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and follow-up work
with SMIRNOV*

COMPUTER PSYCHOTECHNOLOGY - Dr. I. V. Smirnov -

Dr. Smirnov presented his work in using computers to aid in psychoanalysis. Dr. Smirnov and members of his institute have developed software that provides insight into the psychological makeup of a person based on their subconscious responses to computer generated subliminal images. The person under evaluation wears an electroencephalograph (EEG) helmet and watches a computer screen. Images are placed on the screen for a time duration too short to recognize at the level of consciousness. The response of the individual to the subliminal images is recorded by the EEG for future computer processing.

Dr. Smirnov claimed that the results from his computer-aided psychoanalysis method had been used to put together a team of six women skiers who were on a long distance arctic ski trip involving an extended period of time together under confining conditions. He also stated that his computer approach had been used successfully with children who were retarded and disabled in ways that made conventional methods of psychoanalysis impractical.

One of the key features of the computer-aided psychoanalysis method developed by Dr. Smirnov was that the results of processing the EEG outputs revealed the truth about the motivating factors of an individual. The technology offered by Dr. Smirnov was said to be useful in determining such things as basic information about a person, actual memory content of a person (including information that the individual tried to hide), and major behavioral motives of a person (goals, addictions, criminal and antisocial desires, etc.) It was said that while a polygraph detected lies, the computer-aided process developed by Dr. Smirnov detected truth.

Several constructive uses of this technology were offered, including those given below:

- Stress reduction,
- Neurotic status treatment,
- Forecasting a person's behavior during extreme situations, *politicians, military officers*
- Selection of persons for special teams,
- Selection of personnel seeking employment, and
- Truth analysis during jury trials.

In addition to the diagnostic aspects of Dr. Smirnov's work, progress was claimed in the development of psychocorrective treatment and attitude modification using audio techniques. Thus, when undesired attitudes were uncovered, it was possible to correct them with audio treatment.

On Wednesday, 20 November 1991, around 9:00 p.m., three members of the team went to Dr. Smirnov's institute to conduct additional discussions on his computer-aided psychoanalysis and psychocorrective techniques. The institute was in Moscow and consists of about 200 people who live and work together in what begs to be described as a commune situation. The people appear to be dedicated to the work that they are doing and seem to be very concerned that the technology that they have developed not fall into the hands of people or organizations that would abuse it.

After a brief discussion about the institute, an offer was made to demonstrate the computer-aided psychoanalysis technique to us by having one of us volunteer to a test session. One member of the team did volunteer and went to another building to take a demonstration psychological test on the person's feelings about names. While the team member was taking the test, the remaining team members continued to hold discussions with Dr. Smirnov and about eight of his associates.

About 45 minutes after leaving, the team member volunteer returned for continued discussions. A brief description was given of the process, which included reviewing a list of names and discarding names that were not liked (it turned out this was due to a mistake in translation, names that were not important were supposed to have been discarded—not names that were not liked). Additionally, the volunteer was asked to supply names that should be included on the list that were not present. As I recall, after this was done the EEG cap was put on, the lights were turned off, and a tape with noise was played to mask any background noise. The volunteer was asked to watch the screen and push the button on a remote switch every time that a word was recognized on the computer screen. Most of the time, a random sequence of letters was visible. Occasionally, a recognizable word would appear. The exercise of word recognition was believed to be a means of causing the volunteer to maintain a focus on the computer screen. The real work was going on in responses to subliminal images (names) that were present for periods too short to be recognized.

Once these discussions ended, a recommendation was made to go to the test building and get the results. When we got there, the computer was still processing data and there was an opportunity to discuss some aspects of what was going on inside the computer. I was told that the data from the EEG is noisy and needs to be filtered (apparently using FFTs) before follow-on processing can be done. After filtering, the data is subjected to some type of factor analysis which is followed by cluster analysis.

The computer processing algorithms are sufficiently sophisticated to determine which factors are important and in what way they are important. The computer decides what content should be plotted on which axis and what the nature of the axis should be. The processing is numerically intensive. I was told that the computer used for this processing was an IBM-compatible 80386 with a math coprocessor. If so, this was the only 80386 machine that I knowingly saw during the trip.

Once the processing was complete, we were all shown (with the volunteer's consent) the results of the person's attitude toward people's names. It turned out that the response to all names was between almost neutral (very slightly bad) to bad (i.e., the person did not have good feelings toward the names tested). While most of the names were bunched together, one of the names stood out as being far in the direction of a bad reaction. It turned out that this name was the name of the volunteer. The volunteer then produced a business card in which, interestingly enough, initials were used instead of the given names.

After the discussions of the demonstration test were completed, Dr. Smirnov described some of the work that had been done in the arena of psychocorrective treatment. He said that he was able to place subliminal messages in audio tapes that could change the way people thought or reacted to situations. Several cases were cited. In one case, a subliminal message was played through a ventilation pipe that went from the lab to an outside area where men were working. The message was for the men to walk around the side of the building, go downstairs, knock on the door, and ask for directions on what were they supposed to do. After some period of time (15-30 minutes I think), the men came downstairs to a place where they had not been before and asked what it was that they were supposed to do. In another case, Dr. Smirnov said that his mother-in-law was dying (of cancer) and was in such extreme pain that the strongest medication that they had to offer did no good. He said that he made a tape for her that allowed her to block the pain so that no medication was needed. This allowed her to have a more peaceful ending to her life.

Are these subliminal messages based on the EEG or can they be constructed independently?

The visit at the institute was a most interesting experience. The ending was also an interesting experience. When we finished our discussions, the drivers who took us to the institute had left. One of Dr. Smirnov's associates (student?) took us back to the hotel in his car, which was some type of mid-size GM product (Buick I think). The first time he stopped, the unmistakable sound of metal on metal could be heard. Like everything else in Moscow, if it's broke, it's broke. Charging through Moscow at midnight in a vehicle with a braking system consisting of a metal brake pad backing plate squeezing against a metal rotor was an experience I had not counted on having (but it beat walking).

The work being conducted by Dr. Smirnov and his associates impressed me as a technological advance somewhat like that of the atomic bomb. While I am making an assessment far from any claimed area of expertise, the notion of measuring subliminal responses with an EEG and processing the data using established sophisticated statistical algorithms to obtain information about a person seems plausible. It seems to me that a very powerful technology has been developed that has a tremendous potential for abuse and the results cannot be undone. Of course, the technology has a tremendous potential for doing good as well. I share the concerns that appeared to be expressed by the members of the institute that the tools that they have developed end up being used in a responsible manner.

During discussions toward the end of the night, I mentioned to one of the Russians that what we were seeing was equivalent to the development of an atomic bomb. The response was that it was much worse because "at least when an atomic bomb goes off you know it."

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt