

# A Compelling Narrative Vehicle

July 1, 2011 Category: Religion  
Download as PDF

## THE ART OF SELECTIVE PETTIFOGGING:

### CONSTRUCTING A CNV

Strategically selecting tidbits of information that suit the anointed narrative: this has become a well-honed craft by savvy propagandists. The practitioners of this dubious trade generally pose as stand-up disseminators of information—noble purveyors of wisdom. However, what they're actually doing is appropriating isolated snippets of data to fit a customized storyline, providing candy-coated packaging, then hawking the enticing product to credulous audiences.

The narrative serves as a delivery mechanism for the desired dogma...while offering the appeal of a captivating story. Memes are far more contagious when they are delivered via a compelling narrative vehicle (CNV). A CNV is essentially a memplex with a plotline. It is a VEHICLE: a vehicle for dissemination and infection.

A CNV is useful because the dogma-purveyor can emphasize any snippet of information that is conducive to his purpose, while de-emphasizing any piece of information that is inconvenient. Narratives allow for such selective emphasis because that is precisely what defines a good story-teller. The narrative is tailored in a way that promotes the desired agenda, allowing the practitioner to select data-points as he sees fit.

A compelling narrative veils this subterfuge via diversion, as the audience tends to fixate solely on the storyline (and the data-points included), not on what is omitted. After all, omissions don't announce themselves. Peddling propaganda, then, can be passed off as: I'm simply *telling a story*. So long as the narrative is sufficiently compelling, it will faithfully deliver the designated memes while keeping all other insights safely obfuscated.

Fraud only works when it is passed off as something irresistible. This is why con-men use charisma to peddle their wares, not hard facts. They depend on being judged on the image that they project, the emotion they instill, not by way of a meticulous effort to corroborate their claims. They appeal to the most primal, emotion-centers of the brain, not to our pre-frontal cortexes. After all, we homo sapiens are suckers for a good yarn. We think of almost everything in terms of a narrative. Accordingly, we tend not to gravitate toward hard facts that don't fit conveniently into our coveted picture of the world. A story resonates with us more because it grips us than because it is verifiably true. If it hits buttons that need pressing, a CNV will be wholeheartedly embraced.

Scam artists know this, and thus master the art of narrative engineering. Effective propaganda is nothing more than well-orchestrated narrative-construction—a process wherein the desired memes are incorporated into the storyline. This is how cult-leaders design their dogmatic system. This is how politicians design their platforms. This is how marketing gurus design their campaigns. This is how lawyers win cases when Truth is not on their side. This is how sophists persuade audiences.

This is why so many Americans have been persuaded to continue to endorse a blatantly wasteful, disastrously ineffective FPSTI (instead of pushing for socialized healthcare) here in the U.S. This is how Goldman Sachs pulled off such a flagrant heist in 2008. This is how we went to war in Iraq in 2003. This is how an election was rigged in 2000. This is how we allowed ROTA to be gutted in the 80's and

90's. This is how we justified destroying Vietnam in the 60's and 70's. This is how the Third Kingdom metastasized in Germany in the 30's. This is how magicians dupe onlookers with stagecraft. Diversion has become *a science of CNVs*.

The National Security Complex, the “War On Terror”, the “Evil Empire”, the “War On Drugs”, the wonders of the “free market”, the diabolical menace of PSI, “We’re doing god’s work”, Mohammed of Mecca and Jesus of Nazareth and Lafayette Hubbard of Tilden, Nebraska. It all seems to make perfect sense to those who subscribe to the storyline proffered. From the Vatican to the Peoples’ Temple, from astrology to Neoliberal ideology, CNVs persuade people en masse to go along with patently unfounded claims. How? They offer a compelling narrative.

Once one has wed oneself to a narrative, invested enough psychological energy into it, they will cling to it. “Try to deprive me of my fabricated reality, and you will be deemed a threat. For to do anything that undermines my CNV is to wage an attack on me personally. I will therefore brand you a nemesis, and consider anything you say an affront to my security. Keep your grubby hands off my dogmas.”

The hagiography of a charlatan named Joseph Smith, the “trickle-down economics” promises of supply-sider mavens, the “communist threat of world domination” warnings issued by reactionary, Cold Warrior jingoists, the nefarious conspiracy of a “*tyrannical government trying to control your life*” touted by those against healthcare reform: **it all employs the same gimmick**. Capture ‘em with a good story. Tell it to the audience, with resounding confidence, in a way that appeals to their hopes and ameliorates their fears, offer a veneer of certainty...and, presto! They’ll be eating out of the palm of your hand, and thanking you for it.

