

Reflect on this:

“In the beginning was the word.

And the word was with God, and the word was God.”

(Genesis 1:1)

The Greek word for “word”, the word that initiates the Bible, is *Logos*.

How appropriate that this word of words has come to mean a plurality of sigils of corporations, cartels, military units and other organized groups. Logos are private words, copyrighted and trademarked and thus owned and forbidden words.

In the social hierarchies of consumer society, logos are currency, status is achieved by their conspicuous display. So the *logos* is now private property. The once sacred power to create is now privately held, all rights reserved. In the beginning was the word; now the company owns it.

The company may be a media conglomerate, a luxury fashion house or a church. Churches are just one kind of corporation. They claim a monopoly on truth, yet they depend on the competition of similar claimants. And God ain't the only logos in town. As He was in the beginning.

The word is power. God wielded the ultimate power, creating by speaking the word— some say by speaking his name. He said, “Let there be light, and there

was light.” Today the immense things, the earth, the sun, the firmament, the creatures of the earth and the deep, all of this are in place. But the word is still creating. It creates products, situations, laws, wars, science, dramas, comedies and corporations. Corporations are legal persons, but they are also godlike in that they are gigantic and theoretically immortal. And where the ancient gods and the God of Abraham required their voices be heard and their texts transcribed as law, so do the new lords of mass society present their dictates, not in the form of magic words or even of rational arguments—but as advertising slogans, as lines in a script or even clichés of popular expression.

But what does Genesis mean? Did the solo male God of the Old Testament actually fabricate sun, moon, and earth, etc, by the uttering words? Did His words create Adam out of clay, or did His words instill the nature of humanity in a band of promising primates? Aristotle used the word *logos* to mean reasoned discourse. Can we infer from that: “In the beginning was reasoned discourse?”

According to Julian Jaynes in *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, consciousness as we know it today was created by the use of words as a metaphor to create an expansive field of reasoning. The metaphor was a mirror of the world that we saw and by the use of the word as an approximative/reflective device we came to be able to understand the mechanisms of nature. Language developed an unfolding logic that was able to reason solutions to problems of the unknown.

According to Jaynes, early man (as recently as the time of the composition of the Iliad) heard the words of the gods literally and directly through the right lobe of his brain, as schizophrenics hear the voices now. The “bicameral man” as Jaynes calls him was not conscious in that he did not reason. When he encountered the stress of a new situation, the god part of the brain spoke to him, telling him what to do. When man reached the level of civilization—that is, when he began living in complex communities where he could no longer know each member personally—the system of control by god became unwieldy, requiring more and more gods, and eventually the use of written word. And it was when those words came to be written that the singular God emerged from a chorus of divine voices. The Old Testament is the story of the solitary uppercase God rubbing out the chorus or pantheon of gods. According to Jaynes, Yahweh accomplished this to a considerable extent by destroying idols (i.e. figurative tools which induced hallucination of the gods’ voices) and killing those still able to hallucinate the words of the competing gods.

The diverse gods and the One God are social mechanisms of control, which is not to say that they didn’t and don’t exist. The gods existed in the brain of the believer/receiver and the mechanism of the gods is still latent in the brains of the subjectively conscious sophisticates of the modern world. We are still directed by words, but the words enter into our consciousness externally and lead us from there. If God still speaks to us, he does so not directly but through channels. The reason for this evolution of consciousness was primarily scale—the social units became too large and complex to be directed through

this ancient system. Hive societies, like those of bees and ants are comparable to the human societies of today, defined by Jaynes as civilizations, being structures where the individual cannot know every member, where the king cannot know every subject, where labor must be divided into specialties. In insect societies, intelligence is not possessed by an individual ant or bee but by the hive itself, the individual cells of that group brain are controlled by pheromones that induce an automatic action. In the human hive society, behavior is controlled through the word. In the complex of technological society, the individual is no longer capable of possessing the knowledge required to perform all society's tasks or to guide its actions.

After man became conscious he developed an extraordinary capacity to create through the word. The lexicon explored exponentially, naming the previously unnameable and unknowable, and creating science, technology and philosophy. The progress of man was so miraculous that he could come to see man himself as a God, and Jesus emerged as such a figure (even if this divinity was imposed upon posthumously him by his followers). But progress created difficulties; the old political systems proved incapable of managing the new knowledge, industries and structures. Kings and emperors, being no wiser than ever, were incapable of managing industrial states, and so the radical Greek notions of republic and democracy were adopted, offering the possibility of managing enormous structures because they worked through language.

