

Television Literacy in the Classroom and Beyond

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Two incidents make me think about media literacy and its failures. The first is Pizzagate 2016, wherein Edger Welch, a 28-year old man from Salisbury, North Carolina, fired 3 shots into a Comet Ping Pong pizza parlor because he was convinced of a conspiracy that implicated high ranking Democrat officials in a human trafficking and alleged child sex-ring. Welsh was so convinced by his conviction that this rumor was true that evidence and facts became irrelevant.

The second is the 2006 Time Magazine's Person of the Year: YOU. The magazine's front page reflected the hypothetical Internet user by using the screen of the computer as a mirrored reflection to illustrate the importance of the digital user. The cover's byline read, "yes you. You control the Information age. Welcome to *your* world." The rise of the prosumer over the last 20 years of course has indelibly changed the way the view production and creation of media. Voices that rarely were able to have a platform now do. But the valorization of this phenomenon of the self is telling. In distinction to Time's previous covers which featured prominent political figures or groups of specific people such as the "middle class" in 1969 or The Peacemakers of 1993 which included the likes of Nelson Mandela, the celebration of "YOU" indicated that the world both has become highly individuated.

These two incidents makes me ruminate about the status about the individual and the self within this media environment, where television literacy is greatly informed by social media and news dissemination. Keeping the Time Magazine cover image in mind, I'm interested in tracing the genealogies that lead us up to this point of television and media literacy failure, by journeying back to a potential origin point when I locate a shift where individual feeling *becomes* fact.

My attempt to contextualize this change emerges from my book project, which charts a sort of pre-history of social media and the visuality of racial violence, and begins with television and the 1960's. Though the current rise of fake news and the failure of media literacy exists along the whole political spectrum, I focus specifically on the white countercultural left precisely because the distrust of corporate and government sourced media came so sharply into mainstream focus during the 1960s and 70s. The anti-war protests of the Vietnam war and various campaigns of misinformation created a particular wing of leftist critique that centered on a justified paranoia around media and governmental collusion, dissemination of misinformation, surveillance, and control. Given the histories of government surveillance and terrorism like COINTEL PRO that sanctioned the murder of Black Panther Fred Hampton and the efforts to discredit the anti-war movement, among many other instances, this suspicion was well-supported by evidence. And it bears repeating, that people of color have always maintained a distrust of "fake news." "Fake news" has been a constant threat to claims of humanity, worth,

and justice denied for people of color. In this way, as Roopali Mukjaree notes, truth itself is a fundamentally a *racial* category that maintains the racial order of things.

Though these ideologies originated within left circles, this media distrust have been appropriated by the right and leveled against the left and journalistic reporting in ways that have left many us teaching college age students suspicious of who is in our classroom.

I want to linger in a particular ideological shift, where the white counterculture's involvement with social justice movements morph into what journalist George Leonard called "the human potential movement." Or as I argue as the move from a focus on social justice towards individualized transformation and *feeling as social justice*.

Specifically, I examine a subsection of the countercultural white left which pivoted from a focus on social justice movements inwards to explorations of the self through psychedelics, psychotherapy, and learning centers like Esalen, and EST, which all emphasized a notion of individual potential and deliberate personal transformation. I argue that for them, the turn away from social justice battles based in structural reform towards the individual was a natural progression based on the tenets of racial liberalism, which as Jodi Melamed has shown, positioned *specifically*, the *emotional worlds* of white Americans as paramount to the pursuit of racial justice. It is this shift from collective movements to inner worlds, from the white left's support of civil rights struggles to the "human potential movement," that positioned *individualized transformation and feeling as social justice*.

This has had huge ramifications by not only circumscribing the mainstream political and cultural legibility of racial progress to the emotional worlds of white Americans for decades to come, but also in my estimation, is part of a genealogical inheritance for how some readers operate in the realm of *feeling as fact*.

As scholar Fred Turner points out, this is individuation also was reflected in how scholars and intellectuals were trying to envision American media. The Committee for National Morale was formed in 1940 and was comprised of 60 American intellectuals, with people like Margaret Mead, psychologist Gordon Allport, and other prominent intellectuals. Convened as a deliberate response to what they saw as the prominent role of mass media towards the rise of Nazi Germany and fascism, the committee's project imagined media as intensely personal and individual. As Turner puts it, "They dreamed of media that would surround you, that would require you to make your own choices and use your individual perception to define the images that mattered most to you. It was meant to be a kind of media environment within *which you could make your own decisions, and so become more individually unique*. At the same time, it put you in the company of others doing the same thing. The environment was designed to help forge both individual identity and collective unity simultaneously."

Thus, the technological dreams of Facebook's connectivity are not new for the imaginings of self. The highly individuated media worlds of this imaginary precipitated and even encouraged the "uniqueness" of information as a realm of individual choice and feeling, and in my assessment lead us circuitously to our current moment of feeling as fact, contributing to a failure of media literacy.