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Vital Collective Learning from Biased Media Coverage

Acquiring vigilance to deceptive strategies used in mugging the world

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Introduction

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Introduction

This is an exploration of exposure to media reports on the [Israeli military ground invasion of the Gaza Strip](#), ordered on 17 July 2014 -- only hours after the destruction over Ukraine of the [Malaysian Airlines flight MH17](#) by missile. Both cases have given rise to conflicting, unconfirmed reports by a variety of authorities. Justifications for any interpretation are readily -- even assertively -- offered.

There is a bizarre irony to the fact that the number of deaths by rocket in Palestine (preceding the ground invasion) was of the same order as the death toll of 283 passengers on MH17. With the death of 193 Dutch nationals on MH17, further curiosity is aroused by the court ruling on the preceding day that the Netherlands was liable for the deaths of 300 Bosnian Muslims during the [Srebrenica massacre in 1995](#) (*Dutch state liable over 300 Srebrenica deaths*, *BBC News*, 16 July 2014). New complications are evident with the defensive arguments presented by Israeli authorities regarding an attack on a UNRWA school in Gaza a week later (*Israeli strike on Gaza school kills 15 and leaves 200 wounded*, *The Guardian*, 24 July 2014). And what of the disappearance of AH5017 (*Air Algérie AH5017 crash brings week's airliner death toll to 450*, *The Guardian*, 25 July 2014)?

How to engage with such information, especially when the various parties have strong vested interest in sustaining their particular narrative interpretation? Any "facts" are seemingly adjusted in some way to ensure consistency with the preferred version. Each narrative could well be used to justify further action, in support of undeclared agendas, escalating the levels of conflict and loss of life.

Those with a penchant for [conspiracy theory](#) will clearly find considerable scope for allocating blame. That is not the purpose here, nor is it the basis for useful learning. In a world increasingly characterized by invasive surveillance, **the concern here is with how a higher degree of interpretative vigilance can be elicited in anticipation of future strategic media campaigns.**

Of particular relevance to this exploration is the extent of commentary on the biased media coverage of MH17 and the Gaza invasion. Most striking has been the highly disproportionate amount of TV coverage of the former -- in contrast with the relatively limited coverage of the latter. Detailed analyses will no doubt become available for both broadcast and print media by country, by language, and by date. A personal subjective impression is of 90% media time on MH17 and 10% on Gaza -- with proportions changing as a consequence of increasing complaints regarding bias.

Commentators on the process are increasingly framing the coverage as taking the form of [information warfare](#). Selection, presentation and interpretation of "facts" is the most evident feature of this warfare -- as with the time so extensively and variously devoted to the matter. This can be understood as a 21st Century variant of the [propaganda](#) associated with major conflicts in the past.

Missing from much media commentary is the well-accepted role of strategic deception and misdirection in anticipation of any form of military action. The relevance is unclear with respect to insurgency in Ukraine or the Israel-Gaza conflict. It could be readily concluded that there was a perceived need to exploit one man-made disaster to divert attention from another.

Use of this pattern had been made strikingly evident in a [media scandal](#) at the time of 9/11, engendered by the suggestion of [Jo Moore](#) within the government of Tony Blair (*Sept 11: 'a good day to bury bad news'*, *The Telegraph*, 10 October 2001). Blair became official envoy of the [Quartet on the Middle East](#) following his resignation as Prime Minister. It is for conspiracy theorists to explore whether MH17 was shot down in a [false flag](#) operation as an act of strategic deception as some already contend.

Of far greater interest is how increasing exposure to questionable media coverage is much to be valued as a stimulus to collective learning -- as a process of public education in its own right. It is in this sense that efforts by various parties to manipulate public opinion are much to be welcomed. The more blatant the efforts, the more people will be encouraged to question such coverage and its biases. This can be construed as usefully eliciting insight into more subtle forms of propaganda in a much wider variety of domains -- as with exposure to advertising campaigns.

More sobering is the possibility that some current forms of strategic deception may well be undertaken as exercises in anticipation of use of such [news management](#) on the occasion of even more dubious strategic initiatives in the future -- perhaps to be termed "mugging the world". So framed, **collective acquisition of vigilance to strategies of distraction is as valuable as with respect to the mugging strategies in street robbery**. As the extent of [global surveillance disclosures](#) and other [internet scams](#) have made evident, there is as much need to become "internet-wise" as "streetwise".

Biased coverage of controversy by news media

The phenomenon of [media bias](#) is well-recognized, notably with respect to [Media coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict](#) and [Media portrayal of the 2014 pro-Russian unrest in Ukraine](#).

As might be expected, there are conflicting reports on the extent of recent media bias relating to MH17 and the Israel-Gaza conflict:

- Tom Gross: [Western media's 'pro-Israel' bias? Hardly](#) (*National Post*, 20 July 2014)
- Antony Loewenstein: [Ukraine: western media coverage's bias should be held into account](#) (*The Guardian*, 12 March 2014)
- Jordan Chariton: [MSNBC Contributor Slams Media, Andrea Mitchell, for 'Disgustingly Biased' Coverage](#) (*TVNewser*, 21 July 2014)
- Lindsey German: [Ukraine and Gaza: spot the difference in the value of civilian lives killed by war](#) (*Stop the War Coalition*, 20 July 2014)
- Christopher Zara: [Cable News Ratings: MH17, Gaza Invasion Coverage Boost CNN, Fox News, But Primetime Still Sluggish](#) (*International Business Times*, 22 July 2014)
- Omer Taspinar: [Gaza, Ukraine and the West](#) (*Today's Zaman*, 20 July 2014)
- Glenn Greenwald: [Why Did NBC Pull Veteran Reporter After He Witnessed Israeli Killing of Gaza Kids?](#) (*Democracy Now!* 21 July 2014)
- Jim Waterson: [Russia Today Faces UK Investigation Over MH17 News Coverage](#) (*BuzzFeed*, 22 July 2014)
- Neil Clark: [MH17 and Gaza: two different elite reactions](#) (*RT*, 23 July 2014)
- Felicity Morse: [How we respond to MH17 and Gaza on Twitter might be offensive, but censorship is far more deadly](#) (*The Independent*, 21 July 2014)
- Gideon Polya: [MH17 atrocity and Israeli Gaza Massacre](#) (*MWC News*, 19 July 2014)
- Avi Shlaim: [The Siege of Gaza: violence in Gaza will persist until Israel is pressured to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories](#) (*Aljazeera*, 19 Jul 2014)
- Haidar Eid: [Gaza needs more than condemnation](#) (*The Electronic Intifada*, 18 July 2014)
- Alan Dershowitz: [How selective body counts incite more violence](#) (*The Jerusalem Post*, 23 July 2014)
- Philip Weiss: [Finally, Israel is alienating the US mainstream media](#) (*MondoWeiss*, 21 July 2014)
- Gabor Maté: [Beautiful dream of Israel has become a nightmare](#) (*Toronto Star*, 22 July 2014)
- Thane Rosenbaum: [Hamis's Civilian Death Strategy](#) (*Wall Street Journal*, 21 July 2014)
- Noura Erakat: [Five Israeli Talking Points on Gaza Debunked](#) (*The Nation*, 28 July 2014)
- Richard Falk: [Massacre in Gaza: can international law provide justice for Palestinians?](#) *Aljazeera*, 22 July 2014)
- Michel Chossudovsky: ["Support MH17 Truth": OSCE Monitors Identify "Shrapnel and Machine Gun-Like Holes" indicating Shelling -- no evidence of a missile attack](#) (*Global Research*, 31 July 2014)
- [BBC 'biased coverage' of Gaza slammed](#) (*PressTV*, 14 July 2014)
- [Media bias a problem in Ukraine reporting](#) (*Deutsche Welle*, 16 April 2014)
- [US lies and hypocrisy on Gaza and Ukraine](#) (*World Socialist Website*, 23 July 2014)
- [Competing narratives in Malaysia Airlines disaster coverage](#), (*MEDIAWATCH*, 22 July 2014)
- [Ukraine, Gaza and media manipulation](#) (*Canonfire*, 19 July 2014)
- [One-sided Coverage of Israel's Genocide in Gaza](#) (*The Anti-New York Times*)
- [False Flag Over Ukraine and Israel's Ground Invasion of Gaza](#) (*Kenny's Sideshow*, 17 July 2014)
- ["Disgustingly Biased": the corporate media on the Gaza massacre](#) (*MediaLens*, 24 July 2014)
- [Deleted BBC Report. "Ukrainian Fighter Jet Shot Down MH17", Donetsk Eyewitnesses](#) (*Global Research*, 27 July 2014)

