

THE DIMFORMATION AGE

from the desk of **Ned Mudd**,
reporting from the crawlspace of history

"It is not necessary to 'go back' in time to be the kind of creature you are. The genes from the past have come forward to us. I am asking that people change not their genes but their society, in order to harmonize with the inheritance they already have."

Paul Shepard

Homo erectus asphaltus has entered a new and dangerous labyrinth of social experimentation. Thanks to our species' proclivity for eternal entertainment, we have evolved into creatures with a deep seated lust for the latest fickle flash, regardless of how silly or ephemeral the attraction is. In sum, we are now guinea pigs in an exotic new quasi-religion: The Cult of the New.

As pioneers of Big Data, we now have the ability to communicate with the Cosmos simply by feeding Siri our present coordinates. It is an age whereby potentially nefarious threats to our merry-go-round cultural fantasy can be dismissed with the help of modern science and its hierarchy of ever-evolving technological gadgetry (tongue piercing and garish tattoos notwithstanding). Welcome to the Dimformation Age!

Alas, in a world of dimformation, facts become an exceedingly rare commodity. Being pesky critters, facts require some amount of verification in order to be useful. Yet, today we find ourselves passengers on a digital bullet train, immersed in a hyper-storm of disconnected data, one step away from an elusive truth that isn't what it seems and is what it isn't. If it sounds good, it is good; I saw it on Reality.org.

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Let's reflect on the meaning of dimformation - data for the sake of data. Dimformation is neither salutary nor informative. True information provides some form of tangible benefit to its recipient. A guy who asks directions to the nearest waterhole and receives correct instructions has been informed. Dimformation, on the other hand, provides the same guy with Pinterest images of every waterhole between Baghdad and Barstow. As the old saying goes: a painting of a pizza tastes like paint.

Dimformation lives in a domain of its own. Not particularly relevant to personal or tribal wellbeing, it simply thrives for the sake of itself. Kim Kardashian's latest wardrobe malfunction may be titillating, but hardly of any discernible use to a reasonably coherent primate. As cotton candy is to food, dimformation is to human culture: devoid of nutrition, but relished by the hungry and the bored.



Which gets us to the gritty meat of the matter at hand: social media.

Social media is a peculiar worm hole unto itself, flashing warmed-over dimformation to a captive audience with the collective attention span of a five year old. And the granddaddy of them all is my favorite go-to theater of the absurd - FaceBook. Never before in human history has so much baloney been stuffed into one sandwich. Don't get me wrong: I enjoy FaceBook. Perhaps for reasons other than its creators would appreciate.

FaceBook is, by any standard of measurement, a gold mine of quasi-relevant data masquerading as erudition. A weird species of low-hanging fruit, sparkling in digital technicolor, FaceBook offers an endless supply of empty calories to its legion of starving socialites.

On the other hand, FaceBook is every anthropologist's dream, a virtual treasure trove of eccentric human behavior, easily observed through the one-way mirror of technology.

"I know I've posted this Led Zeppelin video 8 times already, but it's TBT and I can't help but share this again with my 4,879 friends! LOL." For this malarkey, innumerable servers housed in gigantic air conditioned warehouses are sucking energy out of the grid as we speak. Stairway to Heaven, indeed.

There is a certain stink of narcissism associated with much of what passes for today's social media. Constantly telling a crowd of strangers our heartfelt thoughts is downright kooky. Infatuated with our virtual lives, we resemble a troop of untethered souls



set loose in a digital hall of mirrors. Space Age monkeys in blue jeans we may be, but it appears we've arrived in the Cyber World slightly unprepared to deal with our own whimsy. Buyer beware.

We are becoming a population of armchair philosophers, comedians, and media wonks, waxing poetic mainly to ourselves. Is anybody actually listening to the tsunami of digital babble out there? Doubtful, as the ability to truly listen is a dying art, perhaps at our peril. And we haven't even gotten to Twitter yet!

Simply re-posting unvetted Internet drivel is hardly a road map to cosmic consciousness, despite the dazzling retina display. So maybe now is a good time to remember the old axiom that "you can sprinkle perfume on bullshit, but it's still bullshit."



