Chapter 3

The Narratives of Neuroscience in Fiction as Propaganda Warfare

Kenneth James Boyte
Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, USA

ABSTRACT

Raising questions about ethics, transhumanism, national security, and the spread of Nazi science internationally following World War II, this qualitative study considers the possibility that the narratives of the biologically based study of the mind known as neuroscience in fiction—conceptualized as a medium of propaganda warfare embedded with socio-political and religious assumptions—have functioned to veil the development and promote the normalization and social acceptance of neuroscience since the dawn of the Scientific Revolution. With a focus on the intertwined relationship between the literary genre and technological innovations in the contest of “killer robots,” “ray guns,” “Skynet,” and now “brain implants,” this chapter examines how the narratives of an internet-connected-and-neural-electrode-dominated future world driven by artificial intelligence has inspired billionaire investors in Silicon Valley to bring to market the neurotechnology that potentially could enslave and wipe out the human race.
INTRODUCTION

Although science fiction is often critically analyzed for its functionality to warn against threats posed by futuristic technologies (Applebaum, 2010; Cooper, 2014; Sims, 2013)—such as artificial intelligence (AI) and “Skynet” depicted in the Terminator series (1984, 1991, 2003, 2009, 2015, 2019) (Packer, 2015), tech that has already crossed over from the realm of speculative fantasy to become science fact (Mamilt, 2017; Marcus, 2015; McLeary, 2018; Tucker, 2017)—this qualitative study—based on an analysis of open-source academic, government, and media reports—attempts to demonstrate that the narratives of science fiction, whether or not intended by authors—through psychological processes involving the veiling, concealing, blurring, and distorting of ideas (Belonsky, 2013; Beukes, et al., 2017; Cunningham, 2002; Nicholas, 2017; Raushenbush, 2011; Spufford, 2011)—have contributed to the militarization (Altmann, et al., 2013; Davis, 2008), as well as social acceptance and otherwise normalization—according to an opinion poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C. (Funk, Kennedy, & Sciupac, 2016)—of at least one product of the biologically based study of the mind known as neuroscience (Banich & Compton, 2018; Nordqvist, 2018): brain implants (Grand View Research, 2018; Okano, Miyawaki, & Kasai, 2015), also called microchips (Spector, 2014), neural dust (Marcus & Koch, 2014), and neural lace (Pilkington, 2017, p. 109), the dominant theme of several novels, movies, television programs, and comic books since World War II (e.g., Banks, 1988/2008; Clarke, 1956/2001; Crichton, 1972/2014; Gibson, 1984/2016; Istvan, 2013; Leuthardt, 2014) (See also Bloom, 2017; Kermode, 2004).

With applications for war and artificial intelligence (Giordano, 2016, 2017; Krishnan, 2016) that could wipe out human existence (Agence France Presse, 2017; Bostrom, 2016; Busby, 2018)—like the narratives of science fiction embedded with socio-political and religious assumptions (Berger, 2013; Stableford, 2006) that began in ancient Greece (Wood & Smith, 2005) and ramped up during the ‘Scientific Revolution’ of 16th-century Europe (Bacon, 1627/2015; Bertucci, 2006; Cintas, 2003; McKnight, 2006)—neuroscience today is especially of interest to military and civilian intelligence agencies (UK Ministry of Defense, 2013, 2014; UK Royal Society, 2012; U.S. National Research Council, 2008, 2009; U.S. National Research Council, National Academies of Engineering, 2014), who have turned to data-mining the storylines as a research methodology for avoiding strategic surprise (Alftberg & Bengtsen, 2018; Cole, 2017; Medich, 2018; U.S. Marine Corps, 2016), which, of utmost concern to this author, may unintentionally ‘open Pandora’s box’ or otherwise bring the ‘unthinkable’ into public discourse through the mental creation of linguistic pathways linking the past, present, and future in the creation of cultural memories.
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