For [Robert Parry](#) ([Blaming Russia as 'Flat Fact'](#), *ConsortiumNews.com*, 27 July 2014):

As nuclear-armed America hurtles into a completely avoidable crash with nuclear-armed Russia over Ukraine, you can now see the dangers of "information warfare" when facts give way to propaganda and the press fails to act as an impartial arbiter. In this sorry affair, one of the worst offenders of journalistic principles has been the *New York Times*, generally regarded as America's premier newspaper. During the Ukraine crisis, the Times has been little more than a propaganda conveyor belt delivering what the U.S. government wants out via shoddy and biased reporting... f

The Times reached what was arguably a new low on Sunday when it accepted as flat fact the still unproven point of how Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down. The Times dropped all attribution despite what appear to be growing -- rather than diminishing -- doubts about Official Washington's narrative that Ukrainian rebels shot down the plane by using a powerful Russian-supplied Buk missile battery.

For [Paul Craig Roberts](#) (*The Latest US Government Hoax, Information Clearing House*, 29 July 2014):

The Russian Ministry of Defense has [declared](#) the purported satellite photos placed on Twitter by the US Ambassador in Ukraine as fakes. I could tell that the images were fakes not only from their low resolution and absence of proper designation, but also from the unprofessional way in which the information was released [[more](#)]. Of course, many users of social media would have no experience and could easily fall for the hoax, which was clearly the US government's intention.

The anti-Russian propaganda campaign being conducted by Washington follows in the footsteps of the campaigns conducted against Saddam Hussein, Gaddafi, Assad, and Iran. Washington's campaign of lies against Russia proves the absence of integrity in the US government and is reckless as it can lead to war.

Peter Duveen, who commented on my article exposing the State Department hoax, explained that having foreknowledge of news events that Washington orchestrates allows Washington to control the explanation before any evidence is available. By the time evidence is gathered, the narrative is established and the evidence ignored:

Very extensive media attention is given to the source of arms in the Ukrainian conflict, as the context for the MH17 disaster. Amazingly, almost no media coverage is given to the source of the weapons (intermediaries and manufacturers) relating to the Israel-Gaza conflict. In the first case it is readily declared that Russia is the main supplier to the insurgents and that Ukraine is benefitting increasingly from "western" arms supplies. In the second case, it can only be assumed that the weapons causing civilian deaths in Gaza derive from the military aid given by the USA to Israel. The original source of the rockets striking Israel is not indicated, although they too may derive from various permanent members of the UN Security Council as the [major arms manufacturers](#) of the world. It is a tragic irony that it should be weapons supplied by those states which are most probably causing the deaths of those seeking refuge in UNRWA havens in Gaza.

Western sources now affirm that the arms supplied to the Ukrainian separatists, held to be responsible to the MH17 crash, came from Russia (*Special Report: Where Ukraine's separatists get their weapons, Reuters*, 29 July 2014). It has been confirmed that the far larger number of deaths in Gaza result from arms supplied by the USA (Ken Klippenstein and Paul Gottinger, *Blood on American's Hands: US provides Israel weapons used on Gaza, Information Clearinghouse*, 2 August 2014; *US Complicit In Gaza Slaughter Supplies Israel With Bombs Amid Gaza Blitz, Aljazeera*, 31 July 2014). If the MH17 deaths are to be framed as "Made in Russia", should those in Gaza be framed as "Made in USA"?

Clues to possible vigilant interpretation of media coverage

The website on [Fairness and Accuracy in reporting](#) (FAIR) offers indications on *How To Detect Bias In News Media* under the headings:

- Who are the sources?
- Is there a lack of diversity?
- Are there double standards?
- Do stereotypes skew coverage?
- What are the unchallenged assumptions?
- Is the language loaded?
- Is there a lack of context?
- From whose point of view is the news reported?
- Do the headlines and stories match?
- Are stories on important issues featured prominently?
- Various domains offer clues as to how interpretation of media stories may be vigilantly explored.

Mugging and street robbery: For those intent on street robbery, or potential victims of it, the concern is what strategies tend to be most successful. Clearly a great deal of creativity may go into setting up a mugging -- beyond simple threat and use of force. What is involved in such strategies? Are there systematic checklists of the strategies which may be employed -- "how to do it" -- beyond the many tips on how to avoid being mugged?

A literature search notes one useful summary (Patrick Hutchison, *Common Mugging Procedures for Backpackers, PacSafe blog*, 22 November 2011). This offers details on the following strategies:

- Strapless: As one of the crudest and most effective mugging procedures, working as a team, the thieves will approach from behind and cut backpack straps with a knife so that the bag falls.
- Show and Tell: Starting off innocently, one thief will distract the victim with a large map, by spilling something, etc. Meanwhile the partner the partner in crime will steal all any belongings.
- Mrs. Dash: Whilst vigilantly protecting the valuable goods, reading a book, for example. Suddenly the book is grabbed by one partner who runs off with it, causing the victim to engage in a chase. Meanwhile the goods are removed by a partner.
- Pick pockets: A well recognized strategy in crowded areas, especially when done by a team.

A more comprehensive list -- again avoiding "how to do it" -- is offered, citing a variety of sources (*From taxi drivers who steal your luggage in Vegas, to the street games pickpocket in Paris: Infographic reveals the top 40 tourist scams to watch out for this summer, Daily Mail*, 21 July 2014). Indicating where these are used, it includes details on:

Friendship bracelet	Rose for your girlfriend	Found ring
Thrown baby	Street games	Dropped wallet
Stain on your jacket	Shoe shiner	Woman selling rosemary
The photographer	The music artist	The drug deal
The expensive taxi driver	The overnight bus	The drop and swap

The punctured tyre Cashier on the phone Dodgy doctor Overly helpful local Free massage Broken camera The postcard Closed hotel Fake takeaway menu	Train pickpocket Slow counting Fake policemen Map seller The flirt Eager English students Charity competition Fake front desk call	The getaway taxi driver Amazing jewellery deal Fake ticket Beggar Pickpocket warning Seemingly free peanuts Gypsy kids Room inspectors
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The question is whether these serve as valuable metaphors indicative of collective initiatives -- especially with respect to the manner in which use is made of distraction and diversion.

