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Trends. War on Personality and Personality and War: Comments on Nass and Lee (2002)

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Abstract: This Trends article discusses another article – Identity and deconstruction, by Clifford Nass and Kwan Min Yee – published in volume 3 (2002) of Archives of Psychiatry & Psychotherapy in which the authors demonstrate that people reliably attribute personality characteristics to computer-synthesized speech, exploring the ramifications in a political psychological context.

Personalization of conflict permeates the political world. In fact, taking things personally often can contribute to violent conflict resolution or management in the political world. Both of these observations relate to the perception and/or construction of personality, of and by oneself and others.

Although the concept or construct of personality might prove instrumentally advantageous and even evolutionally adaptive regardless of the its ontological status, it is certainly the case that most people ascribe to personality a direct correspondence to reality, i.e., they assume it “really exists” and corresponds to “real characteristics” of another person. It is in this context that a recent study by Nass and Lee (2002) may be relevant beyond their direct intentions.

Nass and Lee (2002) demonstrate that computer-synthesized speech manifests personality in that people reliably (and by the authors’ criteria, validly) attribute personality characteristics to computer-synthesized speech. Assuming personality relates to persons, one might attribute personality attributions to the output of a computer as saying more about the person making the personality attributions than an inanimate stimulus.

In the context of such research, should one maintain equanimity in our historical moment? A moment characterized by personality ascriptions of and by terrorists; national leaders (when they are not terrorists); and various so-called aggressors, victims, and observers? A moment when said ascriptions largely populate public discourse on the merits of war to effect regime change and to impede the proliferation and employment of weapons of mass destruction? That one can seemingly ascribe personality to the living and the nonliving and accordingly make life-and-death decisions suggest equanimity is only the stance of the surrealist. (See Ahumada, J.L. (2002). The rebirth of the idols: The Freudian unconscious and the Nietzschean unconscious. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 82, 219-234; Markowski, M.P. (2001). Identity and deconstruction. *Archives of Psychiatry & Psychotherapy*, 3, 89-95; Nass, C., & Lee, K.M. (2002). Does computer-synthesized speech manifest personality? Experimental tests of recognition, similarity-attraction, and consistency-attraction. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 7, 171-181; Richardson, G.E. (2002). The metatheory of resilience and resiliency. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 58, 307-321.) (Keywords: Clifford Nass, Conflict, Kwan Min Lee, Personality, Synthesized Speech.)