



Presentation

Issue 25 (Spring 2024) : Propaganda and its masks of virtue

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This issue, co-edited by Jean-Marie Lafortune (University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada), Ina Motoi (University of Quebec in Abitibi-Témiscamingue), Ligia Tomoiaga and Anamaria Felecan (Technical University Cluj-Napoca-Baia Mare North Centre), is part of a critical reflection on the value of mass communication in globalized societies. Taking as a figure the propaganda concealed by masks of virtue as a socio-cultural and political practice, our intention is to observe and recognize their context of emergence and their method of propagation, analyze them and question their cognitive and social consequences. This involves developing criteria and benchmarks for establishing literacy and being able to orient oneself in this flow of slogans and visuals produced and disseminated by old and new media.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 that followed the breakdown of negotiations between the two countries to avoid the military confrontation, we are once again witnessing on our screens the unfolding of a human tragedy in which the war of arms is accompanied by a war of images and words. Presented on a loop, the well-designed show calls for assiduous spectators. Political and media personalities relay, at the heart of this media construction of reality, the same slogans that legitimize or invalidate them without hesitation.

Propaganda and counterpropaganda use the same type of public communication. Their method proceeds from the ostentatious promotion of virtues, claiming higher values, which imply conforming to common ideals, while their instigators instrumentalize them in their much more prosaic real practices. To mask certain facts, the propagandist mechanism is wrapped around virtues, defined as moral forces promoted by religious and political powers to accomplish good and as rules that the human being should therefore apply to follow, such as humility, zeal, solidarity, fortitude, justice or benevolence. Convenient screens, these virtues are displayed without scruples and confuse the masses on the deep intentions and real interests of their promoters. Hence the difficulty of distinguishing between what is said and what is done, what is true and what is false, what is based on facts and what is fiction or illusion.

It is these dynamics that are highlighted here both in «democratic» countries and «authoritarian» regimes. These are borne by certain ostentatious virtues that are addressed in the

articles gathered here: proletarian morality, the common good, altruism, responsibility, propriety, truth, quality of services, respectability, normality, progress, eternal youth or authenticity. The first section of this issue discusses the effects of propaganda's virtuous discourses on the resulting demobilization of thought, the very foundations of reflection being undermined by these double discourses. The second section deals with the media logics at work, which are sometimes the vehicle of misfortunes of these ostentatious virtues.

“Virtuous” discourse and demobilization of thought

This section opens with an article by Ana-Daniela Farcaș, *Social values and propaganda: theoretical perspectives of key concepts*. Eliminating in advance any debate and historical contextualization, although it is based on the existing values in the society where it unfolds, propaganda is a universal mass communication strategy that aims to influence public opinion through biased information and partial logics. But what is the credibility and legitimacy of such a discourse that appeals to the axiological universe to motivate and mask actions, facts and ways of thinking?

Having lived under a very strong power of censorship, Vera Heller explores the impact of the wooden language on the narrative identity as part of a project of visual auto-ethnography based on her experience. She wonders at the difficulty of verbally evoking this period of her life: *Qu'il y a-t-il derrière le masque de la morale prolétarienne qui me réduit au silence ?* Simulacra of information would have proceeded by omission of certain data and would have taken root in the political correctness devoid of sense of the Romanian communist regime. She thus finds a similarity between the military lexicon of the pandemic and the rhetoric of yesteryear.

When a regime builds its propaganda through social engineering, the place reserved for citizens not to become suspects is reduced to that of a consenting audience that displays new codes of conduct in society. In her text *Propagande et hypocrisie sociale : comment le totalitarisme instrumentalise-t-il le dogme du « bien commun » ?*, Ariane Bilheran questions this demobilization of thought. When instrumentalized, the virtues of «altruism» and «individual responsibility towards the collective» are no more than masks that feed the inclination to conformism.

Stratégies rhétorico-argumentatives fallacieuses et biais cognitifs dans le discours de propagande are addressed by Marius Munteanu. His discursive analysis from the Perelman perspective of Romanian Senator Diana Șoșoacă's speech on the earthquakes in Turkey in February 2023 aims to distinguish political communication from propaganda and argumentation from persuasion. These discursive strategies (simplification, generalities, blurring of causal and temporal relationships, imprecision in the naming of the adversary, etc.) contribute to build an alternative world presented as the real world.