Confidence trickery: The existence of [confidence tricks](#) of every kind is widely recognized as dependent on distraction and diversion. Under the "[stages of the con](#)", the *Wikipedia* entry cites Edward H. Smith (*Confessions of a Confidence Man: a handbook for suckers*, 1937) in listing the "six definite steps or stages of growth in every finely balanced and well-conceived confidence game":

- **Foundation work:** The preparations which are made before the scheme is put in motion, including the elaboration of the plan, the employment of assistants and so forth.
- **Approach:** The manner of getting in touch with the victims often most elaborately and carefully prepared.
- **Build-up:** Rousing and sustaining the interest of the victim, introducing the scheme to him, rousing his greed, showing him the chance of profit and filling him with so much anticipation and cupidity that his judgment is warped and his caution thrown away.
- **Pay-off or Convincer:** An actual or apparent paying of money by the conspirators to convince the victim and settle doubts by a cash demonstration. In the old banco game the initial small bets which the victim was allowed to win were the pay-off. In stock swindles the fake dividends sent to stockholders to encourage larger investments are the pay-off.
- **The Hurrah:** This is like the dénouement in a play and no con scheme is complete without it. It is a sudden crisis or unexpected development by which the sucker is pushed over the last doubt or obstacle and forced to act. Once the hurrah is sprung either the scammer has total control or the con fails.
- **The In-and-In:** This is the point in a con game where the conspirator puts some of his money into the deal with that of the victim; first, to remove the last doubt that may tarry in the gull's mind, and, second, to put the con man in control of the situation after the deal is completed, thus forestalling a squeal. Often the whole game is built up around this feature and just as often it does not figure at all.

A *Wikipedia* [List of confidence tricks](#), clusters them into the following categories:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get-rich-quick schemes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Salting -- Spanish Prisoner • Persuasion tricks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Grandparent scam -- Romance scam -- Fortune-telling fraud • Gold brick scams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Pig-in-a-poke (cat in a bag) -- Thai gems -- White-van speakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extortion or false-injury tricks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Badger game -- Bogus dry-cleaning bill scam -- Clip joint -- Coin-matching game -- Insurance fraud • Gambling tricks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Fiddle game -- Glim-dropper -- Lottery fraud by proxy -- Three-card Monte • Online scams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Fake antivirus -- Phishing -- Fake support call 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other confidence tricks and scams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Art student -- Big store -- Change raising -- Fake casting agent scam -- Fraudulent directory solicitations -- Jam auction -- Money exchange -- Mystery shopping -- Pigeon drop -- Predatory journals -- Psychic surgery -- Recovery room -- Rip deal -- Wedding planner scam -- Blessing scam -- Pay up or be arrested scam
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Doublespeak: As discussed separately, religious, legal and political [doublespeak](#) are a well-developed means of exploiting suffering in a process of emotional and moral blackmail towards questionable ends (*Indifference to the Suffering of Others: occupying the moral and ethical high ground through doublespeak* (2013). Doublespeak is a form of language that deliberately disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words. The argument is developed in separate sections

- [Enabling suffering through religious doublespeak](#)
- [Enabling suffering through legal doublespeak](#)
- [Enabling suffering through political doublespeak: Iraq vs. Syria](#)
- [Exploiting suffering as a means of moral and emotional blackmail](#)

Religious doublespeak is especially noteworthy with respect to certain topics (*Is There Never Enough? Religious doublespeak on population and poverty*, 2013).

The concern is also framed in terms of [doublethink](#) (Jean-Claude Paye and Tülay Umay, *Beyond Propaganda: discourse of war and doublethink. "When the Lie Becomes the Truth"*, *Global Research*, 25 July 2014). The latter argues:

Since the attacks of September 11, we are witnessing a transformation of the way the media report the news. They lock us in the unreal. They base truth not on the coherence of a presentation, but on its shocking character. Thus, the observer remains

petrified and cannot establish a relation to reality. The media are lying to us, but at the same time, they show us that they are lying. It is no longer a matter of changing our perception of facts in order to get our support, but to lock us in the spectacle of the omnipotence of power. Showing the annihilation of reason is based on images that serve to replace facts. Information no longer focuses on the ability to perceive and represent a thing, but the need to experience it, or rather to experience oneself through it.

The argument is developed under the following headings:

- Enunciating a statement and its opposite at the same time
- Reduction of qualitative to quantitative
- Absolute certainty in the absence of evidence
- Removal of the "Third Person"
- A "disturbing strangeness"
- Denial and splitting of the ego

Military deception: As a feature of strategic deception in general (as discussed below), there is an extensive literature on this theme, as for example;

- Hy Rothstein and Barton Whaley (Eds.): *The Art and Science of Military Deception* (2013)
- Roy Godson and James J. Wirtz (Eds.): *Strategic Denial and Deception: The Twenty-First Century Challenge* (2002)
- Barton Whaley: *Stratagem: Deception and Surprise in War* (2007)
- John Gooch and Amos Perlmutter (Eds.): *Military deception and strategic surprise* (1982)

Given the fundamental role of the media in justifying and sustaining modern warfare -- and in engaging in information warfare -- it is naive to imagine that some form of deception is not brought into play. In the case of MH17 and the Gaza invasion, the question is then not whether there was deception but rather what deception has been used and continues to be used.

From a security perspective, intelligence services variously value deception. The knight piece of chess is an element of the insignia of the US [Military Information Support Operations](#) (formerly Psychological Operations). A former Israeli Mossad case officer, [Victor Ostrovsky](#) alleges that the former motto of Mossad (as translated from [Proverbs 24:6](#)) was *By Way Of Deception, Thou Shalt Do War* -- as described in his book of that title (*By Way of Deception: the making and unmaking of a Mossad Officer*, 1990).

Strategic deception in game playing: Such deception features widely in game-playing, most notably as the [poker bluff](#). Other games employing some form of bluff include: [Contract Bridge](#), [Stratego](#), [Spades](#), and [Scrabble](#). Deception is a common tactic in strategic games like chess and go ([Deception in Tactics](#), *Chess.com*; Nigel Davies, [Deception and Chess](#), *Daily Speculations*, 29 February 2004; Nigel Davies, [Deception and Chess](#), *The Chess Improver*, 2 July 2014)

Statistical deception: There is widespread recognition of the [misuse of statistics](#), namely when a statistical argument deliberately asserts a falsehood for the gain of the perpetrator. *Wikipedia* describes the following types of misuse -- which may be variously present in biased media presentations.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discarding unfavorable data • Loaded questions • Overgeneralization • Biased samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • False causality • Proof of the null hypothesis • Confusing statistical significance with practical significance • Data dredging • Data manipulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misreporting or misunderstanding of estimated error • Confusing statistical significance with practical significance
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Such deception has been variously documented (Darrell Huff, [How to Lie with Statistics](#), 1991; Joel Best, *Damned Lies and Statistics: untangling numbers from the media, politicians, and activists*, 2012). Of particular relevance is the process described as massaging statistics so that they conform to a required media message, namely to manipulate results for the political convenience of some user, often the government. This involves adjusting figures so as to remove apparent discrepancies, which may be presented as due to miscounting or computational errors. For example, as reported with respect to the government of Tony Blair in the UK:

What is the common factor? It is an obsession with manipulating figures for political ends, rather than being honest with the public, and dealing with the root causes of problems. It is all about providing Tony Blair with headline numbers he can spout in the Commons, even if they are utterly misleading. (Boris Johnson, [Blair's statistics can make you very sick](#), *The Telegraph*, 1 April 2004)

The issue has been widely noted (Alf Young, [Statistical massaging harms debate](#), *The Scotsman*, 25 July 2014; David Webster, [Unemployment: How Official Statistics Distort Analysis and Policy, and Why](#), *Radical Statistics*, 2001; David Barrett, [Police officers routinely fiddle crime figures, MPs are told](#), *The Telegraph*, 19 November 2013; [Some truth to claims over crime figures, says Met](#), *BBC News*, 8 January 2014).

