

Call for Papers: Mis/disinformation and the artifices of authenticity and authentication | ICA 2023 Pre-Conference

By Digital Democracies Institute

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The construction of authentic-feeling yet untrue information, content, experiences, and relations is central to successful mis/disinformation campaigns. The most outrageous lies can catalyze opinions, behaviours and actions—as long as they appear authentic in spirit, or come from a place or person that feels authentic. Authenticity is the lever of the mis/disinformation complex: it is cultivated and maintained through investments in mass-personal social networks (Gehl & Lawson, 2022) that articulate together Russian bots and Donald Trump, global conspiracies and one's mundane chats. They channel interest in the health benefits of oregano oil into paranoia about covert mass chip implants through vaccination campaigns.

National and global mis/disinformation networks rearticulate authenticity within local contexts while leveraging social media techniques and content. Such industries of mis/disinformation are linked to violent and subtle forms of erasure, othering, and denial, from the rejection of and attacks against the inauthentic human according to fascist logics (Bratich, 2022), to the deadly denial of basic realities like climate change or the benefits of masking during an air-borne pandemic. Thus the rejection of most values and realities as inauthentic in network cultures fuels cynicism, and motivates shitposting, trolling, and bullshitting. Yet the contradiction of these reactionary postures is that they can only perpetuate the very desire for authenticity that they deny.

The industry of mis/disinformation comes in to fill in that breach: it invests in new distributions of the sensible (Rancière, 2019) and establishes relations of absolute trust within homophilic networks and communities of the same (Chun, 2021). It also outwardly delegitimizes the suffering of others and inwardly deadens and represses any true sense of empathy towards an Other. After dismantling and reassembling the socio-psychological experience of users in such fashion, the

industry of mis/disinformation turns towards justifying and legitimizing fear and hatred by articulating them with other social emotions, formulating explosive cocktails of affective intensities that fill in for the yearning for authenticity.

Traditional affective structures are reworked to face threats: fear for oneself, one's family and one's future about to be destroyed by enemies near and close. In response to these threats, the networked and physical spaces of encounters with radically different others become the dangerous thing from which to turn away, with many users channelling their affects instead towards nationalistic pride, anger and revenge, blind trust in one's closed off community, and quasi-religious ecstasy in communing with like-minded people. In summary: fabricated mis/disinformation involves the construction of felt, visceral experiences that are then defined as authentic.

Through this, authenticity becomes an artifice with direct affective and emotional impact. Mis/disinformation is not just about troubling notions of truth and facticity to destabilize rational democratic communication, but about the production of performances of authenticity both mundane and spectacular. These performances establish norms and practices of authentication - how something comes to be perceived as authentic by a receiving party. And these artifices take on multiple forms, from rhetorical performances to the labour of algorithmic recommendations, from CGI to discursive norms. They mobilize proxies; technical, discursive and cultural norms; sociotechnological affordances; bodies; and cognitive and non-cognitive processes. They feed off and ride on affective, cultural and informational dynamics, which they organize through fast responding junctures and disjunctures, linking disparate data points into clusters that then gain greater network visibility and therefore normalization, all the while constantly refashioning themselves to respond to informational flows and cultural and political reactions.

For this pre-conference, we seek critical explorations of authenticity and authentication as they relate to digital manipulation and digital artifice.

- How is authenticity in turn caught, created, faked, authenticated and managed through digital assemblages?
- How is it both constructed as a felt experience, as well as machinized through automated recognition patterns?
- If authenticity is key to misinformation, then what kind of interventions can we imagine to question, and undermine such articulation?

- What new algorithms of authenticity (Chun 2021) could we imagine and deploy?

We are particularly interested in research that examines the fabrication of digitally mediated authentic experiences, be they non-conscious and habitual, or spectacular and deeply meaningful. We are interested in research that explores how objects and persons come to be seen and experienced as authentic and inauthentic, which includes paying attention to how authenticity - in its affective, emotional, non-conscious and cognitive dimensions - is constructed via technical affordances, media habits, political rhetoric, mass-personal communication, network rhythms, recommendation algorithms and targeted campaigns. Equally, we are interested in work that critically and creatively challenges the articulation of authenticity with misinformation.

We welcome a wide array of methodological approaches - qualitative, quantitative, speculative, creative, participatory, collaborative and others. We are open to different formats of intervention, from traditional papers to research-creation. We also welcome proposals for short workshops (1 hour length), demonstrations and other modes of collaborative inquiries.

Deadline: Please submit 150-200 words abstract to **ICA2023Preconf@gmail.com** by December 20, 2022. Notices of acceptance will be sent on 11 January 2023.

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