Democracy seemed to be an appropriate form of government, not because it offered power to the people, but because people can be manipulated through language; consent of the government is engineered with a sort of rocket science cobbled together out of religious and historical mythology and behaviorist psychology. And in the process, something strange is occurring—intelligence and the words that are its medium seem to be breaking down.

We understand words. We stand under words. They are the units by which we communicate and create the human world and make it function. A word is the smallest unit of content in language, while a morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning. A morpheme may be the one or more words. Words and morphemes are conventions. Users of a language agree that a word reflects a thing, a place, a person, an action or an idea. The word is a representation, a reflection of something else, and yet it is said that the word is also the creator of that thing. The creator and the name are one. Or that's what it says in the book. But just as the creator has distanced himself and become unavailable, now the word seems to be eroding, losing its precise functionalities. God revealed himself through the word. The book was written, not by poets, but by prophets who heard the word of God, and in the Abrahamic religions the word is the law. *Mektoub*. It is written.

Who says it is written? The all-powerful God's word says it is written, and the word is heard and has a following. The past and the future are written. They

have surrounded in time, thwarting any concept of individual free will with the immutability of the text. *Mektoub*.

In the Islamic societies where Shariah prevails, it is written. It is written in the heads of the Israeli settlers of the West Bank—God gave us this land; it is written. It is written in the hearts and minds of the Tea Party enthusiasts of the United States. Around the world man suffers from an extraordinary nostalgia for a God who will tell him what to do. Meanwhile the modernists, too sophisticated for belief in the all-knowing, all-seeing answerer of prayers, strive for power as a sort of God. Hence a permanent state of conflict exists between extreme partisans, and the extremism of that conflict has taken over the institutions of American government, where compromise has disappeared, giving way to total resistance.

In Jean-Luc Godard's satirical sci-fi film *Alphaville* (1960), God has been replaced by the all-powerful Alpha 60 Computer which rules the society of the future with logic. The Bible of Alphaville is the dictionary, from which words are continually disappearing. The word love is no longer in the dictionary.

The voice of Alpha says: "Everything has been said, provided words do not change their meanings and meanings their words."

Alpha 60 also declares (quoting Williams James without attribution) "The present is the form of all life. There are no means by which this can be avoided."

While religions still exerts control over considerable parts of the globe, its power has eroded considerably in Western Europe and even in the United States. Atheism or disinterest in religion is no longer a taboo. Other forms of cultural control have replaced the word of God. This is simply evolution, as the stories of the ancient texts have lost relevance for large segments of the public, yet control is maintained by other mythmaking institutions-- entertainment, fashion, advertising and publicity.

Kings ruled by divine right. Originally the king was a priest who was privy to the word of the gods or God. In secular democracy society the power theoretically lies to the people, yet the people are still ruled. The founder of modern public revelations, Edward Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud, wrote in his 1928 book *Propaganda*: "The conscious and intelligence 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."

In the modern state, the individual believes that the people hold power *en masse*, when in fact the people are controlled tightly and scientifically by the media, which is controlled tightly and scientifically by capital. The democratic masses today are not what they were a hundred years ago. Today one sees a new sort of anti-rational streak. It's what Wyndham Lewis termed "the vulgarization of disgust," a lumpen rebellion against reason and the words that constitute it.

In *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis wrote “‘Thought’ having been substituted for action, the word for the deed, we live in an unreal word-world, a sort of voluminous maze or stronghold built against behavior, out of which we only occasionally issue into action when the cruder necessities of life compel us to. ...Words are symbols of ideas, as the old psychology would put it—some people ‘have ideas,’ are ‘theorists,’ ‘highbrows,’ and so forth: and SOME (like YOU and ME) are just plain people who prefer deeds of words! (That’s US—that’s our way!) What’s the use of a word-world to us? We’re not brilliant conversationalists, or anything of that sort! Speech is of silver, silence is of gold. And this is the age of iron, the age of action. We may not have much to say for ourselves, but we can hit a ball or turn a screw with the best. To hell with mere words!”

The anti-intellectual skew of society has many faces, from the militant anti-intellectual “populism” of the Tea Party, to the inverted values of “youth culture” and the hip-hop glamorization of “street”, to the endless idolatry of luxury status consumerism. Advertising, sports, fashion, sexual content and the new keep attention focused on the sensational present, lest historical perspective or scientific concerns intervene.

