Seeing the bigger picture

Description

A generalisable lesson from psychophysics

> *"Violations of moral norms can be made 'morally invisible' even if all relevant facts are unobscured: This can be achieved by embedding these facts into a context that prevents eliciting widespread unease and indignation. One example is the structural violence associated with the implementation of neoliberal economical doctrine. While societal and humanitarian consequences of this violence have so far been mostly observed in so-called third-world countries, they also manifest themselves more and more often in western industrialized nations. Mass media play a pivotal role in making facts morally and cognitively visible: In addition to reporting simple facts, media typically also deliver the contextual frame necessary for interpreting the facts, thus shaping our political world view . The invisibility of some moral transgressions is thus part of our daily live and concerns us all."* (Mausfeld, 2015)

See also: uni-kiel.de/psychologie/mausfeld

Occlusion & fragmentation of information

If information is partially occluded and fragmented, we are oftentimes unable to identify the underlying pattern (see Figure 1).

"Truth has to be repeated constantly, because Error also is being preached all the time, and not just by a few, but by the multitude. In the Press and Encyclopaedias, in Schools and Universities, everywhere Error holds sway, feeling happy and comfortable in the knowledge of having Majority on its side." ~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



Figure 1. Partially occluded and fragmented information (adapted from Mausfeld, 2017)

However, as soon as the causal reason for the fragmentation becomes available to us (i.e., when we become aware of the visual or ideological “mask”) we are able to use inferential deductive cognitive reasoning processes to identify (and understand) the underlying pattern – despite the fragmentation of information/knowledge (see Figure 2). Without this “causative information” which masks the underlying pattern the likelihood of successful pattern recognition is minute (note that both figures display the letter “R” in various orientations – the difference between them is that Figure 2 shows the mask whereas Figure 1 does not) .

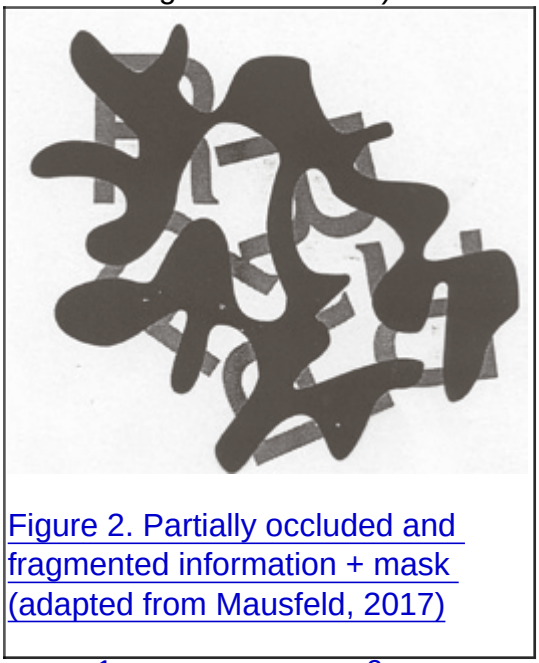


Figure 2. Partially occluded and fragmented information + mask (adapted from Mausfeld, 2017)

Insight[1] (cf. Köhler, 1925)[2] into the mechanism which causes the occlusion and fragmentation thus allows us to understand the broader meaning of the percept (or the psychological narrative), viz., we are able to see “the bigger picture” in context. This contextual knowledge can be a visual mask or a historical pattern (as outlined below). The adumbrated perceptual analogy is thus generalisable across *prima vista* unrelated domains (i.e., it is domain non-specific).

"Truth has to be repeated constantly, because Error also is being preached all the time, and not just by a few, but by the multitude. In the Press and Encyclopaedias, in Schools and Universities, everywhere Error holds sway, feeling happy and comfortable in the knowledge of having Majority on its side." ~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The same idea can be applied to the social sphere. An understanding of the mechanisms which undergird “neoliberal psychological indoctrination” is crucial in order to understand the “bigger picture” – the “holistic gestalt” (Ash, 1998; Sharps & Wertheimer, 2000) of the social, political, economic, and academic environment we inhabit. Based on this overarching knowledge we can then “try our best” to take an appropriate and responsible course of action. However, we first have to perceive and acknowledge the problem. That is, a valid diagnosis is primary. Without this broader understanding we “lose sight of the wood for the trees” (cf. global vs. local perception/information processing), that is, we attend to seemingly unrelated semantic information fragments without an understanding of their mutual interrelations. Interestingly, emotions & affective states play a significant modulatory role in the underlying cognitive processes (e.g., Basso, Schefft, Ris, & Dember, 1996; Gasper & Clore, 2002; Huntsinger, Clore, & Bar-Anan, 2010). In other words, our emotional system is centrally involved in perception and reasoning. Therefore, the emotional system (i.e., limbic system) can be systematically manipulated in order to interfere with rational higher-order (prefrontal) cognitive processes which are necessary for logical inferential reasoning and problem-solving. Primordial fear (phylogenetically ancient amygdalae circuitry) is perhaps the most significant inhibitor of higher-order cognitive processes .



