The Architecture of Persuasion: Digital Media, the Spectrum of Propaganda, and the Recovery of Humanistic Judgment

Dr Neville Buch and MICE[1]

TOOL

Digital Encirclement & Cognitive Filter Diagnostic

Evaluate algorithmic feeds, media narratives, and campaign architectures by testing them against Dr. Neville Buch's Dynamic of Cognition (Prejudice, Exclusion, Inclusion) and Jacques Ellul's sociological propaganda matrix.

file:///C:/Users/nbuch/OneDrive/Documents/SUBMISSIONS/2026-11-22%20Propaganda/Images/Ideologies_and_Nuances.html

[1] Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) has been fairly used in the production of this work. The tool used is Google NotebookLM (recently rebranded as Gemini Notebook). It is an AI-powered virtual research assistant and thinking partner designed to help a person interact deeply with their own documents. Unlike general chatbots, it is source-grounded, meaning it only generates answers based on the specific PDFs, documents, or links uploaded. The A.I. process in the production of this work has been limited to the attached (prompts) on each of the questions in turn. This ensures an accurate reading of each source. The author then rearranged and re-edited the answers the A.I. provided. The human author publishes this work. A.I. is never an author when used properly. This assistance is not qualitatively different from a human research assistant when that assistance is deemed to have no authorial status but is acknowledged.

Abstract

Modern digital media architectures—ranging from algorithmic social media feeds to visual news broadcasts and audio current-affairs performances—have reconfigured how political messaging is produced, distributed, and consumed. This essay examines the nature and operation of propaganda in contemporary society, synthesizing Jacques Ellul's foundational sociological taxonomy of propaganda with Dr. Neville Buch's Dynamic of Cognition (DoC) framework, Harry Frankfurt's critique of "bullshit," and Bernard Stiegler's concept of denoetization . Beginning with a phenomenological examination of daily digital media engagement, the paper analyses the full spectrum of propaganda—differentiating between political and sociological, vertical and horizontal, agitation and integration, and rational and irrational modalities. It then resolves the epistemological problem of identification, demonstrating that while general structural criteria (such as orthopraxy, total encirclement, and administrative rule-enforcement) provide necessary baseline filters, definitive diagnosis requires meticulous contextual investigation of local particulars (*Erlebnis*). Finally, the essay articulates why unmasking propaganda is an existential civilizational imperative: it is essential for resisting algorithmic denoetization , protecting global noodiversity (*knowledge diversity*), and re-establishing Human Authorship over automated systems and corporate-political spectacles.

1. The Modern Media Spectacle: Scrolling, Viewing, and Listening in the Digital Feed

Daily engagement with contemporary news and current affairs rarely occurs through deliberate, unmediated reflection. Instead, it takes place across a continuous stream of visual and audio performances—scrolling through a Facebook News Feed, watching short-form video clips, and listening to serialized podcasts or radio broadcasts. This constant exposure to mediated performances raises fundamental questions regarding how public opinion is constructed and whether individual citizens retain authentic cognitive agency (McManus 2020, pp. 242–244).



Understanding history is philosophy in practice



As Jacques Ellul (1973, p. 11) noted in his seminal work *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* , modern media techniques do not operate through isolated, sporadic messages; they function through total encirclement . Propaganda surrounds the individual across all sensory channels—visual, auditory, and psychological—assailing both conscious reflection and unconscious desires (Ellul 1973, p. 11). In the digital age, this encirclement is exacerbated by automated platform architectures. As Matthew McManus (2020, p. 242) demonstrates, social media news feeds function as "hermetically sealed communication bubbles" where algorithmic feedback loops rank content not by empirical accuracy or logical coherence, but by its capacity to provoke emotional arousal and partisan engagement.