We have finally reached a point in our evolution that mandates hard decisions about where to take this so-called civilization we find ourselves in. Standing on the brink of becoming cyborg chimpanzees, ever removed from the biological matrix that gave rise to us in the first place, we revel at the latest techno trinkets while ignoring the ecological debris piling up outside our window. Our fellow planetary critters are vanishing in the blink of a robot's eye, while we dance along to this week's twerk video. Simply put, the Earth is melting down. Not to worry - there's an app for that.

Suffice it to say, the thrill of the cyber world isn't going to seem so captivating when the well runs dry and the GMO corn won't grow, thanks to an overpopulated planet of globally warmed technogeeks. Are we ready to find out what SoyLent Green tastes like? Pass the mustard, this puppy is going viral.....

Perhaps the most poignant question facing our current era is this: How much is enough? Or will we only discover the answer to that question when we've had too much? Perhaps if this were a televised game show, our myopic monkey business would be excusable. But real life tends to be quite unforgiving where monkey business is concerned. Or, as Will Rogers once quipped: "Letting the cat out of the bag is a whole lot easier than putting it back in."

When we can slide into our cyber suits and conjure up any reality we want, including sex with our favorite celebrity de jour, who will think twice about the collapse of the Amazon rain forest? Or disappearing polar caps? Or the last free roaming wolf? What may sound over-the-top today will seem pedestrian in tomorrow's whacky world of pixillated tomfoolery. But the losers will be us, exiles from the atavistic incubator of humanity - the Wild.

We may be fashionistas of the highest order, bejeweled, bewitched, and bewildered, but we remain bipedal Pleistocene hominids in the depths of our chromosomes, regardless of the fact that most of us probably can't spell Deoxyribonucleic acid. But we can only boogie down the razor's edge for so long before we find ourselves out where the buses don't run. At that point, even Siri won't be able to find us. We will simply be lost in a fata morgana of our own making, servants of some inbred nihilistic chimera that nobody controls, yet controls everybody. Unless we decide otherwise.

Despite what Fox News might have told us, we are biological animals with the same basic drives and needs that all mammals come factory loaded with. And that factory is just outside the door, seething with an infinite biological complexity beyond even Terry Gilliam's bizarre imagination. Such is life. And it's what makes us who we are, regardless of how speedy our hard drives whir.

In the final analysis, no sane creature can consistently violate the laws of Nature and expect to avoid retribution. Of course, sanity and cleverness do not always go hand in glove. But, as sentient beings, we have a choice in where this behemoth of a culture is headed. And a responsibility to exercise our minds in the pursuit of truth, beauty, and freedom. We can become clones in a virtual web of tweets, or stand astride terra firma and take ownership of the funky muck of biology that constitutes our very being.

The choice is ours, if we can slow down long enough to let our genes do the talking.

Salut!



Postscript: Lest my readers think I've neglected the tantalizing subject of artificial intelligence (AI), there is a logic to that avoidance. It is simply because the rush to perfect artificial intelligence seems laughable when you consider that our species has barely demonstrated that we, ourselves, can act intelligently. Enough about that nonsense.

[Editor's note: Ned Mudd can be reached on FaceBook, a site he frequents for laughs and assorted dimformation. Of course, there are, indeed, worthy FaceBook sojourners. Friends of the Canyon Country Zephyr being one of them.]

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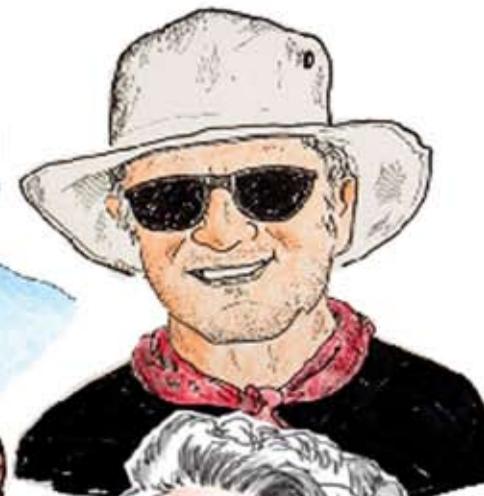
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