



*If One Sheep Leaps Over the Ditch*



# ***If One Sheep Leaps Over the Ditch***

***Knowledge is Power vs. Ignorance is Bliss***

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*The ability to believe, feel and know that black is white if the ministry says so.*

*Having ideas and patterns not approved by the government.*

*To speak whatever 'truth' the government wants you to.*

*A system of pipes used to wipe documents from history permanently.*

*Refuge of thought-criminals.*

*Submitting something to a higher authority.*

*Believing in a certain doctrine so much it becomes an instinct.*

*Individualism and eccentricity. Connected to thoughtcrime.*

*Two way television. Keeps an eye on you at all times.*

*Ministry of Truth, propaganda.*

*A news message of which the truth has been changed.*

*Lying while telling the truth by telling the truth while lying.*

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# *Sheeple*

## **PLURAL NOUN**

*derogatory*

People compared to sheep in being docile, foolish, or easily led.

*"by the time the sheeple wake up and try to change things, it will be too late."*

## **ORIGIN**

1940s: blend of sheep and people.

## **PRONUNCIATION**

sheeple/'ʃi:p(ə)l/



**BLACKWHITE**



We are herd animals. Most of the time, we graze around, staring sheepishly, occasionally bleating at others, while we allow the farmer to trim our wool and occasionally eat or sell us. He controls our food, where we can roam, and when we go to sleep. A lot of us give little attention to it, because it has been like that for all of our lives.

What we often forget, is that we can choose our own destiny. We don't have to be livestock, we don't have to live blindly. Though how can we change that?

In order to take things into our own hooves, we need to know if we want to be 'sheeple', or rather be wolves in sheep's clothing. With all due respect, it's a decision we are free to make for ourselves, however we do need to be aware of the predicament we are in. You could stay in the meadow safely and lazily watch your life pass by, or you can take your sheep skin off and start a new chapter.



**BELLYFEEL**

Storytelling can be a very powerful tool to make others act, and can have many shapes. Hans Hoeken is a professor of Communication & Information Studies at Universiteit Utrecht and researches the effect storytelling can have on people. He explains that stories can make us learn and even change our behaviour<sup>2</sup>. During every part of history, people have been telling each other stories. One of the oldest widely known is the Bible, which has been telling people how to behave for centuries. You might also be familiar with the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm. The majority of these stories have been told with a lesson to learn. For example, the story of 'mother Hulda' teaches that when you work hard and have respect for others you will be rewarded for it, and if you are too lazy to do anything, you will eventually pay for that—even if you come from a rich family.

Stories might help people to deal better with reality too. If you know what is going to happen next, if you can predict that, your chances of survival are simply higher. What is important to us humans, is that we are able to tell if someone is trustworthy or not. By telling and sharing stories, we do not only learn lessons of norms, but also lessons of survival. By sharing a story with each other, we create a bond between each other, which will unify thoughts about certain topics, and make the group work as one. So, conclusively, stories are made as training material to increase social intelligence.

Mr. Hoeken also explains that stories can be told in such a way one will change their mind, even if they had a completely opposite opinion about the topic. When a person

reads two versions of the same story—in which they state before what their own opinion was about the topic—they would pick the version of the story where the argument was written in first-person. They would immediately sympathize with that version of the story, even if it were the opposite of their opinions. This way of manipulating the way someone perceives a story is called 'narrative reconstruction'. There is a simple rule about this: your emotions have an influence on what you think is good. If someone identifies with a character, they are more likely to have the same opinion, but also vice versa: having the same opinions will make them identify faster. The next time you are reading a story, think of this. The writer might use these tricks to make you see from another standpoint than the one you'd normally have. So I have a story for you.

## OWNLIFE

When I was around the age of five or six, I started asking critical questions to my parents. *"Why do people act like this and that?", "Why do people sometimes lie about their lives?", "Why am I never invited to [children's] birthday parties?", "Why does it seem like everybody else has a better life than me?"* My mother explained: *"My dear, people aren't usually as brutally sincere as you are."* It baffled me. *"But why would people be dishonest to others or themselves? I mean, there isn't anything to hide, right?"* She smiled. *"Lying or being insincere is a thing people do that isn't very nice, but unfortunately for many, it is a way to survive in this world. And sadly, you can't change the world."*

*You'll have to learn to live with it."*

Prior to turning 21, I had been an awkward teenager who did not make long-term friends. I understand now that I strongly felt like a dissident at that age. My mother's answer bothered me a lot, but as any rebellious teenager, I left it at the back of my mind for a long time. *"She cannot be right."* Was my thought, time after time. I was angry because I did not want to learn 'how to behave' in order to not get in trouble with others. I did not want to learn how to 'be polite', because I wanted to be able to tell someone when I thought their sweater was ugly. I wanted to tell my life story and the most uncomfortable details to anyone, even strangers, if they would make the mistake to ask: *"How are you?"* I wanted them to accept me for who I am. Unfortunately, I became quite lonely because of that.

Just after I finally moved to a new city to make a fresh start, I decided it was time to take my mothers advice, to learn to act in accordance with what the Dutch society supposedly expected from me and teach myself social conventions. Because I was already a bit older than when people usually learn this, I didn't only copy social behaviour, but also studied the why's and how's. It was all so peculiar and interesting, and until this day, I am still learning.