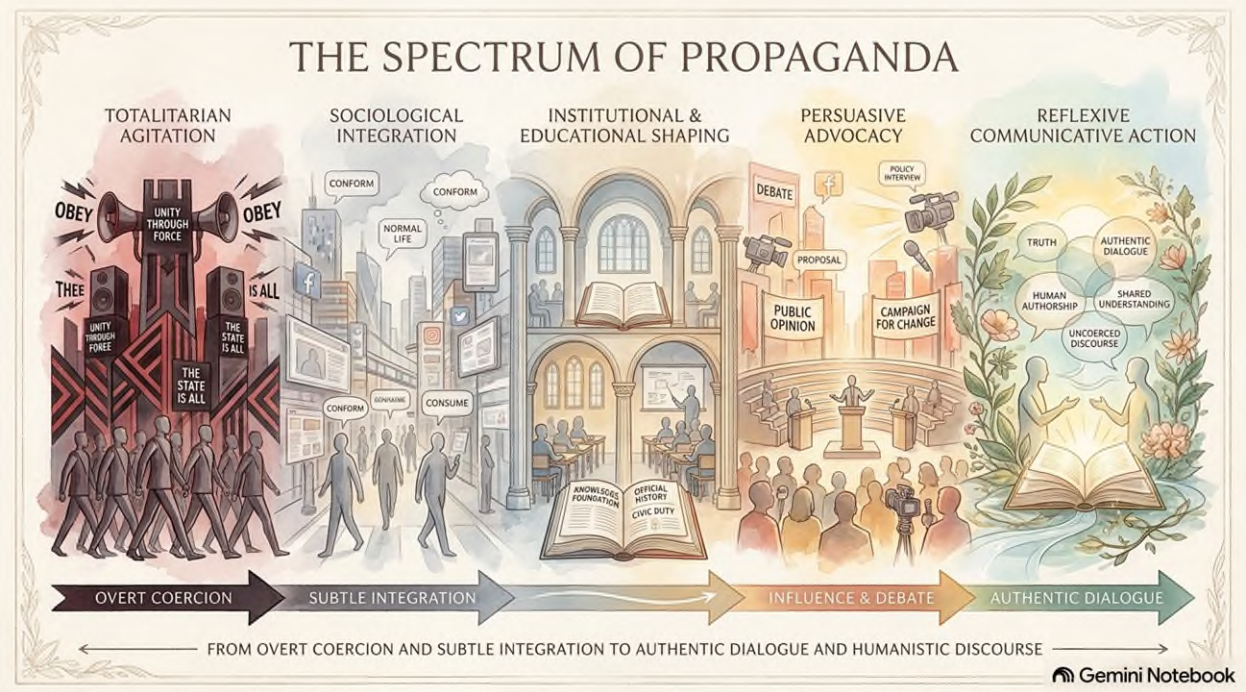
This media environment transforms news into a theatrical performance. Events are routinely displaced by "opinions about events," creating a hyperreality where political mouthpieces engage in bad-faith obfuscation and "truthful hyperbole" (McManus 2020, pp. 243–244). The citizen, acting as what Ellul terms the "current events man," becomes submerged in a rapid stream of ephemeral news items, losing connection with historical depth and contextual bearings (Ellul 1973, p. 38; Buch 2026, *Non-Religion* , p. 18).

In Dr. Neville Buch's (2026, *Architecture of Meaning* , p. 3) triadic epistemology, this mediated performance manifests as Modern Chatter —a category of confusion situated between concrete Context (localized particulars and lived experience) and General Rules (abstract codes and administrative procedures). Modern Chatter operates with complete indifference to truth; as defined by Harry Frankfurt (2005, p. 30), it is "bullshit" that mimics the form of rational

argument while stripping statements of their historical coordinates. When citizens consume news performance without critical diagnostic tools, they risk becoming passive conduits for pre-packaged slogans, succumbing to what Bernard Stiegler (2014, p. 1) terms denoetization —the mechanical liquidation of human judgment.

2. The Spectrum of Propaganda: From Direct Agitation to Ambient Integration

Understanding propaganda requires moving beyond obsolete 19th-century definitions that view it merely as overt political deceit or crude state censorship. Modern propaganda constitutes a sophisticated socio-technical spectrum that operates through distinct functional modalities (Ellul 1973, p. 25).