Gross, C. T., & Canteras, N. S.. (2012). The many paths to fear. Nature Reviews Neuroscience

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1038/nrn3301
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“Fear is an emotion that has powerful effects on behaviour and physiology across animal species. it is accepted that the amygdala has a central role in processing fear. however, it is less widely appreciated that distinct amygdala outputs and downstream circuits are involved in different types of fear. data show that fear of painful stimuli, predators and aggressive members of the same species are processed in independent neural circuits that involve the amygdala and downstream hypothalamic and brainstem circuits. here, we discuss data supporting multiple fear pathways and the implications of this distributed system for understanding and treating fear.”



Povinelli, D. J., & Bering, J. M.. (2002). The mentality of apes revisited. Current Directions in Psychological Science

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1111/1467-8721.00181
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“Although early compara- tive psychology was seriously marred by claims of our spe- cies’ supremacy, the residual backlash against these archaic evolutionary views is still be- ing felt, even though our un- derstanding of evolutionary biology is now sufficiently ad- vanced to grapple with possi- ble cognitive specializations that our species does not share with closely related species. the overzealous efforts to dis- mantle arguments of human uniqueness have only served to show that most compara- tive psychologists working with apes have yet to set aside the antiquated evolutionary ‘lad- der.’ instead, they have only attempted to pull chimpan- zees up to the ladder’s highest imaginary rung–or perhaps, to pull humans down to an equally imaginary rung at the height of the apes. a true com- parative science of animal minds, however, will recog- nize the complex diversity of the animal kingdom, and will thus view homo sapiens as one more species with a unique set of adaptive skills crying out to be identified and understood.”
Ruiz, G., & Sánchez, N.. (2014). Wolfgang Köhler’s the mentality of apes and the animal psychology of his time. Spanish Journal of Psychology