What all of the anti-intellectual forces have in common is a highly romantic, magical view of the world where words do not mean what they say, if they say anything at all, or where words are negotiable. As Sara Palin “tweeted:”

“Refudiate’, ‘misunderestimate’, ‘weewee’dup’. English is a living language. Shakespeare liked to coin new words too. Go to celebrate it!”

A new anti-word anti-language is cobbled together from buzzwords and soundbites that denote shared misunderstandings or open-ended, undefinable terms. The language of mass media discourse comes to resemble music in that in it no longer conveys meaning through logic but through feelings. The anti-language alters the meanings of existing words through misuse and repetition. It resembles Orwell’s Newspeak in which concepts like *blackwhite*, *doublethink* and *bellyfeel* are used to keep meaning ambivalent and mutable, and to rewrite the past whenever it is convenient...

In his novel *The Soft Machine*, William S. Burroughs explored the modern mechanisms of control through subliminal manipulation. The explosive viral life forms who constitute the Nova Mob prey on planets, feeding on the negative emotions of the drone populace which they manipulate through language, recording conflict and playing it back endlessly, amplifying disputes, controlling, burning up resources and the moving on to the planetary victim. In this future (or contemporary) world, the script is pre-written. The individual’s life planned and enforced by powers beyond his reach or understanding.

Burroughs: “Biological parents in most cases are not owners of the property. They act under orders of absentee proprietors to install the indicated stops that punctuate the written life script—With each property goes a life script”.

“We don’t report the news”, says a character in *The Soft Machine*, “We write it.” Modern media control is not logical in the sense of classical rhetoric—its techniques are pastiche, bricolage, and cliché—broken-down, burned-out, negotiable terms.

Bernays: “But when the example of the leader is not at hand and the herd must think for itself, it does so by means of clichés, pat words or images which stand for a whole group of ideas or experiences. Not many years ago it was only necessary to tag a political candidate with the word interests to stampede millions of people into voting against him, because anything associated with ‘the interests’ seemed necessarily corrupt.”

Burroughs: “Posted everywhere on street corners the idiot irresponsibles twitter supersonic approval, repeating slogans, giggling, dancing, masturbating out windows, making machine gun noises and police whistles...” (*The Soft Machine*).

The public’s orders are all out there in and between the lines of the TV “programs,” in the continuous flow of slogans and jingles of advertising, in the litanies of code-word clichés recited by politicians and pundits. The broadcast word is the perfect control device, shapeshifting and anonymous, it infects the consciousness, literally putting words in it the mouth of the masses. The words

are contagious. The headlines go right to their heads. Uploaded, the word programs run their hosts without their knowledge.

Burroughs: "So I am a public agent and I don't know who I work for, get my instructions from street signs, newspapers and pieces of conversations I snap out the air the way a vulture will tear entrails from other mouths."

The WORD is an analog, a reflection across time and space.

The past is a mirror. The future is a mirror. But do you know where you stand? What's your perspective? Narcissus dies, not because he was in love with himself, but because he loved his reflection which he believed was a different being.

Stefan Brüggemann's *Headlines And Last Lines in the Movies* consists of a room of mirrors on which headlines appropriated from the press and the last lines of dialogue from films are scrawled in graffiti-like script.

The key analogy here is somewhat twisted. The mirror reflects the viewer as do the words, some of which may be considered clichés, many of which have passed into the public domain of usage as morphemes or readymade units of meaning.

"Cliché" comes from the essentially obsolete parlance of typography. In setting hot type for newspapers, a phrase repeated frequently was made of one piece

of metal instead of the usual combination of single letters—it was called a cliché. This was a ready-made phrase, and it functions as a unit of what Burroughs called “the Word virus”. The cliché is a meme—a unit of cultural ideas that self-replicates, mimicking viral contagion. These are the building blocks not only of common speech, but also common thought. Just plug one into the script and see how it breeds. Electronic clichés, sound bites, are fine tuned cliché engrams for the transmission of ready-made emotion and opinion. We know how to push their buttons. “We don’t report the news, we write the news.”

So on Brüggemann’s inscribed panels of mirror we see reflections of ourselves overlaid with ready-made language and prefab meaning. These are not phrases from the Bible, but we can also quote chapter and verse from Hollywood, and these words were first spoken to us from “the silver screen” by the gods and goddesses of the Hollywood pantheon, and so they are a reflection of what we are.

