizes the role they play in fixing our attitudes, directing the process of data selection and shaping our misinterpretations of information. It is through words that “Exploitation becomes Development; Indoctrination is Education and Destruction is Liberation”.

The role of language as a positive feedback system is emphasized so that the media are presented as reinforcing prevailing values in a given culture. Capitalism is used as an example of this process as poverty is noticeably absent from the capitalists vocabulary. The business community responds not to necessity but to money, so those in American slums and African hovels can continue to fester unnoticed by those who control Western perceptions. Criticism is thus controlled to the degree that honesty is worthless, as whistle blowers have repeatedly discovered to their dismay.

The modern media have done nothing to correct the essential distorting bent of verbalization but have speeded up the process. One might think the news media have an obligation to emphasize the truth when presenting a balanced reporting of events, but this is a nice idea which seems to be receding in the distance as the media themselves become increasingly partisan. Perhaps it is relevant here and now to present the definition of stupidity which defines our consideration of the topic: Stupidity is the learned inability to learn or,

more precisely, stupidity is a normal, dysfunctional learning process which occurs when a schema (belief system) formed by linguistic biases and social norms acts via the neurotic paradox to establish a positive feedback system which carries behavior to maladaptive excesses. In this sense, stupidity is functionally related to myths, which defines its own existence by presenting only evidence which supports it. This, in turn undercuts the notion that anything appearing in a newspaper (i.e., the media) must be true, because each member of the media tends to be self-confirming.

If a specific example of this principle is needed, consider the reporters of the Knickerbocker Press, in Albany, NY, in 1937, who demanded a contract affirming the importance of “A full, accurate, truthful and fair presentation of the facts”. Management rejected the clause because it ran counter to the third law of journalism—to confirm prevailing prejudices. The second is to arouse existing sentiment and fear (emotion) leading to the first law—promote sales/ratings. Journalists are committed to the subjectivity of reality and the perceptions of PR images. Their job is to distort truths not acceptable to the supporting advertisers and to confirm and distribute fictional views that are. One of the recent examples is Fox News, which is counter-productive in the sense that those who watch it know less than those who watch no news at all.

Further impetus is added by a comment made by one Joey Skaggs, who has staged public hoaxes for over 40 years. “We’re really just pretty pain stupid”, he observed “. We are predisposed to deceiving ourselves”. Emphasizing the positive feedback nature of stupidity, Sara Scribner, who works to promote reliable information in the digital age? “If there is a story that grabs you and confirms reality for you, it’s so easy to just accept it”. In summary, the article, which is well documented, ends with the observation that we favor perceptions which support our beliefs, or in psych speak, beware confirmation bias.