**OLDTHINK**

As Hein Pracht writes, explaining things is a very important habit to us. Parents mostly become expert at it, since they often have their children asking them 'why', 'how', and 'what'. We are always searching for an explanation. We don't like inconsistency, so we will always try to make the world more predictable. When trying to explain other people's behaviour, we will ascribe cause to effect. This is called the attribution theory<sup>3</sup>. Naturally, as I am a human being, I am searching for an explanation for my behaviour, that of others, and how it comes together. And since you are most probably human too, I presume you'd like to read my plot.

One theory is that we are void like a formatted computer when we are born, and later get written on by our surroundings<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, there is the suggestion that we actually emerge into the world equipped with an operating system, which will install the software it needs to function accordingly. For instance, a newborn baby knows how to swim and has a strong grip reflex, which derives from when humans were still ape-like and their mother had a fur<sup>5</sup>, but it will not be able to talk until it hears language regularly and the parent teaches them. Except from a few rudimentary assets, humanity's operating system is relatively minimalistic—which is why we are the animals that are the least programmed at birth, and are possibly the most programmable of all species.

By default humans are programmed to survive, it is the absolute core of our reasoning when it comes to learning and making decisions. We carry this out through condition-

ing: learning by association<sup>6</sup>. If an act is repeatedly successful, it will create a positive association that one would want to repeat. In order to have influence on this, one needs to address the trigger that summoned the positive feeling in the first place.

Willem Verbeke and Lamar Qayoumi explain that there are many triggers that we find pleasant, whereof the most important ones are our senses: vision, tactility, smell, sound, taste<sup>7</sup>. Within the senses, there are multiple factors that will make us develop a certain interest for something. For vision, there is pretty much one rule that counts for most people. Seeing the colour red makes humans excited on a sub-conscious level<sup>8</sup>, while seeing the color green or grey makes us calmer. Seeing Barnett Newmans' 'Who's Afraid Of Red, Yellow and Blue' [figure 1] could unintentionally make us aroused, while James Turrell's 'Alta Green' [figure 2] probably gives all a sense of serenity.

For tactility, on the other hand, the way things work is much more personal. Not everyone loves to be touched or likes to touch things. There are certain groups of people that will get triggered by being able to touch something, because it makes them feel more like it is theirs, or that they are part of it. Phone stores often use this to advertise their wares.

Then, there is smell. Smell is the sense that has one of the strongest associations with feelings, because the nose is closely connected to parts of the brain that store feelings and memories. Because of this, we remember smells easily. They can make us think something is good or bad—even if the smell does not say anything about the actual experience—and is a strong trigger which will bring up certain

memories stored in the brain. For this reason, a sugary smell is often used in [American] stores, since sugar is believed to be more addictive than alcohol, thus attracting people and making them return. Artists also use smell as a trigger: Maki Ueda's 'SMELL x ILLUSION' takes smells out of the normal context and puts them back in a different one so that new connections are made between them<sup>9</sup>.

Rhythm can stimulate people to go faster or slower. If you go for a run, you will probably put on music with an upbeat tempo, and it will make it easier to run fast. Music is more difficult to avoid than images, since it is omni-existent: it is all around you. Sounds can alter our behaviour, since they can make us aggressive, calm, or excited.

Last there is taste, which can evoke positive or negative feelings too. Bitterness should imply something is not edible, thus this taste is used in anti-nail biting liquids, immediately sending a small alarm signal to the brain when your taste buds come in contact with it. For positive reinforcement, medicine is sometimes covered in sugar so children will not be too reluctant to eat them. There are also specific foods that we have a connection with. Hot chocolate milk or glühwein on winterly days is a good example of conditioning with taste, because for most people this drink is connected to a feeling of cosiness.

Our senses are being influenced widely to change public opinions. Powerful people in the marketing world—people that [try to] own our identities, like Google and Facebook—know better what triggers us than ourselves, which results in us becoming addicted and vulnerable to whatever they want to sell—whether it's information or products.

Another example is the way women are presented in advertising. Hairs are removed digitally, waists are trimmed, wrinkles erased, hair added on other places, skin smoothed, and so forth—all to make women feel like they ought to look this way, and by using the advertisement's products, they supposedly can. Recently there has been quite an uproar about these misconceptions of beauty. Fortunately for this generation, because years went by with women thinking that the alien being in the display window was everything she should be. Still, even by knowing this, it can be very difficult to look past these alterations if you never see what a real person looks like. So treat yourself, visit a sauna, get naked, sit down, and take it all in.

Apple was once famous for a specific use of language in their speeches. Steve Jobs would repeatedly use words that sparked a positive feeling like 'incredible', 'awesome', 'amazing', 'great', 'beautiful'<sup>10</sup>. He would repeat them many times during his speeches and caused people to actually have more brain activity in the area where religion normally is processed<sup>11</sup>, creating a true hype for Apple products. Apple's users were euphoric about the product, and even though Apple made great products, the trust of their customers was a tremendous amount bigger than for products that were as good as theirs. It became almost cult-like, a religion of its own<sup>12</sup>. People would have full trust and put all their faith in Apple.