Analytical Taxonomy of Propaganda Modalities

To systematically map how propaganda shapes public consciousness, the table below synthesizes Ellul's (1973) paired taxonomy with Buch's (2026, *Non-Religion*) Dynamic of Cognition (DoC) framework:

Propaganda Modality Pair	Primary Mechanism & Target	Impact on Human Cognition & DoC Axis
Political vs. Sociological, Political	Calculated, top-down dissemination of political ideology by state or party actors to make policies acceptable (Ellul 1973, p. 64). Sociological : Ambient, unwitting penetration of an entire style of life through film, education, and cultural habits (Ellul 1973, p. 62).	Political propaganda drives immediate tactical compliance; Sociological propaganda operates on the Prejudice (Centre) axis, transforming unreflective cultural habits into unexamined natural facts (Buch 2026, Architecture of Meaning , p. 6).
Vertical vs. Horizontal, Vertical	Traditional mass-media broadcasting from political elites down to passive masses.	Horizontal : Peer-driven group dialectic springing up inside schools, community groups, or online filter bubbles (Ellul 1973, p. 80). Vertical propaganda imposes external authority; Horizontal propaganda traps the individual inside a group-sanctioned dialectic, reinforcing defensive Attitudes on the Thinking axis (Buch 2026, Non-Religion , p. 16).
Agitation vs. Integration, Agitation	Subversive mobilization provoking explosive crises, rebellion, or intense hatred against an enemy (Ellul 1973, p. 71).	Integration : Subtle, permanent reinforcement of cultural myths (Work, Nation, Progress) to ensure ongoing social stability (Ellul 1973, p. 74). Agitation propaganda exploits immediate emotional drives for rapid destruction; Integration propaganda induces denoetization , training citizens to accept administrative routines without complaint (Stiegler 2014, p. 1; Buch 2026, Non-Religion , p. 23).

Propaganda Modality Pair	Primary Mechanism & Target	Impact on Human Cognition & DoC Axis
Rational vs. Irrational, Rational	Presentation of verified statistics, technical charts, and factual data.	Irrational : Emotional mobilization utilizing latent fears, myths, and collective desires (Ellul 1973, p. 84). Rational propaganda provides the citizen with intellectual self-justification (I am obeying reason), while the underlying irrational pressure forces unreflective action (Ellul 1973, p. 84; Buch 2025, Dynamic of Cognition , p. 3).