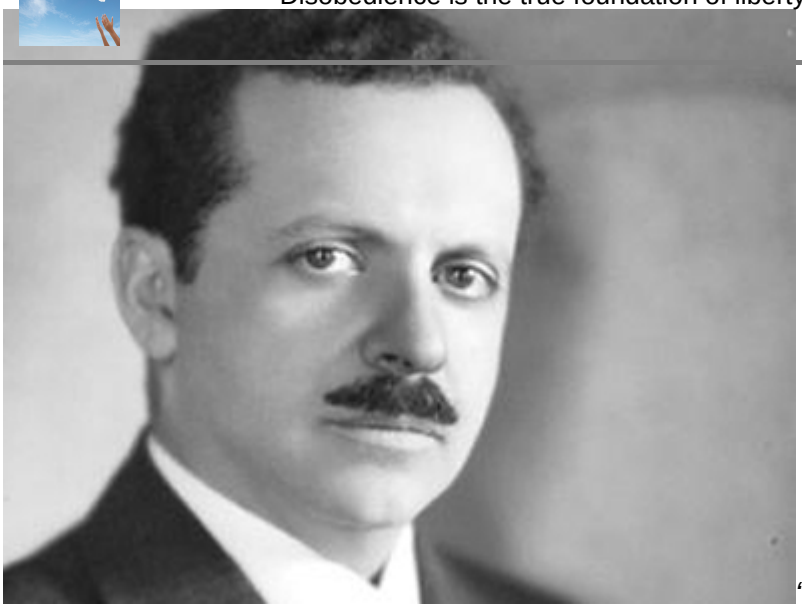
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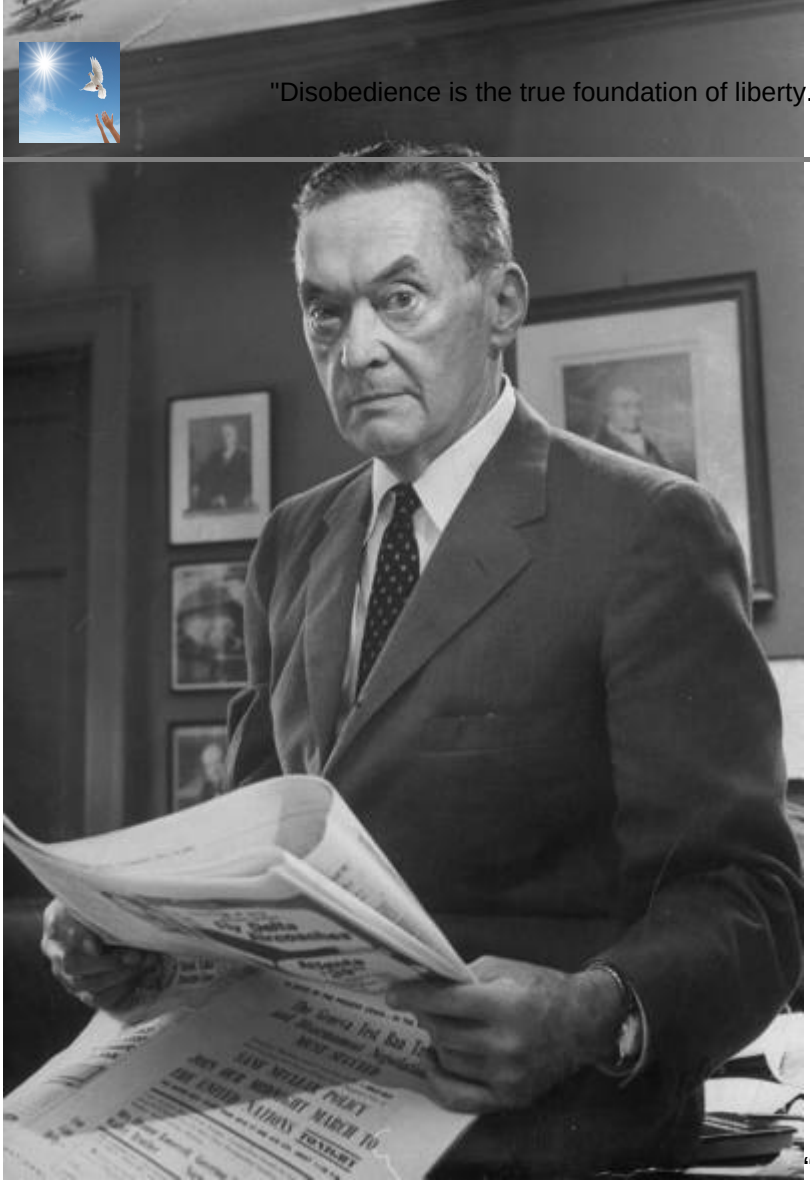
in 1913, the anthropoid station for psychological and physiological research in chimpanzees and other apes was founded by the royal prussian academy of sciences (berlin) near la orotava, tenerife. eugene teuber, its first director, began his work at the station with several studies of anthropoid apes’ natural behavior, particularly chimpanzee body language. in late 1913, the psychologist wolfgang köhler, the second and final director of the station, arrived in tenerife. during his stay in the canary islands, köhler conducted a series of studies on intelligent behavior in chimpanzees that would become classics in the field of comparative psychology. those experiments were at the core of his book intelligenzprüfungen an menschenaffen (the mentality of apes), published in 1921. this paper analyzes köhler’s experiments and notions of intelligent behavior in chimpanzees, emphasizing his distinctly descriptive approach to these issues. it also makes an effort to elucidate some of the theoretical ideas underpinning köhler’s work. the ultimate goal of this paper is to assess the historical significance of köhler’s book within the context of the animal psychology of his time.

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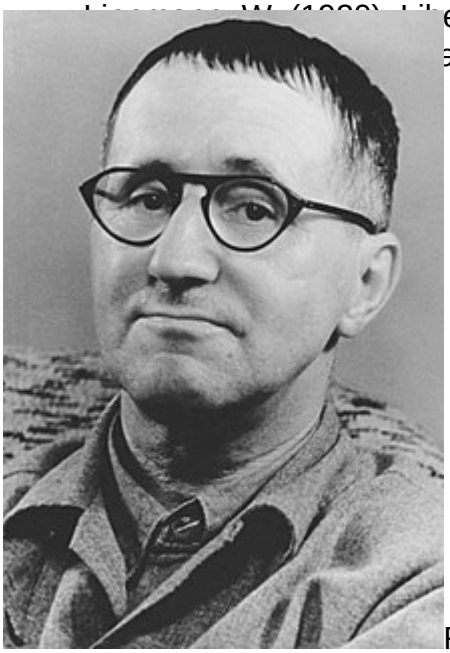
“The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society . Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of.” (Edward Bernays, Propaganda, 1928)

- Bernays, E. L. (1928). Propaganda. *Horace Liveright*.
- Bernays, E. L. (1936). Freedom of Propaganda. *Vital Speeches of the Day*, *2*(24), 744–746.
- L’Etang, J. (1999). The father of spin: Edward L. Bernays and the birth of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, *25*(1), 123–124.