Social media is generally designed to be addictive. Something is addictive when an outcome is equally variable—when you don't have any input in its behaviour. When a

disappointment comes up you feel stimulated to try to get something nice, hence the vicious circle begins. Platforms like Facebook work as slot machines, where the user has to 'pull to refresh' in order to get a chance to see something nice<sup>13</sup>—like a beautiful picture or a story—or something rather disappointing. Colour is being used too: Facebook uses red dots as a marker for new messages, while the background is blue: the color of trust. As I noted before, red makes us excited, thus triggers the user to tap or click on this marker. Although Facebook has stated that they never intend negative outcomes, some part of their service evokes just that.

Instagram shows you everything you don't have. Except it doesn't, it has the same result as beauty and lifestyle advertisement has on us. The social media platform started to evoke something called FOMO<sup>14</sup>—fear of missing out—in its users, makes them feel more anxious and depressed, and have a lower body image compared to any other social media platform. What is shocking, is that so many people still seem to forget that 'the grass is always greener on the other side'. Nevertheless are social media platforms giving people a feeling of support and making them feel less lonely.

## **DUCKSPEAK**

Conformism makes up a large part of our programming. There have been studies to discover how autonomous a person usually is. In the Conformism Experiment of Solomon Asch<sup>15</sup>, one participant would be invited to look at lines

[figure 3]<sup>16</sup>. The other participants, who were in fact actors, would deliberately give wrong answers. When the answers were said out loud, the participant would start giving the same wrong answer as the rest, even though they knew it was incorrect. When the same figure was shown but the answers were anonymously written down, the participant would give the right answers.

Not conforming at all to the norm can have great consequences for a person. Since being part of a group is essential for our survival as human beings, separating yourself from a group could be dangerous. Therefore most people would rather join a group that isn't in line with their ideas than going solo. Hence the expression *"If you can't beat them, join them."* We even seem to think that others around us probably know better how to deal with situations than we do, especially when they have more power, or are very opinionated. A common example of you conforming to a group could be:

A group of people is watching a couple fighting on the street. The man is shouting at the woman and making threatening gestures with his hands, while the woman silently weeps. You just walked into the mass of watching people and notice that no one takes action.

You will most probably experience 'cognitive dissonance'<sup>17</sup>: a feeling of uneasiness when the reality doesn't quite go as expected. People generally don't like inconsistency, so you would give yourself reasons why you should not call the police or step in and help. A common reason could be that you'd assume someone else already gave help, you could get hurt, that the couple is not in need of help, or that it is simply not your place. This idea will then

make you calm, because the situation becomes someone else's responsibility, so that you can go home and not worry about which consequences your actions could have.

Even though we feel safe and happy when conforming to a group, we feel also feel a bit ashamed, like we would probably feel if we'd act like the example above. This is why we feel admiration for those who deviate from the usual rules. Deviating too much, though, will result in becoming a dissident: a fool, an insane person, or a lone wolf. That's where the line between crazy and genius really lies.

George Orwell terrifically portrayed how conformism could destroy our free will in '1984', and it is absolutely dystopian. The main character is arrested after trying to escape the system, which has an absolute control and overview on what every civilian does. He is kept in a cell for months, underfed, tortured and told false truths:

*"How many fingers, Winston?"*

*'Five! Five! Five!'*

*'No, Winston. That's no use. You are lying. You still think there are four. How many fingers, please?'*

*'Four! Five! Four! Anything you like. Only stop it, stop the pain!'"<sup>18</sup>*

When he comes out, he is a broken man, he doesn't care about fighting the system anymore because of his reconditioning. The new version of himself is considered 'safe' for the government, so he isn't even being watched anymore, and it ends with him being truly, blindly happy.

## MEMORY HOLE

*"The fact is that we as users are victims of our own assumptions."*<sup>19</sup> As A8 Team describes, our behaviour on the internet is quite naive, assuming that the software we use, the WiFi we connect to and the websites we visit are safe. Somehow it became normal to type our name and address into any text box that asks us for it. We became more easy going releasing our credentials online, because it is more difficult to see what actually happens to it. Sometimes we don't even realise it might be accessed by anyone.

Although '1984' didn't happen in 1984 it has been prophetic in some parts. When Edward Snowden uncovered in 2013<sup>20</sup> that our privacy is being invaded daily, people weren't massively alarmed. Snowden had been collecting secret files from the NSA that showed evidence of mass surveillance on civilians via the machines in their houses. Every device in your home that has the ability to record anything can be triggered from outside, even when powered off<sup>21</sup>. You might not really care because you think: *"I have nothing to hide"*<sup>22</sup>, like people said in a recent series of interviews by Roel Maalderink. Somehow a lot of people seem to think their privacy is not interesting enough to be invaded, that only criminals or 'important' people would be tracked. We do have something to hide. If a stranger asks you for your pin number, you would not tell them, because they could intend to steal your money. But in the digital world, people are way less careful. Recently 31 million users were duped when their personal information leaked via a virtual keyboard app, because a server wasn't pass-

word protected<sup>25</sup>. The app collected very personal information from the victims including storage of banking apps, and was able to record everything people typed in when using the keyboard, including passwords. Luckily the leak was discovered by a security company, which only reported the problem but didn't use any of the data.