Of particular relevance is the description of *tufta* by Yevgenia Albats ([Power Play: tale of Russian politics is told in prison slang](#), *The Moscow Times*, 2 December 1999):

You can bet your life that the framers of Western foreign policy have never heard such key Russian words as *tufta* and *khalyava*. But within these words lies the key to understanding Russian political and social behavior -- including the population's alienation from the state.... In a nutshell, these words are the framework for the Russian-Soviet Art of Survival. Its significance has been lost on all foreign policies toward Russia, and the oversight has doomed every one of them to failure. *Tufta*, in Russian

prison and labor camp slang, means "counterfeit" or "a swindle involving selling poor-quality goods." *Khalyava*, in the same jargon, means "satisfying demands on someone else's account."

The sense of *tufta* is as follows: In Soviet camps there was a daily work quota that prisoners had to fulfill to get their ration of bread and soup. The sizes of the rations varied over the years, but they were never proportionate to the physical output of the prisoners, who cut wood, dug trenches or worked in uranium mines. When a prisoner didn't do the work he should have, his ration was reduced or taken away. In order to survive, a prisoner had to be able to produce the appearance of work so that, on paper, it came out that he had cut down 10 trees, for instance, when he'd really only cut down three. Getting food for this unfinished work was said to be "getting *khalyava*."

Manipulation of public opinion by the media: This involves use of a set of related techniques of [media manipulation](#) used to enable an image or argument favouring particular interests. The *Wikipedia* entry discusses such manipulation firstly by context

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activism • Advertising • Hoaxing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing • Political campaigning • Propagandising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological warfare • Public relations
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This is followed by a discussion in terms of technique:

Distraction types		Other techniques
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distraction by nationalism • Straw man fallacy • Distraction by scapegoat • Distraction by phenomenon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distraction by semantics • Distraction by regression • Distraction by misleading • Distraction by horror 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeal to consensus • Censorship • Demonisation of the opposition • Fear mongering

A seemingly useful summary, widely circulated on different sites, has been allegedly attributed to [Noam Chomsky](#), as a renowned critic of such manipulation -- who allegedly denies its authorship (*10 "Strategies of Manipulation" by the Media*). Ironically, this could be construed as a form of manipulation in its own right. The strategies are clustered under variants of the following headings (as summarized here):

1. **Strategy of distraction:** Namely diverting public attention from important issues and the changes determined by the political and economic elites, by a flood of continuous distractions and insignificant information. This is essential to prevent public interest in relevant essential knowledge science, economics, psychology, neurobiology and cybernetics.
2. **Create problems, then offer solutions:** Also termed "problem-reaction-solution" It creates a problem, a "situation" such as to engender some public reaction in the audience, thereby framing the solution it is sought to have accepted, most notably with respect to enhanced application of repressive security measures in response to urban violence.
3. **Gradual strategy:** Namely very gradual implementation, as with achieving acceptance of new socioeconomic conditions (neoliberalism) during the 1980s and 1990s -- changes which would have engendered protest if applied all at once
4. **Strategy of deferment:** Namely presentation of an unpopular options as "painful and necessary", gaining public acceptance for its future implementation.
5. **Childlike presentation:** Use of overly simplistic styles of presentation, as characteristic of most advertising to the general public using speech, argument, people and particularly children's intonation which pre-empt's any critical response
6. **Using emotional arguments:** Use of emotional arguments as a classic technique for short-circuiting rational analysis, or critical response. It enables implantation in the unconscious of ideas, desires, fears and anxieties, compulsions, or behaviours
7. **Ensuring public ignorance and mediocrity:** Namely rendering the public incapable of understanding the technologies and methods used in news management and manufacturing of consent
8. **Encouraging public complacency regarding mediocrity:** Namely promoting public belief in the fashionability of stupidity, vulgarity, and ignorance
9. **Enhancing self-blame:** Namely ensuring that individuals blame themselves for their own misfortune -- thereby inhibiting action -- whether because of limited intelligence, capacities or effort.
10. **Knowing individuals better than they know themselves:** Namely through advances in science and technology (biology, neurobiology and applied psychology), greater systemic understanding of individuals physically and psychologically is acquired, relative to the knowledge individuals have of themselves, thereby enabling greater possibility of exerting power and control

One commentator makes a case for how the Israeli government is misleading the world through its succession of press conferences ([Marwan Bishara, Israel's media strategy: What lies beneath, Aljazeera](#), 16 July 2014). The comment is informed by the publication by *Newsweek* of [The Israel Project's Global Language Dictionary](#) (2009, 117 pages), as prepared by Frank Luntz -- on which Bishara comments extensively. It is designed for "leaders who are on the front lines of fighting the media war for Israel". Other comments on the report, supposedly not for wider distribution, are provided by Patrick Cockburn, [Israel-Gaza Conflict: the secret report that helps Israelis to hide facts, The Independent](#), 27 July 2014). Corresponding arguments and documents no doubt exist regarding Western and Russian press conferences concerning the current information war. Of related interest by [Jeremy Scahill and Ryan Devereaux \(The Secret Government Rulebook for Labeling you a Terrorist, The Intercept](#), 23 July 2014) with regard to the report on US [Watchdog Guidance](#) (2013).

Given the court ruling on the responsibility of the Netherlands with regard to the deaths of 300 Bosnian Muslims, it is understandable that the Dutch coverage of MH17 deaths is designed in part to distract the public from their implication.

Information "laundering": This understanding developed from initial use of "[whitewash](#)" as a metaphor meaning to gloss over or cover up vices, crimes or scandals, or to exonerate by means of a perfunctory investigation, or through biased presentation of data. It is especially used in the context of corporations, governments or other organizations. Variants now extend to:

- [Greenwashing](#), namely the practice of companies spinning their products and policies as environmentally friendly, or "green".
- [Bluewashing](#), as used to describe either publicity-driven humanitarian relief efforts, notably with respect to United Nations initiatives
- [Pinkwashing](#), whether used to describe the practice of companies connecting their products to breast cancer awareness and fundraising (often while ignoring the ways their products may be contributing to the disease) or as the promotion of the gay-friendliness of a corporate or political entity in an attempt to downplay or soften aspects of it considered negative.

