



FRONT AND CENTER

FAKING IT

NOT ALL BOGUS NEWS STORIES ARE SATIRE. SOME ARE JUST LIES.

BY TAD SIMONS

There was a brief flare-up of liberal schadenfreude in the blovsphere recently over a news report that Michele Bachmann had been arrested in Colorado for driving stoned. At last, people thought, the woman's sanctimony and hypocrisy had finally caught up with her, and her true nature has been revealed. Michele Bachmann, it appeared, is human after all.

If only the story were true. But it wasn't—it was a fake news story posted by a website called newslo.com, a site that proclaims itself to be "the first hybrid News/Satire platform on the web," bringing its readers "a unique brand of information and entertainment." Newslo's "unique" approach to entertaining disinformation is that it mixes real news and fake news indiscriminately and doesn't tell you which is which. The game, for readers, is to guess.

Granted, *The Onion*, *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and other comedy

outlets have made satirizing the news seem like a fun and profitable way to spend the day. But Newslo isn't doing satire. What Newslo writers are doing is making things up for the hell of it, then sitting back and laughing at anyone who is stupid enough to believe them.

The kids call this "trolling"—saying outrageous or idiotic things on the Internet just to provoke a reaction. Satire, by contrast, uses humor to make a larger and often more truthful point about its subject. *The Onion*—which traffics in actual satire—recently featured a story with the headline "Report: Lake Ice Grows Safer to Venture Out on with Each Beer Consumed." The story went on to quote a researcher from the University of Minnesota as saying, "Our data clearly show that by collectively finishing a 24-pack of Keystone, Budweiser, or similar American-style lager, ice becomes so safe and stable that a whole group of buddies can walk out onto the lake as far as they want." This story is fake, too, but it's funny—and satirical—

Newslo is really creating a sophisticated form of meta-satire that lampoons the dubious legitimacy of "real" news and seeks to reveal journalism's iffy relationship with the truth by creating an inefably iffier site where readers can find a seamless blend of fact and fiction—just like they do in *The New York Times*! And maybe the Michele Bachmann story was "funny," in a meta-sense, because she is a moral crusader who plays famously fast and loose with the facts.

I doubt that much thought went into it, though, because the only way the Bachmann story would actually be funny or ironic is if it were actually true. Without the element of truth, the story is simply bogus—lying for the sake of lying, with no higher purpose than to see if anyone is foolish enough to fall for it.

Stephen Colbert famously coined the term "truthiness" to describe things that feel true but aren't, especially in the ever-more-confusing landscape of modern media. Perhaps we need to invent a new word for information that's pack-

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because it purports to "explain" why so many drunken people insist on walking and driving on thin ice.

Now I suppose one could argue that

aged and delivered as "news," but—ha, ha—really isn't, fool.

Oh wait, we already have a word for that kind of thing: B.S. ■

{ Scene Stealer }

KAREN L. CHARLES THREADS DANCE PROJECT

A veteran of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, Threads Dance Project artistic director Karen Charles knows how to connect with audiences. The company's March show, *Body and Soul*, starts out with a couple of familiar company favorites from the past few years, "Childless Mother" and "Memories," and concludes with the world premiere of a new work, set to music by the Grammy-winning a cappella ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock, which will be performing live. Very sweet. **March 21-22.** Cowles Center, 528 Hennepin Ave., Mpls., 612-206-3636, threadsdance.org