Since the government portrayed Snowden mostly as a criminal, no one doubted he was one. In a sense they were right—he did break the law. But he did it to show something to us. Unfortunately Snowden is a dissident<sup>23</sup>: he made such an autonomous move he did not fit into a comprehensible regime. He did not make a decision for his own survival, he made a decision for the greater good. He said: *"I'm willing to sacrifice [my former life] because I can't in good conscience allow the U.S. government to destroy privacy, internet freedom and basic liberties for people around the world with this massive surveillance machine they're secretly building, ..."*<sup>24</sup>. Although petitions were set up and signed to pardon Snowden, it feels like the mass hasn't really mentioned him and largely forgotten his actions while they are so important for our freedom.

Large masses use apps without considering the safety of them. We feel safe because others feel safe, we find it easy to leave the thinking to someone else that seemingly knows better—like the government—or someone that only speaks with authority, like a boss, parent, or any group. The reason behind it is again survival: we group up because we need to work together to survive. In ancient times, if you were not particularly popular in the group or even expelled from it, your survival chances sank close to zero.

## CHESTNUT TREE CAFÉ

Seminal research including the Milgram experiment<sup>26</sup> and the Stanford Prison Experiment<sup>27</sup> showed how susceptible we are for group behaviour. The Stanford Prison Experiment—where equal students became prisoners and guards—escalated and had to be stopped after the sixth day because of the horrible things the 'guards' did to the 'prisoners': students that had the role of prisoner started to act like prisoners, telling each other stories and ratting each other out to the students that had the role of guards. The 'guards' would on their turn make the 'prisoners' do tedious and boring tasks, strip them naked, or isolate them from the others.

The Milgram Experiment was motivated by curiosity for statements of WWII criminals, who stated that it was pure obedience that made them do the most horrible things. In the Milgram experiment, a situation was set up where a participant, the 'teacher', had to punish a 'student' [an actor] with electrical shocks when their answer was wrong. A shocking amount of 65% of the participants did exactly as the researcher told them to, even when the 'student' would cry out in pain. They were asked to crank up the 'voltage' even after it became silent on the other side. Milgram did many more of these experiments and came to the conclusion that adults would obey authority blindly.

There are a few things to say about the trustworthiness of above experiments. A couple of factors make the general outcome a bit less secure, like the fact that all attendees

were male. In the Milgram experiment people had to volunteer themselves by a newspaper, which might imply they are more obedient than others who wouldn't be so voluntary. Even though it showed that we will go great lengths whatsoever in order to conform ourselves to a group.

Jean-Paul Sartre, who is regarded as one of the most important philosophers of existentialism<sup>28</sup>, had been a victim of conformism too, just like Snowden is nowadays. Sartre was unpopular and even arrested by the government at one point, and had polyamorous relationships<sup>29</sup>. Sartre wanted to give the individual their freedom back, and thought that humans don't have a purpose, that we are thrown into this life just like that, and that *"Things are weirder than we think"*<sup>30</sup>. In one of his books, *Nausea*, he writes down his feelings about this weirdness in the form of a novel: one day, a man starts having strange sensations of what he calls 'the Nausea', where he becomes more and more overwhelmed by all the details that are occurring in his daily life. Things that weren't strange at all for him at first, suddenly strike him as odd as normalized connotations seem to fade. He sees things for what they 'really are', in their naked truth. A Sartrical way to look at you, the reader, could go as follows:

An intelligent mammal—male, female, or anything in between that—is looking at black figures made of straight and bent lines on square pieces of very thinly pressed shards from the stem of trees—which possibly have been of service for them to sit or lie on, behind, or between, when they were still bigger pieces of wood. These thin pieces have been put together with a thread

and some white substance, forming a rectangular shape when it is closed. The lines are part of a system that has a certain sound and meaning attached, so these mammals can communicate with each other. They learn this at a place where all mammals come together to learn about other mammals, what important things they did, and will base their entire life on this knowledge.

Sartre also thought we all were able to imagine a better world. Because of that, he said, is possible for us to interpret facts in our own way, and make our own story out of it. In school we usually learn of two ways to interpret facts: objectivity and subjectivity. Being subjective means your view is being formed by surroundings and therefore a warped picture. Objectivity is supposed to be the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but Sartre opposed this. In philosophy in general objectivity has been under fire<sup>31</sup>. Because how can one be objective when surroundings are clearly always affecting our perceptions?

The news is an example: it presents itself as an objective source, but is actually always interpreted by a reporter, cameraman, editor, etc.. The same is applicable when someone tells you a story personally, and you then tell this story to a friend as precise as you can. The more sources or people in between, the greater the chances are that the story will deviate from the original, despite of each storyteller trying to keep the story intact<sup>32</sup>. Even when you yourself speak about what you did last week, you will explain this via your memory. And it has been proven our memory isn't actu-

ally that precise<sup>33</sup>. It can exaggerate, misplace, fade, or be imprecise in the first place, due to expectations prior and post the experience.

Because of this, one could simply argue that nothing is objective, but what about video footage and recorded messages, which are created and framed by us? Even if you look at something with your bare eye, the images go through a filter: you. Even without memories, you aren't as trustworthy as you might think you are in sense of objectivity. If you'd put your left hand in a bucket of ice water, and your right hand in a bucket of hot water, after which you'd put both hands in lukewarm water, you'd feel two different temperatures in either hand<sup>34</sup>. Now, if two hands can already have such a different sensation with only one factor as a difference, imagine a case where perceptions are far more complicated.

As you've read multiple times survival comes first on our list. That's where mass hysteria is such a strange phenomenon. It mostly puts multiple lives in danger, while the original threat mostly is not as large as the disaster caused by the panic. All capacity to use common sense has been lost<sup>35</sup>. An exemplary event where that happened was the 'Love Parade' festival held in Duisburg in 2010<sup>36</sup>. A spark of panic started when some people tried to climb over a barrier and fell, resulting in more and more people panicking and pushing each other over. Within a very short time frame the crowd was growing tighter and tighter, resulting in people getting suffocated, crushed, and trampled. 19 people died that day, simply because mass hysteria occurred. The panic started small, but our instinctive group behaviour—which

works faster than our reasoning<sup>37</sup>—and people's strong tendency to conform made the frenzy so huge it actually caused a disaster.

## UPSUB

Recently, when I started studying internationally, I learned that the history I acquired in my school is not the history others learned. I was vaguely aware of that, but had never given it any thought. One girl from my class—who grew up in a village in Siberia called Buryatia—told me, laughing semi-nervously: *“Before I came to Europe, I learned in school that Genghis Khan was a great hero, and got to learn only positive things about him. I used to think he was an amazing guy!”* She giggled, covering her mouth with her hand. It was only later she discovered that, even though he invented the first postal system<sup>38</sup>, the man also had plundered and raped extensively throughout what is now Russia<sup>39</sup>. In those times things like rape were seen very differently, which explains why Khan was seen as a hero rather than a villain. I remember my school teaching me the opposite about him, but my country had its own 'Genghis': I learned that Michiel Adriaanszoon de Ruyter was a sublime war hero at sea<sup>40</sup>—he invented a communication system with flags so ships could work together—and he even has plenty of statues in the Netherlands. What I only learned later—which wasn't mentioned in the history books—is that de Ruyter was involved in slave trade, and had ties to groups of people that had a criminal background<sup>41</sup>.

When I was small, I even did not realize to what extent Dutch slave trading had been harmful, simply because at school the emphasis was put on the success of the Dutch rather than the suffering of the slaves and the inhumane ways they were treated. This has caused me to not understand for a very long time why the tradition of Sinterklaas in the Netherlands would be better off without 'Black Pete'—a jolly character in a colorful suit, dark face paint, red lips, a curly wig and mostly large golden earrings—even though I started being annoyed by the amount of anger around the topic. Tradition can blind us from seeing something that is very obvious to others outside of the group. Only after I did research myself I got a chance to form my own opinion and readjust my way of thinking about the topic.

It's clear why a lot of Dutch people became angry over something as simple as changing the color of a character that is fictional in their eyes: traditions are a way for people to feel safe, to share a certain thing with one another, they bind a group together and make them stronger. It simply makes people feel weak and exposed, which they will then respond to in a defensive manner. To change a tradition, it needs to be disrupted for a long time. Even though so many people are used to 'Black Pete' being painted black, slowly but surely the tradition is already being changed for another colour, another type of helper or even just no helper at all. Within another 5, 10 or 20 years, it will have evolved to a divergent form.

Marina Abramovic once said: *"I know only one audience that is not governable, and those are the Dutch. They are the most disobedient people I have ever met. They refuse to give*

up their freedom."<sup>42</sup>. This statement was made about her work where she wanted people to not use their electrical devices and to be silent for a while before a concert started. Of all nationalities she performed for, the Dutch were the only ones asking critical questions and complaining, or simply refusing. I was surprised, because I thought the Dutch were just as susceptible to group behaviour as anyone else. Abramovic furthermore stated she thinks this is a problem—at least, for her work—since it's hard to learn something if you don't open up for it. I believe the Dutch are known for being down to earth and quite rebellious, so she has a very valid argument.

Abramovic's other work, 'Rhythm 0'<sup>43</sup>, is another of her experiments in human psychology. She stood in a room with 72 objects and the public could do what they want, which they did. People became more and more nasty, until one person put a gun to her head and put her finger on the trigger. On the other hand she evoked emotional responses and respect for her work 'the artist is present'. What is interesting for me in the light of this topic is that for 'Rhythm 0' the people who were drawing on her, cutting in her skin and her clothes, were unable to face her in the end. As a group, they felt strong, but when she became part of it again, they suddenly felt ashamed. I strongly wonder what would have happened if there would've been one person and no cameras. Would the group element have made the scene worse or better?



**TELESCREEN**

Video games are also being used as a medium for social experiments, since they are interactive and easily available to a large but select group of people. You could say they are a mini-experiment at home, just for yourself. They can make you lose yourself in an imaginary world. Therefore, it might sound strange to hear it isn't common at all to make such experimental games, but there are a few examples. One of the most well known is 'The Stanley Parable' [spoilers ahead]: a game which takes you to a deserted office, where a voice-over narrates to a man named Stanley—you. You basically have two choices: obey or disobey the narrator. But that makes you wonder: if someone gives you a choice, isn't there already choices made because it was given to you? Or is it already made by the circumstances—in this case, the game?