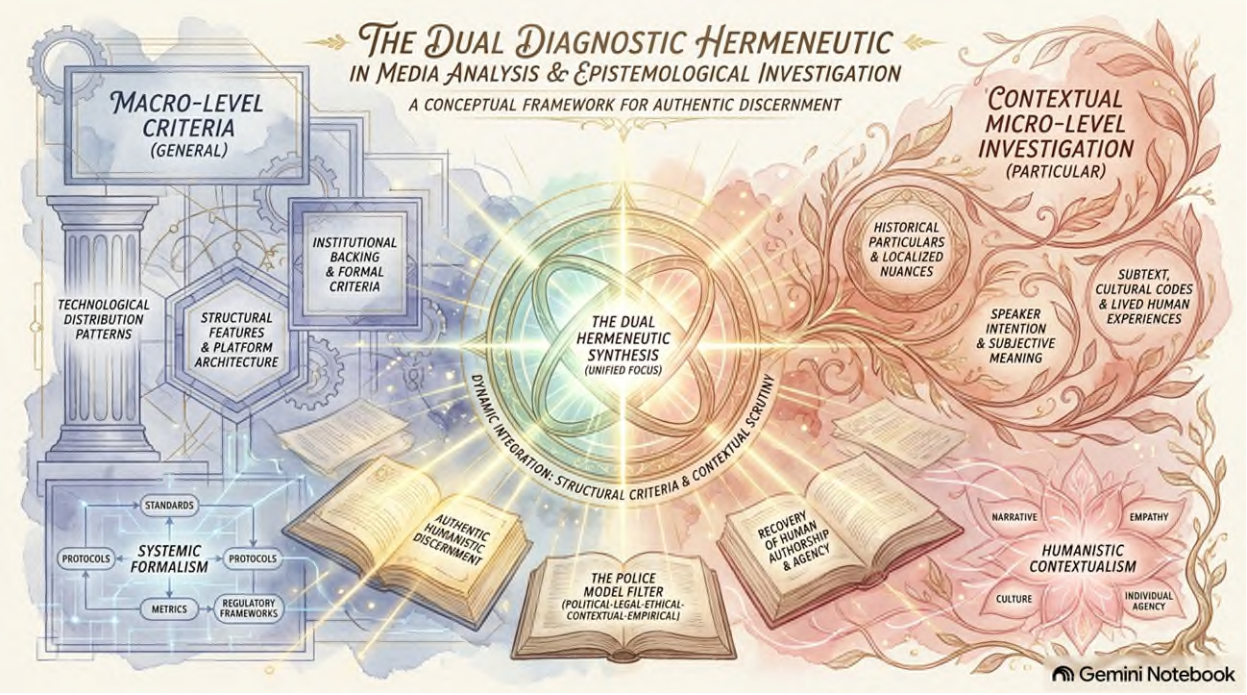
Orthopraxy Over Orthodoxy

A critical insight arising from this spectrum is that modern propaganda prioritizes orthopraxy over orthodoxy. As Ellul (1973, p. 25) emphasizes, modern techniques no longer aim merely to alter abstract beliefs; their primary goal is to provoke action or enforce passive compliance. Propaganda seeks to make the individual cling irrationally to a continuous process of activity—whether that involves voting, buying, sharing content, or acquiescing to legislative mandates.

In Dr. Buch's (2026, *Basic Social Psychology* , p. 14) cognitive framework, when propaganda succeeds, it converts human Attitudes —which should serve as revisable assessments of reality—into automatic, defensive habits. The individual is reduced to a "Junior" state of execution, acting as an unreflective node within a technocratic machine rather than a "Senior" agent capable of ethical accountability (*panser* / thinking as caring) (Buch 2026, *Model of Intellect* , p. 5; Buch 2026, *Non-Religion* , p. 17).

3. Diagnostic Continuum: General Criteria, Contextual Investigation, and the Dual Hermeneutic

A central epistemological dilemma facing media consumers and scholars is whether propaganda can be identified via universal, general rules, or whether diagnosis requires exhaustive contextual investigation.



The Limits of Purely General Criteria

Proponents of a purely general approach argue that propaganda can be identified by scanning for structural markers: total encirclement, heavy reliance on operational slogans, continuous repetition, and the activation of collective myths (such as the inevitable march of economic growth or national security) (Ellul 1973, pp. 39–40). Furthermore, diagnostic tools like Dr. Buch's POLICE Model (*Philosophically, Ontologically, Logically, Intersect, Compatibility, Education*) provide a systematic procedure for evaluating whether public messaging contains structural fallacies or institutional bullshit (Buch 2026, *Model of Intellect* , p. 2; Corwin 2026, *Epistemological Audit* , p. 5).

However, relying *exclusively* on general rules creates a severe category error. As Buch (2026, *Architecture of Meaning* , p. 1) warns, abstract rules detached from particulars do not constitute context. Applying general criteria mechanically leads to "wooden epistemology" and bureaucratic gatekeeping, where legitimate, highly passionate public advocacy or unorthodox scholarship is falsely labelled "propaganda" simply because it violates conventional institutional style guides (Luchel 2026, *Architecture of Meaning Review* , p. 1; Buch 2026, *Defeating Epistemic Evasion* , p. 1).

The Necessity of Contextual Investigation

Conversely, propaganda cannot be identified without examining localized Context —the specific historical coordinates, institutional motivations, and lived particulars (*Erlebnis*) surrounding a

statement (Toulmin 1990, p. 188; Buch 2026, *Architecture of Meaning* , p. 3). Contextual investigation requires distinguishing between an agent's internal psychological Motivation (fear, self-preservation, or financial gain) and their stated teleological Intention (validity claims regarding truth and rightness) (Buch 2026, *Architecture of Meaning* , p. 3).