The Messiah dying for your sins, corporate interests being consonant with the common good, the Pentagon budget being required to keep us safe, K-Street being needed to help legislators stay “well-informed”, the second amendment giving us the right to keep a Glock under our pillow: *we’ll believe anything so long as it’s delivered in a well-crafted CNV*. People only come to believe such things because they’ve been delivered via a CNV. To tamper with a narrative once it’s been thoroughly inculcated risks pulling the epistemic rug out from beneath one’s feet.

Tips for crafting a CNV are relatively straight-forward. Offer a sense of desperately needed certainty, a modicum of coherence, something solid to hold onto, a veneer of plausibility based on a few morsels of truth, and, PRESTO: Something dependable by which to ground oneself—replete with a handy prism through which to see the world. The prospect of such a thing is tremendously appealing to those who feel hopeless, disoriented, disconnected, frustrated, or insecure. No more uncertainty, no more confusion, no more feeling lost and alone. CNVs are like Oxycodone for existential vertigo: they make you feel good, and can be extremely addictive once imbibed.

The cost of admission: they disconnect one from Reality. Yet by offering the sensation of being blissfully aware of all that matters, such disconnection is unproblematic. If it seems to work, then why ruin it?

Indeed, CNVs are viruses that inculcate the “host mind” with an ersatz reality—a fabricated reality that masquerades as Reality. Some people embrace an artificial reality that helps them cope with life—helps them make sense of the world. This ersatz reality is essentially a house of cards, yet seems ironclad. Zealots like this need to engage in certain mental shenanigans in order to maintain that house of cards—but it’s a small price to pay for the apparent return on investment.

Dogmatism has momentum, as it has both mass and velocity. This entails what could be called, “CNV inertia”. The momentum of dogma is proportionate to #. For example: [S.O.L. p 4].

When confronted with those who question to their hallowed edifice, such people often accuse the interlocutor of some sort of heresy. Threaten to undermine a sanctified house of cards, and one renders oneself public enemy number one. As a tactic to salvage their fabricated reality when it is challenged, they are often forced to dismiss or demean the party that threatens to debunk it. People often must resort to delusion in order to convince themselves that their fabricated reality is LEGITIMATE. They are also compelled to save face: the more their sacred narrative is exposed to the light of critical analysis, the more they will dig in their heels. Obstinate defiance is the sanctuary of the dogmatist. He will fight to the death to preserve that which he depends on for peace of mind.

People often need to erect dogmatic buttresses so as to preserve their house of cards. They take refuge in sanctimony, construing their neurosis as “loyalty”. They do this by convincing themselves of outlandish claims that help their fabricated reality maintain its veneer of credence.

The house of cards must grow in order to be maintained. Sometimes, this can only be accomplished by convincing oneself (and others) that those who bring Reality to everyone’s attention are “evil” or “crazy”. “If you threaten my dogmatic system, you’re intentions are ipso facto nefarious.”

Here, people are forced to concoct a reason to disregard anything that doesn’t jive with the designated narrative. Their ersatz reality only “makes sense” if the OTHER guy is the crazy one. Pretending that anyone who reveals Reality is deemed deranged or somehow venal is necessary in order to sustain the sacrosanct illusion.

When confronted with critical analysis of his fabricated reality, the subscriber to the fabricated reality is often caught between a rock and a hard place. His hand is “forced”: he must demonize those who bring into question the credence of his beliefs. Indeed, he can’t NOT do this if he is to remain committed to his fabricated reality. Fealty, then, trumps intellectual integrity.

Those who don’t “play along” with the fabricated reality, then, MUST be seen as a threat. The perpetrators of such incursions must therefore be categorized as an “enemy” that must be “defeated”...simply in order to preserve the good standing of the coveted edifice. The perpetrator is summarily vilified: “I depend on X while you threaten to deprive me of it. That makes you bad.”

And so it goes: Anyone who brings Reality to light is “the bad guy” simply because—according to the narrative—they HAVE to be the bad guy. This taxonomy becomes part of the anointed theology. Those not within the fold must be deemed an adversary to “the good”. They must be so deemed in order for the fabricated reality to MAKE SENSE. Alas, to concede any part of Reality not in keeping with the narrative is to acknowledge such insights have credence...and thus introduce a fatal perturbation...thereby bringing down the house of cards.

This is the behavior we’d EXPECT to see in such cases, and it is—indeed—the behavior we actually do consistently observe. Upset someone’s sacred applecart, and one makes oneself the “bad guy. If a man depends on that applecart, he will invariably depend on applecart-upsetters being categorized as “bad”. (“Good”, meanwhile, is defined as anything that is in keeping with the designated narrative.)

Examples of this peculiar phenomenon are endless, from the Vatican's Inquisition to the GDR's subversion police. A Revisionist Zionist accuses those who point out the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the IG (and the anti-goyem racism underlying such crimes) of being an "*enemy of Israel*" (and thus "anti-Semitic"). Since WWII, Republicans have labeled anyone criticizing right-wing foreign policy as "un-American". Religious fundamentalists of all three Abrahamic religions routinely accuse freethinkers of being "heretics" and "infidels". The examples are legion.