You might end up in a broom closet forever where the narrator makes fun of you until you go out, you could end up in a 'mind control' facility, go to a museum, jump from a platform and die, you even can go insane in-game ... With every ending, 'The Stanley Parable' tries to trick you into acting like your surroundings conditioned you. Normally things supposedly have a purpose. But not in 'The Stanley Parable'. The game gives a philosophical twist to an environment one normally follows flawlessly, simply because that's how video games normally work: The target is to go from point A to B, sometimes solving a puzzle, and if you do it right, you 'win the game'. The Stanley Parable has none of that. You do not win, neither do you lose. Nothing matters, nothing makes sense. It's an antithesis of life, or maybe it's exactly like life.

With “The Eye”<sup>44</sup>—a VR experience I made recently—I was trying to play with the same obedience dilemma as the Milgram and Stanford Prison experiment by placing people in a virtual world where a voice would tell them to do things in order to book progress in the so-called ‘game’. What they did not know, is that someone—in this case me—was actually monitoring them, pressing buttons when they would perform a certain action, which made them think the game somehow registered them doing it. People had full trust that I, the artist, had intended all the best with my installation. Since they trusted me, some people ended up quite far in the game where they had to crawl on the floor calling out someone’s name, not realising how ridiculous they actually might look for others. While I did my best to take a playful turn because I did not want to embarrass or harm people, these tactics could have been used in a dark and harmful way, and it has been used like that in the past.

## MINITRUE

Propaganda is an illustration of this. There have been politicians that used propaganda for a good cause, like Silvio Berlusconi who created a ‘good news machine’<sup>45</sup> to save Italy from bad publicity. But it’s the negative propaganda that helps us understand how we can prevent maleficent influences in the future. Adolf Hitler was one of the most well-known politicians who used his power of speech to reach his target group, often stating things like: *“What good fortune for governments that people do not think.”* He used fear, name-calling and *“you are either with us or against*

us<sup>46</sup> tactics to make people more malleable, whilst creating a one-sided view of facts by leaving information out, only telling it to certain groups or diverting their attention to another topic.

Today, these tactics are still being used by others, like Islamic State, who in turn use fear to make the world fearful towards Muslims so they will fight for them<sup>47</sup>. Ironically, this is where another propagandist pops up: Donald Trump, who has been advocating to ban Muslims from the U.S., raising the same fear. All three of these techniques were meant to unify a large group of people by creating a so-called 'common enemy'. In Trump's story, these were Mexicans and primarily, Muslims. With Islamic State, it is them pretending to be representing Muslims. In Hitler's story, the enemy was portrayed as Jews. And unfortunately, we all know what happened to the Jews.

During his campaign, Hitler would speak of the large accomplishments of Germany, how they all became that 'great', how they built everything 'on their own'. An uncanny resemblance to Trumps "*Make America Great Again*". This, of course, does not mean that it is certain Trump will be causing World War III, but it does say something about our society. In 60 years time, another man with less than noble intentions got one of the most powerful roles on this planet. 60 years after a terrible war that shook a huge part of the world there are still groups that use the same tactics as Hitler did, and many people still collectively fall for it.

Luckily, all is not lost. We have something people in 1939 did not have: knowledge, in the shape of the Internet. As

I stated before, thanks to the Internet we have much more reach to find out what information is (partly) wrong, and what is (mostly) right.

## **MALREPORTED**

A recent event came to my attention, where I found it terribly difficult to figure out what actually must have happened. A Chinese doctor named David Dao, who got dragged out of American Airlines violently, was suddenly accused in news messages<sup>48</sup> of being a 'criminal' after a video of the act went viral. It was implied the man 'deserved' to be handled with violence, because he supposedly cheated on his wife and allegedly prescribed illegal drugs to himself. These words were written in an article from a source—*Mail Online*—which at first glance looks like a news source, but when one takes a closer look it becomes clear that something is fishy. The writer of this article uses sophisms to make the story look real and to imply American Airlines was justified to do what they did.

Unless you are David Dao yourself, you will not know the full story. But there is a way to come close: check your sources, search for more than one, and consider if they are trustworthy. This is how the story of David Dao became a bit more elaborate. The headline of another online article spelled out<sup>49</sup>: *"It doesn't matter what happened in David Dao's life—that can't justify what happened to him on United Airlines."* According to Independent news, American Airlines tried to undo their recent reputation drop that was

brought onto them by this incident. The described 'scandal' was most probably brought to life to discredit the doctor so that American Airlines wouldn't seem so bad—something which Independent quite poetically called “*moving the spotlight*”.

Another way to find a possible truth would be visiting the 'deep web', or even the 'dark web'<sup>50</sup>, where information can be found that is invisible on usual browsers like Google Chrome or Firefox. A browser that gives the opportunity to find such places, is Tor Browser. Tor connects to a broader variety of web links, making it easier to find information that is hidden. The construction between the three webs is mostly shown in the shape of an iceberg [Figure 4], which gives an idea of the size of all this hidden information.