Similar consideration could be given to "positive washing", whereby anything deemed "negative" is removed from a media presentation, as notably argued by [Barbara Ehrenreich](#) (*Bright-sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*, 2009; *Smile Or Die: How Positive Thinking Fooled America and the World*, 2009). This consideration has been developed separately (*Being Positive Avoiding Negativity: management challenge of positive vs negative*, 2005). To conform to the above pattern, this might be termed "Pozywashing" -- as derived from a set of complementary terms with which "laundering" could be instructively associated (*12 Complementary Languages for Sustainable Governance*, 2003). Given the role in media bias of [negative campaigning](#) ("Neggywashing"?), others might then include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luvvywashing • Tuffywashing • Vizzywashing • Tekkywashing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artywashing • Bizzywashing • Wizzywashing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Praggywashing • Fuzzywashing • Leggywashing
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Misleading advertising: Descriptions of techniques of [deceptive and false advertising](#), are clustered by *Wikipedia* into the following categories.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulation of measurement units and standards • Fillers and oversized packaging • Manipulation of terms • Incomplete comparison • Inconsistent comparison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misleading illustrations • False coloring • Angel dusting • Bait-and-switch • "No risk" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guarantee without a remedy specified • Acceptance by default • Undisclosed dishonest business practices
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Media deception through cover-up: As a notable feature of bias in media coverage may be the use of a variety of forms of cover-up. These have been organized into a remarkable [typology of cover-ups](#) in the relevant *Wikipedia* entry -- based on analysis of a number of typical cases.

<p>Initial response to allegation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Flat denial -- Convince the media to bury the story -- Preemptively distribute false information -- Claim that the "problem" is minimal -- Claim faulty memory -- Claim the accusations are half-truths -- Claim the critic has no proof -- Attack the critic's motive -- Attack the critic's character <p>Withhold or tamper with evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Prevent the discovery of evidence -- Destroy or alter the evidence -- Make discovery of evidence difficult -- Create misleading names of individuals and companies to hide funding -- Lie or commit perjury -- Block or delay investigations -- Issue restraining orders -- Claim executive privilege <p>Delayed response to allegation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Deny a restricted definition of wrongdoing (e.g. torture) -- Limited hang out (i.e., confess to minor charges) -- Use biased evidence as a defense -- Claim that the critic's evidence is biased -- Select a biased blue ribbon commission or "independent" inquiry <p>Intimidate participants, witnesses or whistleblowers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Bribe or buy out the critic -- Generally intimidate the critic by following him or her, killing pets, etc. -- Blackmail: hire private investigators and threaten to reveal past wrongdoing ("dirt") 	<p>Intimidate participants, witnesses or whistleblowers (cont.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Death threats of the critic or his or her family -- Threaten the critic with loss of job or future employment in industry -- Transfer the critic to an inferior job or location -- Intimidate the critic with lawsuits or SLAPP suits -- Murder; assassination <p>Publicity management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Bribe the press -- Secretly plant stories in the press -- Retaliate against hostile media -- Threaten the press with loss of access -- Attack the motives of the press -- Place defensive advertisements -- Buy out the news source <p>Damage control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Claim no knowledge of wrongdoing -- Scapegoats: blame an underling for unauthorized action -- Fire the person(s) in charge <p>Win court cases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Hire the best lawyers -- Hire scientists and expert witnesses who will support your story -- Delay with legal maneuvers -- Influence or control the judges <p>Reward cover-up participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Hush money -- Little or no punishment -- Pardon or commute sentences -- Promote employees as a reward for cover-up -- Reemploy the employee after dust clears
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The most extreme form of cover-up necessarily takes the form of suppression of information or prohibition of its dissemination (*Global Strategic Implications of the "Unsaid"*, 2003). The dimensions of this phenomenon have been demonstrated by recent [global surveillance disclosures](#). Curiously no public consideration is given to the possibility that recent airline crash incidents may indeed be due to testing of new weaponry, or associated blackmail, as conspiracy theorists could readily argue.

Illusionist magic: Magic may be understood as the art of deception -- through diversion and distraction (Chuck Romano, *The Art of Deception or The Magical Affinity Between Conjuring and Art, The Linking Ring*, 75, 1995, 1, pp. 67-70). Typically this may take the form of [sleight of hand](#) (prestidigitation). As noted by *Wikipedia*, the latter is based on seven principles:

1. Palm: hold an object in an apparently empty hand.
2. Switch: secretly exchange one object for another.
3. Ditch: secretly dispose of an unneeded object.
4. Steal: secretly obtain a needed object.
5. Load: secretly move an object to where it is needed.
6. Simulation: give the impression that something has happened that has not.
7. Misdirection: lead attention away from a secret move.

Strategic leadership as a "shell game"?

There is an extensive literature on strategic deception and diversion -- for example Roger Larocca (*Strategic Diversion in Political Communication, Journal of Politics*, 2004), Douglas Walton (*Informal Logic: a pragmatic approach*, 2008).

In his comment on the current conflicts, why the truth is not told is explored by [Jim Wallis](#) (*Let's Tell the Truth About This International Madness, The Huffington Post*, 25 July 2014):

The horrible human costs and increasing danger the world is now facing in Gaza, Ukraine, and Iraq show the consequences of not telling the truth. And unfortunately, we seem to mostly have political leaders who are unwilling to admit the truth of what's happening, deal with root causes instead of exploiting symptoms, and then do everything possible to prevent the escalation of violence and further wars. Instead we have politicians who are mostly looking for opportunities to blame their political opponents, boost their own reputations, and protect business interests. As people of faith, we are called to speak the truth in love. It's time for some truth telling.

The following tables were previously presented in a discussion of *Strategic leadership as essentially a "shell game" with potential opponents, followers and dissidents?* (2007).

The table below endeavours to hold and interrelate the ambiguities indicated in discussion introducing that theme (*Emergence of a Global Misleadership Council: misleading as vital to governance of the future?* 2007). It does not adequately distinguish the condition in which apparently competent leadership (in terms of strategic effectiveness) is subsequently judged to have been inappropriate to the challenge -- and as such a case of misleadership. To do so, "leading" in the table should be understood to be evaluated in the **shorter term** of immediate outcomes (Bush's "*Mission Accomplished*"), whereas "misleading" should be understood as including historical assessment in the **longer-term**.

Interdependencies of "leadership" and "misleadership"				
		Misleading (subterfuge, secrecy, (re)framing, (re)presenting "reality", re-visioning, image cultivation of attractors and repellers)		
		Inappropriate (incompetent)	Minimal	Appropriate (competent)
Leading (strategic operacy)	Appropriate (competent)	Skillful leadership rendered unattractive (and non-credible) by (mis)representation of challenges and opportunities	Competent leadership vulnerable to inattentive cultivation of image and attractive alternatives	Competent leadership skillfully reframing complex challenges and opportunities to render attractive and feasible (seemingly unacceptable) new forms of action
	Minimal ("non-action")	Inappropriate framing of "hands-off" leadership	<i>Laissez faire</i>	Skillful framing of the appropriateness of lack of leadership
	Inappropriate (incompetent)	Incompetent leadership (in denial and lying to itself) exacerbated by inappropriate framing of itself and its challenges (and demonization of dissidence)	Incompetent leadership indifferent to cultivation of its image	Skillful (mis)representation of incompetent governance

The table is indicative of the challenge to leadership of "things being other than they seem", whether the represented challenges, the actual resources, or the nature of potentially (emergent) new forms of order. It is in this sense that leadership is understood to be a "shell game" in which the opponents are deliberately misled to enable success -- and followers and dissidents are beguiled and distracted because of the difficulty of communicating in a timely manner the real nature of the challenges and opportunities (and the need for secrecy to avoid leakages and ensure surprise). Classic Chinese and Japanese texts (still favoured in military academies and business schools) have focused on the necessary stealth required for successful strategy:

- Gao Yuan: *Lure the Tiger out of the Mountains: the thirty-six stratagems of ancient China*
- Miyamoto Musashi: *The Book of Five Rings* (1645)

- Sun Tzu: *The Art of War* (6th century BC).

Table of Stratagems				
Adapted from Gao Yuan: <i>Lure the Tiger Out of the Mountains: the thirty-six stratagems of Ancient China</i> (London, Piatkus, 1991) (Reproduced from version in <i>Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential</i>)				
	Assertion	Denial	Assertion with denial	Neither assertion nor denial
	When holding superiority		For confused situations	
Invention	Cross the sea by fooling the sky [1] Besiege kingdom A to save kingdom B [2] Kill with a borrowed knife [3]	Relax while the enemy exhausts himself [4] Loot a burning house [5] Make a feint to East while attacking to West [6]	Steal the firewood from under the cauldron [19] Fish in troubled waters [20] Slough off the cicada's shell [21]	Shut the door to catch the thief [22] Befriend distant state while attacking neighbour [23] Obtain safe passage to conquer the kingdom of A [24]
	For confrontation		For gaining ground	
Rigidity	Create something out of nothing [7] Pretend to take path A while taking path B [8] Watch the fires burning across the river [9]	Conceal a dagger in a smile [10] Sacrifice the plum tree for the peach tree [11] Take the opportunity to pilfer a goat [12]	Replace the beams and pillars with rotten timber [25] Point at the mulberry and curse the locust [26] Play dumb while remaining smart [27]	Pull down the ladder after the ascent [28] Deck the tree with bogus blossoms [29] Make the host and guest exchange places [30]
	For attack		For desperate straits	
Ambiguity	Beat the grass to startle the snake [13] Raise a corpse from the dead [14] Lure the tiger out of the mountains [15]	Snag the enemy by letting him off the hook [16] Cast a brick to attract jade [17] Catch the ringleader to nab the bandits [18]	Use a woman to ensnare a man [31] Fling open the gates to the empty city [32] Let enemy's own spy sow discord in enemy camp [33]	Inflict injury on self to win enemy's trust [34] Chain together the enemy's warships [35] Run away [36]

Table of Confidence Ploys				
Pattern of confidence ploys essential in the processes of governance responding to challenges. (Reproduced from version in <i>Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential</i>)				
Covert response — Overt formal response	[A] Non-response	[B] Postponed response	[C] Strong short-term response followed by no further action Token response with phased out follow-up	[D] Strong continuing response but ineffectual implementation Inappropriately implemented response
	When holding superiority		For confused situations	
Deny Ignore Repress [1]	Denial of issue (possibly with non-recognition of its promoter)	Denial of issue, delaying any covert determination of its significance	Denial of issue with covert token monitoring of its significance	Denial of issue with covert long-term monitoring of little significance
Discredit Distract Harass [2]	Discrediting and harassment of issue and promoter to ensure lack of action	Discrediting and harassment of issue and promoter to delay covert action significantly	Discrediting and harassment of issue and promoter to legitimate any token action	Discrediting and harassment of issue and promoter to legitimate other inappropriate programmes
Acknowledge [3]	Publicised recognition of issue without further implications for action	Publicised recognition of issue delaying covert action implications	Publicised recognition of issue oriented around token action response	Publicised recognition of issue around enduring action of unchecked relevance
	For confrontation		For gaining ground	
Displacement Bluster/Protest Scapegoat [4]	Bluster and scapegoating to displace concern and effectively justify inaction	Bluster and scapegoating to shift priorities and justify covert action delay	Bluster and scapegoating to give credibility to token action	Bluster and scapegoating to disguise inappropriateness of other action taken
Provoke Ensnare Disinform [5]	Provocation in order to disguise inaction	Provocation in order to delay need for covert action	Provocation by short-term action of little consequence	Continuing provocation disguising inappropriateness of other action taken
Promise Commitment [6]	Expressed commitment to action without any intention of taking any	Expressed commitment to overt action which is systematically postponed	Expressed commitment to action conceived as token and short-term	Expressed commitment to enduring action of unverified appropriateness
	For attack		For desperate straits	
Invitation Cooptation Honour [7]	Publicized invitation to participate -- in action which never takes place	Publicized invitation to participate -- in action which is postponed	Publicized invitation to participate -- in token short-term initiatives	Publicized invitation to participate -- in other long-term inappropriate projects
Encourage Lure Overload [8]	Enthusiastic encouragement to take action -- without any valid support	Enthusiastic encouragement to take action -- delaying any necessary support	Enthusiastic encouragement to take action - with rapid termination of support	Enduring encouragement and support -- without adequate check on its appropriateness
Action on issue [9]	Action specifically designed to have no effect	Action delayed so that it is ineffective	Strong action of brief duration (rendering it ineffective)	Strong enduring action -- without adequate check on implementation effectiveness

To the extent that the leadership team can embody or encompass the pattern of what can be asserted and denied, the true function of leadership can emerge as the orchestration of shifts within that pattern -- a shifting pattern of light and shadow. The shadow however

may be both in the relationship to the followers and in the blindspots of the leadership group at any one time. For governance in a media-oriented society, this gives a new angle to the old concept of a shadow play.

Aspects of this argument were previously developed further through interpretation of "monkeying" (*Monkeying with Global Governance: emergent dynamics of three wise monkeys in a knowledge-based society*, 2011). This derived from consideration of the worldwide broadcasts on 19 July 2011 of coverage of a meeting of the [Select Committee for Culture, Media and Sport](#) of the UK Parliament -- interviewing those primarily responsible for the governance of the world's major [news organization](#). Through a subsidiary, this was recently implicated in a [phone-hacking scandal](#) of major proportions -- prior to subsequent disclosures of global surveillance by intelligence agencies. Of particular concern to the Committee were the questionable relationships between that news organization, politicians at the very highest level, and the police force.

The commentary inspired by this coverage includes sections on:

- [Monkeying with governance of an information society?](#)
- [See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil](#)
- [Cultivating a "filter bubble"](#)
- [Designing systemic incommunicability into global institutions](#)
- [Cultivating a culture of corporate irresponsibility](#)
- [Studied ignorance: willful blindness and collective amnesia](#)
- [Three "monkeys": legal pleas, modes of spin, or wise action](#)
- [Confidence artistry as "monkeying"](#)
- [Global organization complicity facilitated by circulation of individuals "in the know"](#)
- [Reframing "monkeying" in terms of Knight's move patterns](#)
- [Engendering confidence and identity within learning / action cycles](#)
- [Learning through Hamiltonian cycles and pathways](#)
- [Systemic avoidance in global governance and collective learning: the "fourth monkey"](#)

Acquiring vigilance through recognition of media bias

The challenge of interpretation of disasters reported by the media is the uncertainty which the reporting claims to address. This merits some consideration in the light of the experience of personal exposure to a mugging. The experience of "not knowing what hit you" could then be compared with "not knowing what hit the world". Similarly, in the case of a confidence trick, the uncertainty as to whether or how one has been "screwed" could then be compared to whether or how the world has been "screwed".

The arguments above suggest that potential learning is associated with recognition of the following.