Cult leaders persuade converts that anyone who questions the cult's dogma is "the bad guy"—a menace to their sacred path—simply because this is REQUIRED in order to sustain the desired illusion. The narrative collapses if it allows incursions to go unattended. Scam artists of all stripes employ the same scheme with their target audience: "Those who disagree with these claims are scheming to HURT you; so don't pay attention to them."

Con men use this tactic as a way of persuading their victims to dismiss those who would bring their claims into question. "I'M your ally; THEY are the enemy. Listen to ME. I will protect you from their maniacal machinations. Follow ME, and all will be well. Deviate from the prescribed path, and you risk bad things around the corner." This maneuver is standard operating procedure whenever a fabricated reality is to be effectively propped up.

Observe the treatment by right-wing pundits of Progressives who challenge the G.O.P. Machine's agenda. If one subjects the corporatist storyline to critical analysis, one is a "socialist", booga-booga! Such treason can't be tolerated. Such subversion HAS to be seen as taboo—lest the scam allow itself to be subject to critical analysis.

Call a cult's sacred scripture out for being a bunch of sanctified hogwash, and one commits sacrilege. For doing so, one is promptly branded an enemy of the designated deity. (Queue the spooky music.) One HAS to be so branded, lest the anointed CNV NOT WORK.

Indeed, if something can be *blasphemed*, it's most likely a hoax that is hiding behind a sacrosanct hermetic seal. Any legitimate edifice insists on being subjected to on-going critical analysis—as it has nothing to hide. Reality doesn't need to be protected from aggressive scrutiny. Truth isn't threatened by prying eyes. Genuine justice doesn't demand subordination to any authority. Credence doesn't require credulity. Probity doesn't ask for "loyalty". Freedom doesn't depend on conformity. Morality doesn't involve obedience. Individual autonomy is the enemy of all fabricated realities.

Conformity / compliance is crucial to maintaining a fabricated reality. To challenge the legitimacy of the CNV, then, according to the narrative, is to commit a grievous crime. To expose this specious charade, one must be branded an "enemy" of the established order. "Subversive" activity/ thinking is forbidden simply because it disrupts the show.

Hierarchal systems of superstition demand loyalty, lest they collapse under the weight of their own fatuousness. Loyalty prevents too much free inquiry from interfering with the process. Supplication discourages inconvenient lines of critique. Interference is deemed an act of "heresy" simply because the house of cards can't withstand such perturbation: it DEMANDS that counter-narrative forces be subdued. It demands this in order to survive. "You are a heretic" is a typical defense mechanism for the indefensible. It is the hallmark of cult activity. Consequently, freethinkers should wear their heresy with pride. A CNV can't work if it is exposed for what it really is: a vehicle for dogmas.

We see the standard "CNV defense mechanism" exhibited by Neoliberal economic ideologues. Those who dare question free-market fundamentalism are labeled "communists" and other nefarious-sounding rubrics. Advocates for social justice are deemed menaces to "the American way of life". Calls

for civil society are painted as efforts to install a Soviet-style tyranny. Essentially, Progressives commit the “crime” of challenging the sacrosanct right-wing narrative, and thereby betray the worldview on which corporate power depends. They have truth on their side, so the only way to deter their efforts is to incorporate their cause *into* the narrative *according to the terms of* narrative. “Listen to them! That’s just what socialists SAY!”

Un-approved acts are something that must be seen as unacceptable if the fabricated reality is to retain a veneer of credence. Corporate interests are thus able to promote their agenda under enticing pretexts, quarantined from the pesky nuisance of critical analysis. ROTA is seen as “a government takeover” in the same way that secularism is seen by the Salafist as a betrayal of Allah. Same gambit, different context.

Adherents come to NEED the CNV to be “true”. They depend on their *fabricated* reality being THE reality—and so will do whatever it takes to ensure that remains the case. To disrupt this process is to threaten the adherent’s sense-making mechanism. This is how a dubious memplex manages to survive: disqualify the competition.

(Ironically, every so often, the impresarios of a CNV are duped by their own sales-pitch, and fall prey to their own scam. Sometimes the puppeteer gets tangled in his own strings. This is often not a matter of being hoisted by one’s own petard; rather it’s a matter of the vendor imbibing the elixir he’s selling. In such cases, the charlatan is seduced by his own ballyhoo—which only makes his delivery MORE compelling to eager ears.)

Some people don’t have the will or the wherewithal to engage in the due diligence necessary to vet a CNV. That so many don’t have the time or the energy to debunk every enticing memplex allows dubious CNVs to be promulgated with impunity. The key, then, is to buck the status quo and generate awareness. Prudent iconoclasm plays a crucial role in exposing CNVs as what they are: CNVs.