**DOUBLETHINK**

Even with all the knowledge in the world about conformism we can be made to do things we wouldn't do: brainwashing or thought reform<sup>51</sup> targets one person or a small group, isolates them and tries to completely reprogram them. This is done by having complete control over someone's environment and breaking down their personality piece by piece, after which a new set of behaviours is taught. 'A Clockwork Orange' describes a fictional situation where the main character, a young criminal who rapes and harms others for fun, gets caught in the act. He is brought to a facility where men in white coats condition him until he is unable to do anybody harm<sup>52</sup>. He is forced to watch violent movies while being injected with a substance that makes him feel sick. Unfortunately his favorite music is also played during the procedure, which makes it impossible for him to enjoy it after that. When he tries to kill himself, the government becomes a target for human rights organisations and doctors are urged to cure him, after which everything goes back to normal. Even though this story is hardly imaginable in real life, it has been performed in the past: the CIA has been experimenting on humans in the fifties through a project called MK-Ultra<sup>53</sup>. They would use drugs like LSD, toxins, chemicals, electroshock, radiation and other means to adjust the behaviour of all kinds of people who most of the time did not get a choice, or were seduced with a reward. Among these people were junkies, criminals like the fictional character Alex, and even CIA-employed sex workers that lured men into participating without knowing [operation Midnight Climax]<sup>54</sup>.

A lot of conspiracy theories have been spread about the CIA<sup>55</sup>, but MK-Ultra, operation Northwoods, operation Mockingbird<sup>56</sup> and many more were real. Operation Mockingbird was set up in the 1940's to control the news. The CIA installed tap at several newspapers, among which the Washington post, and people were set out to be hired as CIA-informed news reporters. Propaganda was widely spread to control the mass. It is said that Operation Mockingbird stopped in the 1970's, but recently a New York Times reporter coughed up that the CIA still controls the press of the U.S. until this day<sup>57</sup>. This might mean that more than 50 percent of the sources used in this thesis aren't even reliable, which is absolutely horrifying, but almost impossible to find out, since that information is still classified. Naturally this means that your newspaper probably doesn't contain any news that would give you insights in what is really going on in the world.

And that's why hackers, whistle blowers, and maybe even 'tin-foil-hat' eccentrics are important in our society. In our giant heap of information, the internet, we need some people that are willing to give themselves up for the greater good, to try to convince others of mishaps, in the hope something changes. Until then, this thesis will have to do.



# **CONCLUSION**



**Gain Knowledge**

**Open your eyes**

**Embrace the weirdness**

**Beware for false truths**

**Tell more tales and learn from them**

**You are not missing out on anything**

**Nothing is objective**

**Nothing matters, so**

**You are free**



# **CREDITS**



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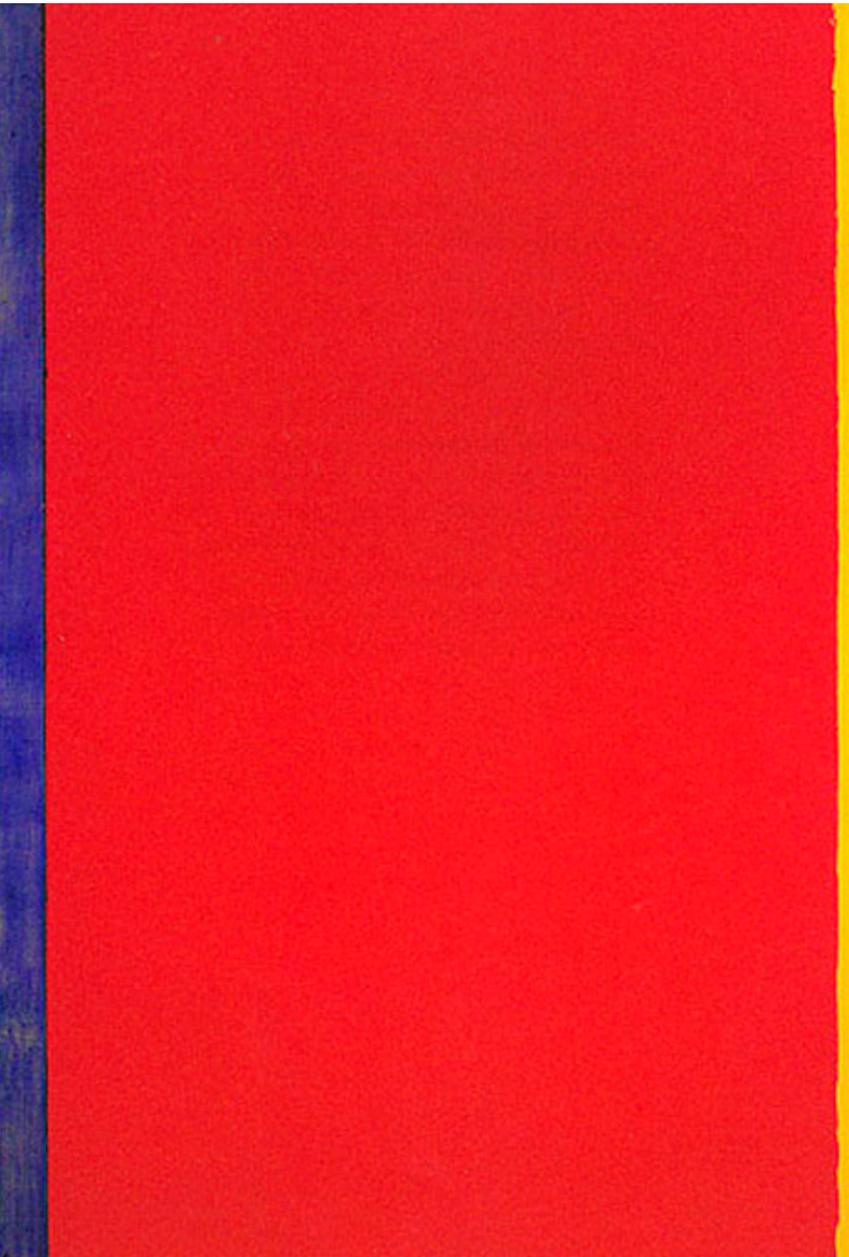
... Erwin Fasel, who helped me structure my chaotic brain.

