

# POLITICS AS USUAL: Alien Babies

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

We live in an era in which anyone and everyone has the potential, the very real risk in fact, to experience the excruciating reality of public exposure of every foible, be it personal or professional, regardless of its magnitude.

From hogging two parking spots at the local mall, to cheating on your spouse, anything and everything you do can end up at some point on someone's blog or twitter feed should it strike their fancy ? or more likely, appeal to their sense of spite.

Every Blackberry and iPhone has a camera and video capability ? with pretty good quality. As a result, someone is always watching and just as likely someone is always recording. There's no need for the massive Big Brother CCTV infrastructure that exists in the UK. Joe Public is more than capable of handling the job.

It seems like everyone has a blog these days or - God help us ? a twitter feed. Facebook page updates from all and sundry bombard us with fantastically inane musings about, well, nothing. Foursquare updates on where people are every minute of the day are particularly irksome. Why someone feels they must account for their whereabouts in 15 minute increments all day, every day is simply beyond me. For the record, I do not care what restaurant you are at, what you had for dinner or what intersection you are passing. But the thief who is breaking into your house right now sure appreciates the information.

On balance, social media is a wonderful thing. It makes information use and dissemination accessible to anyone with a computer and internet access. Some argue its relevance and importance in terms of democracy is akin to the creation of the printing press and the Gutenberg bible. I'm not sure I would go that far, but it is an incredibly important leap in terms of increasing the accessibility of democracy. Injustices can be exposed by anyone. Sanitized versions of wars, uprisings, atrocities are no longer possible in the face of real-time reporting by real people on scene.

You can still lie, but you won't get away with it. Eventually, someone, somewhere will produce a video, a photo, a recording that will expose the ? truth ? for all to see.

And therein lies the problem

The downside is that there is a complete and utter lack of consideration for what constitutes the ? truth. ? ? News ? can be posted without any verification, without any semblance of objectivity at all. It can be manipulated or even manufactured. Speed of reporting and ? gotcha ? moments caught on tape rule the bandwidths.

There is no context. Many a public person has been snared in that trap ? of statements made, and duly reported, but in a highly edited way. A snippet of a conversation can seem extraordinarily damning when heard without the benefit of the sentence before and after.

Photo-shopped images and doctored recordings make people question the ? truth ? of anything.

No one has the time to sift through the massive amount of detritus that litters the web in search of the important information. As a result, many things pass as fact when they are in most cases entirely fiction.

This is our reality.

The next time the web explodes with a story about a celebrity, a politician or even an ordinary citizen alleged to have done something extraordinarily bad, I think we should view that ? news ? story with a healthy dose of skepticism.

Treat it like it's a story by the National Enquirer. Yes, there is a slim chance that they have indeed got a scoop, but it's much more likely that there is no alien baby.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is ? after all ? our Town.

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