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Winning the Disinformation War: Suturing the Soul

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Title: Winning the Disinformation War: Suturing the Soul

Even if one believes in evolutionary psychologies—at least the possibility of changing human natures in adapting to the world through time—so far, the intentional attempt to create misperceptions through false information remains of our human repertoire (1). So, too, do the vagaries of belief and skepticism which lead to possibly interpreting any information as false and any intention as malign. And as well, life as a war denoting conflict, competition, and transactionalism. Disinformation war has been, is, and will likely be with us; and winning denotes not expunging it but managing it to one's benefit and values (2).

How to win? A common approach is to fight the lie with the truth. There are psychological and rhetorical techniques to suppress, minimize, discount, and disconfirm the lie; their converse with the truth; and presumed communication efficiencies—e.g., congruence with a recipient's expectations; import and amplitude of content; frequency of repetition; and figure to ground ratios as well as the independence and interdependence of various messages. The problem with this approach is the primary assumption that humans function as rational and logical parsers of information (2). Even content predicated on emotional arousal such as profane images of hellish atrocity is presumed to be effective through following the right calculus of rhetorical engagement (3).

Another common approach is intensive data mining yielding data relationships putatively helping us identify, understand, explain, influence, control, and predict what are true and false (4). One problem with this approach is the unknown transience of these relationships. Another is the reactance of people once these relationships become known to elements of a general public—viz., currently 'bad' actors changing behavior to act 'good' and formerly 'good' actors acting 'bad' once falsely identified as 'bad'. And there are scientific anomalies impeding the validation of predictive models of rare events that have not yet occurred; the social damage from false positive and negative errors in mis-identifying the lie and the truth; the phenomenon of identical information being true or false, even true and false, at different times within different contexts; and the challenge of the Black Swan metaphor intrinsic to inductive logic—that one anomalous example belying the regularity of all having come before (5).

Where does this leave us? Maybe, contemplating the life-confirming and death-defying search for meaning and desire (6). And some readings of Lacanian psychoanalysis suggest that the key to effective disinformation is exploiting absences of meaning and desire. The former denotes wanting to make sense out of no sense, the latter wanting to sense what is yet un-sensed in that desire is not yet fulfilled. These are so crucial to human nature—especially to one's sense of identity—that their absence can be portrayed as wounds needing to be sutured with information serving as suture. The lie will win over truth any day if it can better suture the wounds. With suture comes the soul; with un-sutured wound comes *horror vacui*, the fear of the void (7).

Lacanian *suture* denotes thoughts, feelings, and images serving as stitches or seams bringing together yet other thoughts, feelings, and images that are as edges of a mental wound. Again, the wound is of no sense, of un-sense, so evocative of desire that even nonsense can fit the bill. The sense of closing the wound is so much more desired than just making some rational or logical case, for it constitutes who we are as main character in our own narrative. Not only may this be key to successful psychotherapy, but according to some film theories allows us to understand the characters and narratives of others (8). In the disinformation war between the lie and the truth, with truth focusing on conscious and empirical validation of notions of objective reality, the lie will win every time. For the truth to win, the lie's suture must become infected and fester, the wound must open, a new suture must be applied consciously and unconsciously. But most truth tellers avoid the dark night of the soul. They would rather rest their souls even as they leave blood on the tracks of life.

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Keywords: Data Mining, Disinformation, Lacan, Propaganda, Psychoanalysis

Abstract/Description: In a world of false facts and fake news, what is the crucial psychology underlying what people believe?

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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