... Rainer Hensel, who helped me shape my ideas and gave me the last push to finish what I started.

All title names of main chapters are written in 'Newspeak' language<sup>58</sup>.



# **FIGURES**



*1.*

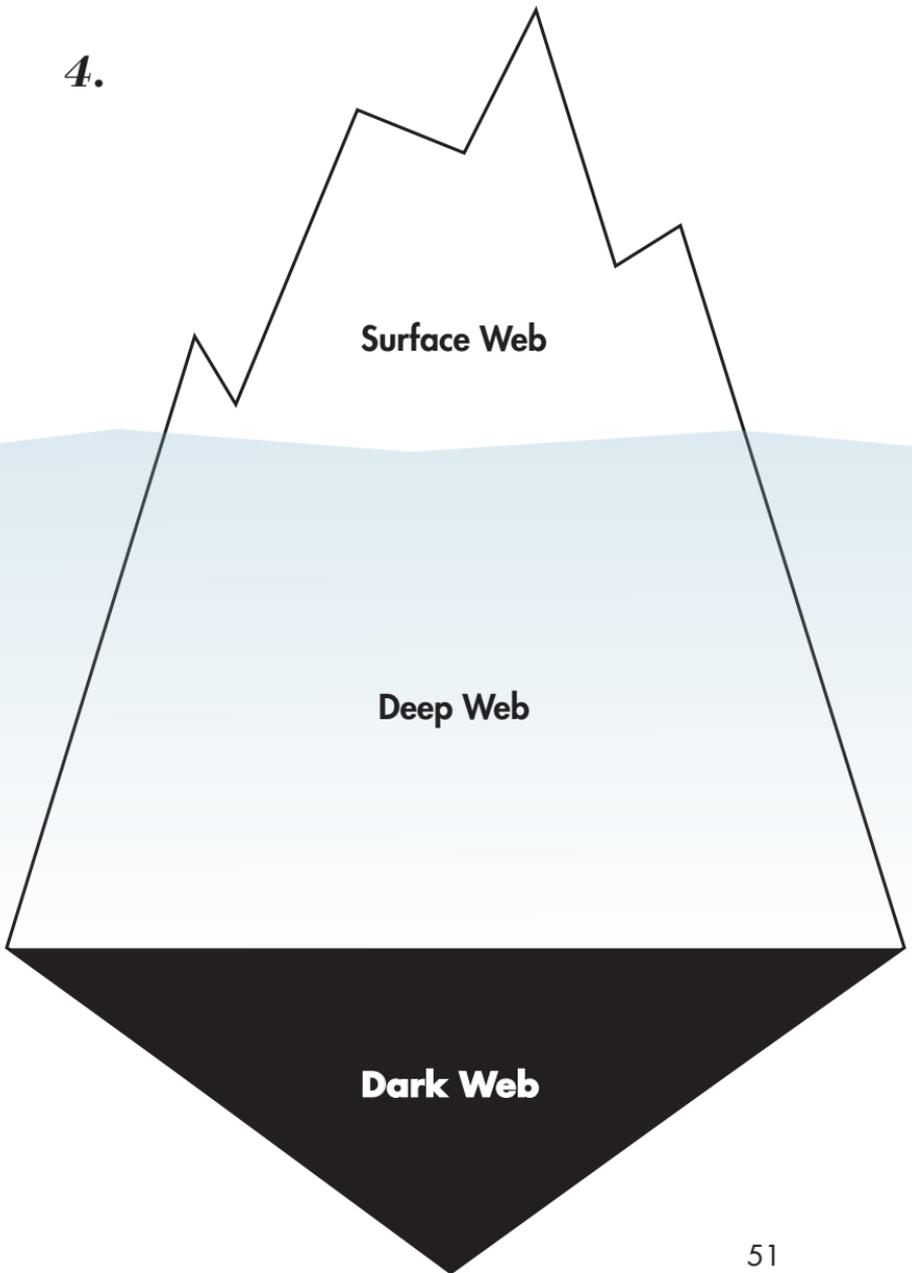
**2.**





**A B C 3.**

4.





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