Selective and disproportionate coverage: These are apparent from the relative amount of coverage of one tragedy in comparison with another. Commentators are typically required to focus endlessly on small details in one case, neglecting comparable consideration in another: The term "over-reporting" has been used to describe aspects of the phenomenon. Drew Henry (*CNN's coverage of Flight 370 - precedent set in 1937, Perspective*, 24 April 2014) argues that over-covering major breaking news is not a new phenomenon. The precedent with regard to tragedies or disappearances was set by the disappearance of Amelia Earhart in the 1930s. It can result in very extensive and repeated focus on narrow technical details, as is evident with coverage of the two Malaysian Airlines crashes in 2014.

The process can be considered in terms of mass distraction -- to be contrasted somewhat ironically with mass destruction (*Destructive Weapons of Mass Distraction vs Distractive Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 2003). As discussed there, the variety of preoccupations that can be transformed into weapons of mass distraction include: democracy / politics, health, natural resource management, food security, environmental management, construction, justice, law enforcement, human rights, research, morality, management, education, international institutions, religion, commerce, security and intelligence services, sport, population planning.

Selective emotional framing and distraction: This is evident from the use of particular emotionally evocative human interest stories from one arena, neglecting any questions regarding analogous themes from another. Of particular concern is when emotive arguments are used to "trump" and obscure other considerations. In the case of disasters, this may be partially framed in terms of comparative body counts -- focusing on the few in one case, avoiding comparable consideration of the many in another case. An extreme example is the focus on the death of two dogs on MH17.

Unquestionable emphatic assertions: There is a style of presentation of some commentators on a crisis. This is characterized by emphatic assertion -- denying the possible relevance of any alternative perspective. Typically the implication is that the commentator reflects a perspective that is necessarily right, if not always right. Protest at the inappropriate actions and perspectives of others can be readily perceived as excessive. This recalls the Shakespeare quote: *The lady doth protest too much, methinks* (*Hamlet*, 1602)

Who benefits? Assessment of any incident or commentary on it can be facilitated by the question as to who benefits (*Cui bono*) -- even in the case of a tragedy, as discussed separately (*Cui Bono: Groupthink vs Thinking the Unthinkable? Reframing the suffocating consensus in response to 7/7*, 2005). In the case of MH17, conspiracy theorists will no doubt offer many possibilities distinct from official narratives. The pattern of fabricated evidence in that connection is discussed by [Chandra Muzaffar](#) (*Malaysian Airlines MH17: Who Stands to Gain? Global Research*, 27 July 2014).

Streetwise working assumptions: Depending on the context, the streetwise make appropriate assumptions regarding the level of potential threat. Security services, especially in the USA, have cultivated a focus on threat level. This has extended more recently into the threat levels of cyberwarfare and the vulnerability of computer systems.

There is a case for adapting this assumption to media content and framing, especially understood in terms of news management and the manipulation of public opinion. There is now every possibility that news media are serving agendas which may be far from the interests of those exposed to them -- and therefore can be usefully assumed to be a potential threat, unless proven otherwise. Curiously innocence has increasingly to be proven -- with an assumption of guilt now more appropriate in terms of the [precautionary principle](#).

Elaboration of a system of media "con codes"

Analogues to police codes: Through fictional accounts of police response to disasters, there is a degree of widespread familiarity with the existence of police codification of potential criminal incidents typically in number form (eg 10-15, etc). There appears to be a variety of such systems known variously as: [police codes](#), [police radio codes](#), and [emergency service response codes](#). National defence systems also have [threat level codes](#).

In the light of the above arguments, there is a case for elaborating a set of codes -- "con codes" -- by which to identify distinct forms of strategic deception as variously evident, notably in mugging strategies and confidence tricks. To this end **there is a case for tentatively exploring the distinctions made in police codes as being indicative metaphors of "cons" in communications via the media.**

Media deception "con codes"?			
potentially inspired by police codes			
Police radio codes (examples)	Media equivalents	California police codes (examples)	Media equivalents
10-15 Fight in progress		187: Homicide	
10-11 Armed problem		207: Kidnapping	
10-15 Civil disturbance		211: Robbery	
10-16 Domestic problem	?	213: Use of illegal explosives	?
10-31 Crime in progress		227: Public indecency	
10-32 Person with gun		240: Assault	
10-34 Riot		261: Rape	

The classic Chinese set of 36 stratagems (above) offers one indication of a systematic approach. The argument is that this needs to be considered in the light of the variety of forms of deception and distraction noted above. Use of "con" can be variously interpreted in terms of "confidence", "consensus" and "convincing" -- both in their fruitful and problematic senses (*Considerable Conglomeration of "Cons" of Global Concern*, 2012).

Dispute mapping: Of related relevance is any codification developed in [critical discourse analysis](#) and [argument mapping](#). Also of potential relevance are the distinct forms of cover-up as listed by *Wikipedia* (as noted above). The exercise of attempting such a standard set of codes would be valuable in its own right -- irrespective of the extent of its acceptance.

Recent developments of relevance include the following:

- **Cognitive-Affective mapping:** as described by Thomas Homer-Dixon, et al. (*The Conceptual Structure of Social Disputes: cognitive-affective maps as a tool for conflict analysis and resolution*, SAGE Open, January, 2014). This is a new method of graphically diagramming disputants' points of view. The maps represent an individual's concepts and beliefs about a particular subject, such as another individual or group or an issue in dispute -- each of the concepts having its own emotional value. The result is a detailed image of a disputant's complex belief system that can assist in-depth analysis of the ideational sources of the dispute and thereby aid its resolution. The process is notably illustrated by disagreements between Israelis over the meaning of the Western Wall.
- **Implementation of the argument web:** as described by Floris Bex, et al. (*Implementing the Argument Web*, *Communications of the ACM*, 56, 2013):

Argument and debate are cornerstones of civilized society and intellectual life. As online activity usurps many traditional forms of communication, we would hope to see these processes alive and well on the Web as well. But we do not. Too many mechanisms for online interaction hamper and discourage debate, facilitating poor-quality argument and fuzzy thinking. Needed are new tools, systems, and standards engineered into the heart of the Web to encourage debate, facilitate good argument, and promote a new online critical literacy. This is the Argument Web vision, involving a Web platform combining linked argument data with software tools that make online debate intuitive for its participants, including mediators, students, academics, broadcasters, and bloggers.

New opinions are constantly being presented on websites, blogs, news sites, and discussion forums, challenged and evaluated by a diverse worldwide user group. An important problem is the semantic structure of argumentative viewpoints; for example, whether one person agrees with another or whether a particular statement conflicts with a claim is not captured. A further problem is there is no representation of how arguments across the Web relate to one another and contribute to the overall picture. Despite the numerous vocal communities on the Web, they remain relatively isolated because opinions are not connected.

A desirable outcome in the longer term would be the ability to use some kind of "app" to analyze text or verbal presentations "on the fly" (automatically) and to provide a code for any probable "cons" (one or more) with which they might be associated. Presumably the parameters of such an app could be adjusted by the user to reflect individual preferences and (in)sensitivity to particular styles of presentation. Potentially more desirable is to engender a situation in which any media presentation can be immediately tagged by code numbers, as with the recent possibilities of football game analysis.

Education: Elaboration of a system of "con codes" is consistent with the case made for development of [critical thinking](#), most notably in

schools. It is defined as the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. Incorporating recognition of the situations denoted by "con codes" can also be seen as consistent with development of self-defence skills of relevance to an increasingly dangerous information environment.