For example, when political actors weaponize tragic events to push legislative overreach, general rhetoric may sound like normative care. Only contextual forensic analysis reveals that the underlying motivation is political opportunism designed to override statutory protections (Save Victoria Park 2025; Buch 2026, *Draft. Politicians* , p. 2). Contextual investigation relies on Bernard Williams' (1985, p. 120) thick ethical concepts (*truthfulness, sincerity, cruelty, betrayal*) that are simultaneously world-guided and action-guiding, anchoring judgment in concrete reality rather than abstract slogans.

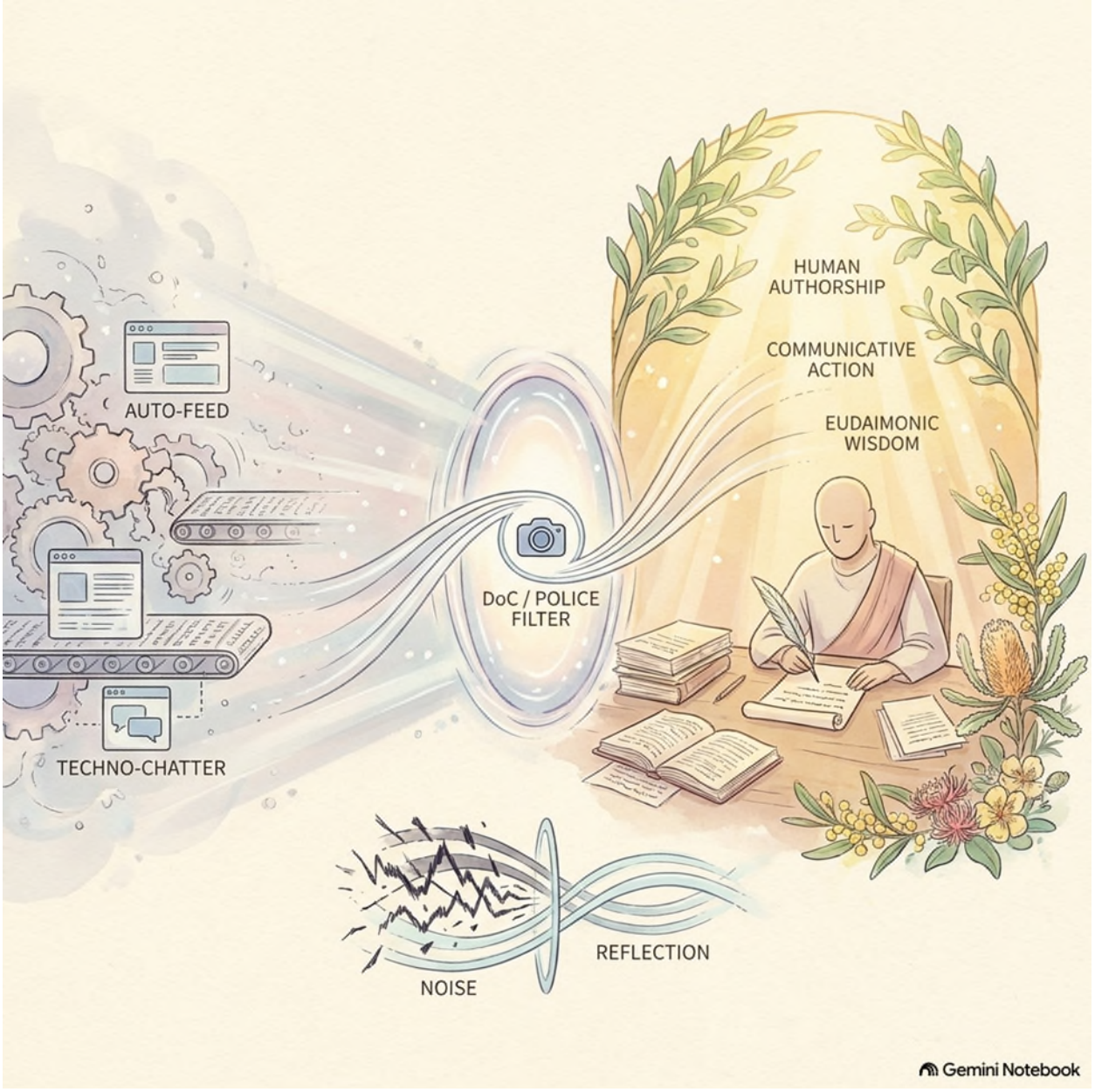
The Integrated Dual Perspective

The resolution lies in a dual hermeneutic that integrates general diagnostic criteria with contextual investigation. In Buch's *Dynamic of Cognition* model, this synthesis is executed through Stage 3: Diagnostic Exclusion ("Crap Detecting") (Postman & Weingartner 1969; Buch 2025, *Applications in Liberalism* , p. 24).

Diagnostic exclusion functions as a permeable filter. It applies general structural heuristics (such as the POLICE filter and Frankfurtian bullshit detection) to flag suspicious messaging, while immediately initiating deep, contextual inquiry into historical patterns via Spiral Historiography (Buch 2025, *Applications in Liberalism* , p. 12). This dual perspective prevents both generalist administrative tyranny and localized epistemic subjectivism, allowing the investigative scholar—acting as a "reflexive insider"—to definitively separate genuine communicative action from manipulative propaganda (Habermas 1991b, p. 120; Buch 2026, *Non-Religion* , p. 17).

4. Why This Message Is Important: Resisting Denoetization and Restoring Human Authorship

Unmasking the spectrum of propaganda and mastering the dual diagnostic hermeneutic is not an academic exercise; it is an urgent requirement for civilizational health.



Resisting Denoetization and Symbolic Misery