Scrying is a ritual magical practice that involves seeing things psychically in glass. Crystal balls are the classic scryer’s medium but the mirror of Snow White or the Magic Mirror of Galadriel in Tolkien. Sometimes the magic mirror was used for “transfiguration,” in which the gazer would see his or her future form. Sometimes it was used by maidens to see the face of their future husbands. It has been said that scrying in the form of mirror-gazing with candles, often taught by pop metaphysical cults, can facilitate self-hypnosis. It has been written that Sirhan Sirhan, the assassin of Robert F. Kennedy and

member of the pop cult Rosicrucian Society, used mirror-facilitated self-hypnosis. Sirhan's diaries are filled with references to "my mirror".

Of course the mirror as a control device need not have occult overtones. In Brüggemann's installation the scrying medium is inscribed. The mirror not only shows, it speaks, reflecting us in the characters of popular dramatic narrative. Here are the words of invented characters, but they are also our words. In these lines we are programmed with borrowed memories and vicarious emotions. These are words that have been repeated and return through many projectors, many actors, many quotes. Have they been altered in the replication and transmission? Do they convey the original meaning of the words, or has there been a sort of word inflation process by which the words are devalued and either rendered meaningless or turned into a reprogrammable ideogram?

In John Carpenter's 1988 film *They Live* a man discovers a pair of sunglasses which, when worn, reveal messages hidden in billboards and in the newspaper headlines, and the true faces of alien beings living among the humans. A street preacher declares: "Outside the limit of our sight, feeding off us, perched on top of us, from birth to death, are our owners! Our owners! They have us. They control us! They are our masters! Wake up! They're all about you! All around you!"

Reading magazines today or listening to the written copy of clever commentators on television and radio we are exposed to a constant barrage of

word play. Tittles, lyrics, memorable snatches of dialogue, specially recycled song titles or film titles are endlessly altered in a display of cutesy cleverness. The public discourse is a continuous recitation of bricolage play references, seeking a pun or twist on the literal, even if it is quite irrelevant, even to the extent where the usage, as Dick Hebdige notes in his essay "Subculture: The Meaning of Style", serves "to erase or subvert their original straight meanings." It's as if there was a fear of direction or unreferenced statements and a belief that alterative appropriation, even if the connection is utterly stupid, is a preferred mode. Everything becomes a pastiche of quotation, or a sort of compost of ground-up meaning.

Burroughs: "So I am a public agent and I don't know who I work for, get my instructions from street signs, newspapers and pieces of conversation. I snap out the air the way a vulture will tear entrails from other mouths..."

William S. Burroughs' tactic against control by the word was a cut-up technique that was learned from painter and writer Brion Gysin. To disengage control we must cut up the text, reordering the image virus much a vaccine is composed of dead pathogens. Burroughs: "We fold writers of all the time in together and record radio programs, movie soundtracks, TV and jukebox songs all the words of the world stirring around in a cement mixer and pour in the resistance message 'Caling partisans of all nation—Cut word lines—Shift linguals..."

The control room of democracy is not a physical location. It shifts constantly and randomly. What's the secret password? Take your pick from the newspaper headlines: HEADLESS BODY OF TOPLESS BAR... ABORTION HOPE AFTER GAY GENES FINDING... I SNORTED MY DAD... KISS YOUR ASTEROID GOODBYE... SHE WAS NICE TO ME THEN I KICKED HER OFF ROOF...

Or select any handwriting on the wall, from the subway to the compact infinity of Brüggemann's hall of mirrors. "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Life just wouldn't be worth living would it? Shut up and deal!"

Burroughs: "Posted everywhere on street corners the idiot irresponsibles twitter supersonic approval, repeating slogans, giggling, dancing, masturbating out windows, making machine gun noises and police whistles..."

Note that Brüggemann's inscribed mirrors, intersecting at right angles create an endless overlap, an infinity of pre-owned thought. At right angles the two dimensions become three and the words become solid, almost like flesh. And they dwell among us.

"Prisoners of the earth come out!" Strom the Studio! Cut up the program. Look in the Brüggemann mirror and what do you see? Is it an original or a copy? Are you speaking or quoting? Is it the word of gods or the venial rote of the dogs?

BEGINNING OF WRITING

Glenn O'Brien, 2011

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Is it written? Rites nitwit.

Mektoub? Bum toke.

Just say on!

END OF WRITING