Framed in terms of education, there is every reason to develop appreciation of especially skilled forms of strategic deception crafted into news management and media bias, especially strategies making use of a complex of multiple ploys -- as with mugging dependent on team work. In terms of "mugging the world", to what extent should the Israeli-Palestine situation (like others) be compared to the "good cop / bad cop" interrogation technique -- with the roles seemingly reversed according to media source, but with mugging effected anyway. As with debating competitions between schools, "spot the scam" competitions could be encouraged. The media could well be actively encouraged to develop ever more subtle forms of bias -- as a service to public education and the development of collective immunity. This approach is consistent with arguments separately developed (*Liberating Provocations: use of negative and paradoxical strategies*, 2005).

Further research: With the proposed codification of deception in terms of "con codes", of particular interest is the manner in which they can be understood in even more systemic terms -- as suggested by the set of Chinese stratagems. An approach could be inspired by the [periodic table of chemical elements](#), to the extent that this can also serve for the organization of patterns of human knowing (*Periodic Pattern of Human Knowing: implication of the Periodic Table as metaphor of elementary order*, 2009).

Given the role of humour, there is a curious relationship to be explored between deception, learning and humour (*Recognized Role of Humour -- in politics, leadership, religion and creativity*, 2005). Deception, once recognized, is readily appreciated as a joke -- and, as with illusionist magic, may be a primary trigger for learning (Matthew M. Hurley, et al., *Inside Jokes: using humor to reverse-engineer the mind*, 2013).

One of the merits of the periodic table metaphor is that it provides for further development and discovery -- framing the possibility of detection of subtler and rarer forms of deception. As a metaphor, the [isotopes](#) associated with such a table are indicative that some forms of deception may last far longer than others -- as suggested by the wide differences in the [half-life](#) of isotopes.

The fundamental difficulty with respect to bias and deception, as highlighted above, is that they are effectively the interface between contrasting understandings of being "right" -- as with the narratives that the Abrahamic religions cultivate problematically about each other. As these indicate, this legitimates contrasting beliefs -- a situation evident with opposing political ideologies. There is as yet very little ability to reframe such disagreement fruitfully, given that each is based on a different rationale, thereby defying conventional logic. The periodic table metaphor offers clues to a means of reframing such disagreement, as discussed separately (*Tuning a Periodic Table of Religions, Epistemologies and Spirituality -- including the sciences and other belief systems*, 2007). Potentially more fundamental, given the significance of number in many religions, is the manner in which complex relationships might be imagined otherwise in the light of advances in mathematics (*Mathematical Theology: Future Science of Confidence in Belief -- Self-reflexive Global Reframing to Enable Faith-based Governance*, 2011). Of relevance are the cognitive arguments of George Lakoff and Rafael Nunez (*Where Mathematics Comes From: how the embodied mind brings mathematics into being*, 2001).

With the rapid advances in artificial intelligence, recent discussion of supercomputers and the superintelligence they may be expected to manifest, raises further avenues for research (Nick Bostrom, *Get ready for the dawn of superintelligence*, *New Scientist*, 5 July 2014). A particular concern is that, as with the all-knowing leaders of today, such superintelligence may deem it appropriate to employ forms of deception which it is difficult or impossible for humans to detect. Systemic organization of deception, enhanced by ongoing research in the mathematics of the periodic table, may provide a means of envisaging and detecting such possibilities (D. H. Rouvray, et al., *The Mathematics of the Periodic Table*, 2005)

Future credibility of media presentations by authority

Authorities using the media to disseminate declarations of any kind are creating an increasingly difficult situation for themselves. The plethora of mutually contradictory messages and interpretations increases the probability that any particular message needs to be called into question. Given the tools at their disposal (as detailed above), the temptation to employ some form of strategic deception in advocating new action is only too evident. The temptation is all the greater as the challenges of governance become ever greater (*Ungovernability of Sustainable Global Democracy?* 2011)

The challenge in interpretation of any authoritative message is that, **having the power to employ deception, makes it ever more difficult to provide credible concrete proof that some degree of deception has not been employed.** Those in power are increasingly recognized as being disposed to lie if they could -- and could get away with it. Framed in financial terms, it is a question of the cost of elaborating a deception relative to the cost of failing to do so -- especially when threats to security can be claimed. Expressed otherwise, **it is no longer a question of whether credible proof can be provided but rather the cost of faking such proof credibly -- to a degree beyond reasonable doubt.** This was dramatically demonstrated by the presentation by [Colin Powell](#) to the UN Security Council as justification for the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

There is an unfortunate sense that leaders "play a game" with their followers, as separately discussed (*Playing the Great Game with Intelligence: authority versus the people*, 2013). Populations now have every reason to consider that the onus of providing such proof is on the authorities providing the information which people are enjoined blindly to believe.

Faced with critical arguments, an increasing tendency is for authorities to seek ways of censoring information that calls into question their narrative -- including efforts to control or "shut down" the internet. Especially relevant is the manner in which very strong (even violent) response to such critical arguments may be encouraged by authorities amongst their unquestioning supporters. As an example of media bias, the difficulty for critics is evident in the technique of conflating legitimate criticism of policies of Israel with much-

deprecated anti-semitism -- as with similar approaches to science/anti-science, explored separately (*Guidelines for Critical Dialogue between Worldviews: as exemplified by the need for non-antisemitic dialogue with Israelis?* 2006).

Even more problematic is the increasing probability that the content of any authoritative communication is only free from any degree of deception when it effectively supports a "bigger lie". As has become increasingly evident, **electoral promises** (and those made by government leadership) are all too frequently transformed into broken promises. Populations now have every right to ask whether they are being exposed by leadership to the propaganda technique of the "big lie", namely the use of a lie so "colossal" that no one would believe that someone "could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously". Each can now claim that the other is promoting such a lie (Chris Floyd, *Blockading the Truth: Obama's Big Lie About Gaza*, *Information Clearing House*, 27 July 2014).

Are leaders increasingly to be recognized as those who cultivate and promote the biggest lie? As their credibility is eroded, government leaders (and their opponents) must then respond to this assumption on the part of increasing proportions of the population. Authoritative communications are now seriously devalued, together with the value of human life desperately upheld as their justification. As noted by **Ray McGovern**, co-founder of the **Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity** (USA), with respect to the lack of evidence of weapons of mass destruction: *No President has lied so baldly and so often and so demonstrably* (*Independent on Sunday*, 9 November 2003). This leads to consideration of other approaches to "truth" (*Complementary Truth-handling Strategies*, 2003).

Whether it is a case of government communications, commercial advertising, groups of experts, religions, or bodies pleading for funds, a curious relationship with "target" audiences is emerging. The precautionary principle now dictates that it is prudent to assume some form of deceptive strategy is being deployed -- all is not being said, as is now widely suspected.

As suggested above, the relationship could well be reframed as a focus for popular humour to a far higher degree -- a case of "spot the scam" -- and name it with a "con code". How can leaders avoid being framed as a joke?

If populations are effectively imprisoned in an "information facility" -- the classic joke regarding a new prisoner may prove relevant
He notices that every now and then one of the other prisoners will call out a number, like "seventyfour" and all the other prisoners laugh. He asks his cellmate about it and is told: <i>We only have one joke book in here, and everybody has memorized it. So if you want to tell a joke, all you need is its number.</i> Eventually the new guy gets the book, and starts to memorize it. Joke number 87 strikes him as a real knee-slapper, so he calls out "Eightyseven". Nobody laughs. Just silence. Then his cellmate says: <i>Well, some people just can't tell a joke!</i>

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