Isabelle Chouinard and Martine Guenette are questioning what is happening *Derrière le masque de la qualité des services de la gestion managériale : les droits sociaux bafoués des usagers et les fondements occultés de la profession des travailleurs sociaux*. The rise of a culture of evaluation conceals the deleterious effects of managerial and economic imperatives. Acting as institutional propaganda, the principles of new public management thus contribute to the demobilization of social intervention and critical thinking necessary to establish direct individual relationships to knowledge and act accordingly.

Eriola Qafzezi notes that the search for exclusivity comes up against a loss of originality, rudeness and impoliteness, accompanied by a tendency to hide rather than reveal the news in the written media. Her article, *“Fast” food for thought? Exploring the not-so-easy-to-digest language of Albanian newspaper* allows to understand how the main objective of newspapers, inform, is continuously distorted, by means of a sensationalism not requiring too much effort of analysis and reflection, to capture people’s attention and a greater marketplace.

Media logics and misfortunes of virtue

Is this quest for the ratings that relay a single premade point of view the primary objective of the use of media masks of virtue? The second section presents its logics at work, beginning with Ligia Tomoiagă’s critical reflection on the construction of a famous Canadian psychologist by opposing to «shoot down». In *Constructing the enemy in the process of virtue signalling: a critical reflexion on media representations of Jordan Peterson*, her analysis puts into perspective this technique well known in all dictatorial regimes: offer a target to hate in order to mobilize the discontent by diverting it from the «real questions».

Nicolas Mary exposes the media logic of the depoliticization of collective and societal issues in his text *François Hollande ou les infortunes de la vertu...*, apprehending the extent of the scandalous peopolization of French political life, the process of mediating, whether consented or not, the privacy of public officials. The media staging of libertinage by the closegate becomes the object of particular attention to legitimize their aspiration to power while eluding political struggles. However, revealing the contradiction between the mask of virtue displayed and the reality of private behaviour does not strengthen democracy.

Self-censorship and parallel communication as practices of resistance to a totalitarian regime are put forward by Anamaria Felecan, in *Totalitarianism and the questionable legitimization of conflict through propaganda in Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis and Art Spiegelman’s Maus*. The article offers a comparative analysis of what has led to the establishment of powerful political regimes by imposing strict and absolute discipline on their citizens, one that combines external reality with history as described and the other that demonstrates how lies and criminal actions can be justified by alleged good intentions.

Le spectacle futuriste de la conquête spatiale masque la fuite en avant technoscientifique. This text by Nicolas Oblin identifies the masks of the virtue of technical progress used by propaganda concerning contemporary space travel. Based on an illusion, the media logic at work favours its spectacular dimension of fetishization and sacralization, which screens contemporary social and political reality and is self-evident in order to face the ultimate condition of a possible human future a planet Earth that has become uninhabitable.

Mohamed Sami Alloun studies transhumanist communication through the analysis of *Nick Bostrom’s Fable of the Dragon-Tyrant*. According to him, using the literary text to illustrate the confluence of rhetorical discourse with fiction makes it possible to create an overall vision and not only a partial ideological logic. By this narrative strategy, Bostrom would make visible beyond technical solutionism the philosophical and social stakes of transhumanist ideology, whose possible escape of the human being from his physical condition (weakness, disease, senescence) and moral (vices).

Comment porter le masque vertueux d'une pensée dominante et enseigner la création de liens empreints d'authenticité en relation d'aide ? asks Gregory Ardiét, who observes the contemporary narrowing of freedom of expression both in the context of the recent pandemic and in the expression of identity claims at the university. The values taught in relation to help are then cantilevered and condemn to three postures, either an adherence to the unique thought by wearing the mask of authenticity or a teaching without mask backed on critical thinking and authentic bond or alternating between the two.

Report

Ina Motoi reviews the contributions that marked a symposium held by zoom in 2021 on *Political Correctness, Wooden Language and Newspeak*.

The next issue, to be launched in the fall of 2024, will celebrate the Journal's 15th anniversary. In addition to a retrospective of the articles published since its creation, it will host a series of prospective texts on the future of sociocultural community development in a dozen countries by 2030-2035. The deadline to submit an article or report for this issue is September 30, 2024 (see instructions: <https://edition.uqam.ca/atps>). Please note that we always accept texts to appear in the Open Topic section.

Enjoy the reading!

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