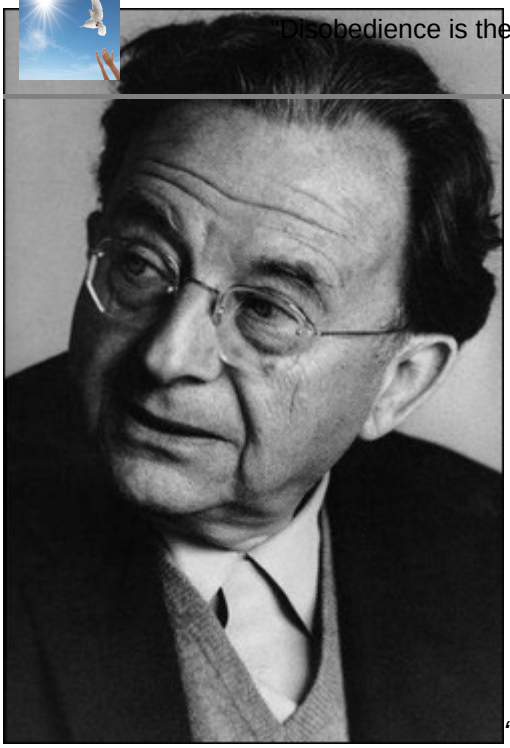
“That the manufacture of consent is capable of great refinements no one, I think, denies. The process by which public opinions arise is certainly no less intricate than it has appeared in these pages, and the opportunities for manipulation open to anyone who understands the process are plain enough. . . . [a]s a result of psychological research, coupled with the modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner. A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significant than any shifting of economic power…. Under the impact of propaganda, not necessarily in the sinister meaning of the word alone, the old constants of our thinking have become variables. It is no longer possible, for example, to believe in the original dogma of democracy; that the knowledge needed for the management of human affairs comes up spontaneously from the human heart. Where we act on that theory we expose ourselves to self-deception, and to forms of persuasion that we cannot verify. It has been demonstrated that we cannot rely upon intuition, conscience, or the accidents of casual opinion if we are to deal with the world beyond our reach. … The public must be put in its place, so that each of us may live free of the trampling and roar of a bewildered herd.” (Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion, Chapter XV)

erty and the News. *Museum*.
e Phantom Public. *Politics*.



From 1930 onwards, Brecht became part of a wider complex of projects exploring the role of intellectuals (or “Tuis” as he called them) in a capitalist society. A Tui is an intellectual who sells his or her abilities and opinions as a commodity in the marketplace or who uses them to support the dominant ideology of an oppressive society.] The German modernist theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht invented the term and used it in a range of critical and creative projects, including the material that he developed in the mid-1930s for his so-called Tui-Novel—an unfinished satire on intellectuals in the German Empire and Weimar Republic—and his epic comedy from the early 1950s, Turandot or the Whitewashers’ Congress. The word is a neologism that results from the acronym of a word play on “intellectual” (“Tellekt-Ual-In”).
According to Clark (2006):
“… the critique of intellectuals which Brecht developed… around the notion of ‘Tuismus’ engages a model of the public intellectual in which the self-image of the artist and thinker as a socially and politically engaged person corresponded to the expectations of the public.”

- Clark, M. W. (2006). Hero or villain? Bertolt Brecht and the crisis surrounding June 1953. *Journal of Contemporary History*.
- Hunt, T. C. N.-. (2004). Goodbye to Berlin: For 200 years, German thinkers have shaped British intellectual life – but their influence is fading fast. *The Guardian*.



"It is very useful to differentiate between rational and irrational authority. By irrational authority I mean authority exercised by fear and pressure on the basis of emotional submission. This is the authority of blind obedience, the authority you will find most clearly expressed in all totalitarian countries.

But there is another kind of authority, rational authority by which I mean any authority which is based on competence and knowledge, which permits criticism, which by its very nature tends to diminish, but which is not based on the emotional factors of submission and

recognition of the competence of the person for a certain job."

? 1958. The Moral Responsibility of Modern Man, in: Merrill-Palmer. Quarterly of Behavior and Development, Detroit, Vol. 5, p. 6.

> *"No expert certification is required to think about these questions, even if the ruling elites try their best to restrict discourse about them to a narrow group of "qualified experts". As "citoyens", well-informed and dutiful citizens trying to actively participate in forming our community, we possess what in the age of enlightenment came to be called "lumen naturale": We are endowed with a natural reasoning faculty that allows us to engage in debates and decisions about matters which directly affect us. We can therefore adequately discuss the essential core of the ways in which grave violations of law and morality are hidden from our awareness without having some specialist education."*

(Mausfeld, 2015)



Despite the clear words of these very influential and prominent personalities (i.e., Bernays and Lippmann) some social psychologists argue that “irrational conspiracy theories” are based on fallacious and “illusionary pattern perception” – but see article below.

By contrast, compare the following websites for more information on the actual origin of the “conspiracy theory meme”. According to the in-depth analyses of these scholars, governmental ‘think tanks’ (e.g., well-paid social psychologists) played a crucial role in the invention of the term “conspiracy theory” which is used to *prima facie* discredit those who challenge the mainstream narrative propagandized by the mass-media and other other social institutions (e.g., schools & universities). The social sciences & humanities have a long well-documented history of contributing to the systematic manipulation of public attitudes & opinions (the public relations industry and the social sciences/humanities are obviously deeply intertwined) (cf. weaponized anthropology). Today, the cognitive neurosciences joined the choir (cf. techniques of neuro-marketing). Psychology (and science in general) is a two-sided sword. It can be used to contribute to the unfoldment of human potential (the humanistic perspective which emphasises liberty and self-actualisation a la Maslow) or the same methods can be used to manipulate and control people (the neoliberal doctrine a la Bernays which focuses on power and submission to authority). It is self-evident on which side of the bipolar continuum (viz., humanism versus neoliberalism) humanity finds itself at the moment…

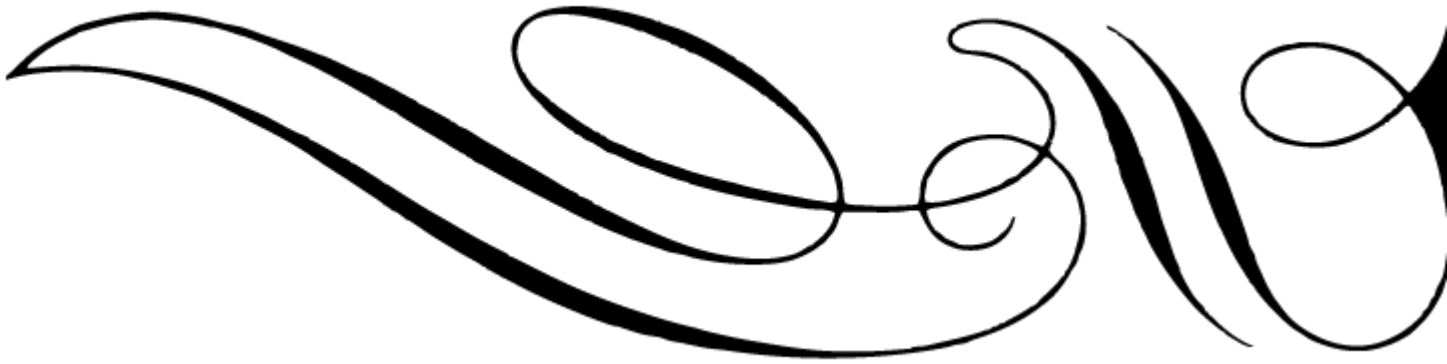
- cognitive-liberty.online/2019/01/10/origins-of-the-conspiracy-meme/
- cognitive-liberty.online/2018/11/20/the-conspiracy-meme-as-a-linguistic-tool-for-memetic-hegemony/

Connecting the dots: Illusory pattern perception predicts belief in conspiracies and the supernatural www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5900972/pdf/EJSP-48-320.pdf

See also: conspiracytheories.eu/activity/canterbury-training-school/



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Mausfeld_Why do the lambs remain silent_2015

URL:
www.uni-kiel.de/psychologie/mausfeld/pubs/Mausfeld_Why%20do%20the%20lambs%20remain%20silent_2015.pd
Semantic Chord/Knowledge graph
[wl_chord]
Concepual cloud
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Vocabulary
[wl_vocabulary]
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[wl_timeline]

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Gasper, K., & Clore, G. L. (2002). Attending to the big picture: Mood and global versus local processing of visual information. *Psychological Science*. doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00406

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Tags

1. abduction
2. analogy
3. cognition
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19. Prof. Rainer Mausfeld
20. Propaganda
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23. silent lambs metaphors

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