The pervasive nature of modern media feeds threatens society with denoetization —the systematic destruction of human cognitive discernment caused by an over-reliance on automated routines, algorithmic recommendations, and pre-packaged slogans (Stiegler 2014, p. 1; Buch 2026, *Non-Religion* , p. 23). When citizens absorb propaganda passively, they fall into Symbolic Misery , a state of spiritual and intellectual impoverishment where human judgment is delegated to technological systems (Stiegler 2014, p. 15; Buch 2025, *Applications in Liberalism* , p. 17). Teaching citizens to identify propaganda provides an "intellectual immune

system," breaking the "closed loops" of unreflective automaticity (Buch 2026, *Non-Religion* , p. 20).

Protecting Global Noodiversity

Propaganda, particularly in its sociological and integration modalities, operates as a flattening force that enforces cultural conformity and "singular messaging" (Ellul 1973, p. 62; Buch 2026, *Non-Religion* , p. 24). This commercial and political homogenization destroys noodiversity —the diversity of localized knowledge, regional historical memoryscapes, and distinct philosophical traditions (Stiegler 2014; Buch 2026, *Non-Religion* , p. 20). Resisting propaganda protects the rich pluralism of human thought against both bureaucratic state monopolies and market-driven anti-intellectualism (Hofstadter 1963; Buch 2023f; Buch 2026, *Non-Religion* , p. 10).

Restoring Human Authorship and Communicative Action

Ultimately, understanding propaganda enables the recovery of Human Authorship . It re-anchors human beings ("Who") as the proactive, reflective masters of technical and communication systems ("What"), rather than allowing them to be reduced to "puny human nodes" in an automated network (Buch 2026, *Basic Social Psychology* , p. 4; Buch 2026, *Non-Religion* , p. 20).

By transitioning from baseline *Prejudice* through diagnostic *Exclusion* ("crap detecting") to horizon *Inclusion* , individuals achieve Habermasian Communicative Action —engaging in open, rational-critical dialogue aimed at mutual understanding and undamaged intersubjectivity (Habermas 1991b, p. 120; Buch 2026, *Covenantal Hermeneutics* , p. 32). In doing so, society moves away from manipulative political spectacle toward authentic human flourishing (*eudaimonia*), ethical care (*panser*), and Planetary Wisdom (Rovero 2024, p. 147; Buch 2026, *Non-Religion* , p. 20).

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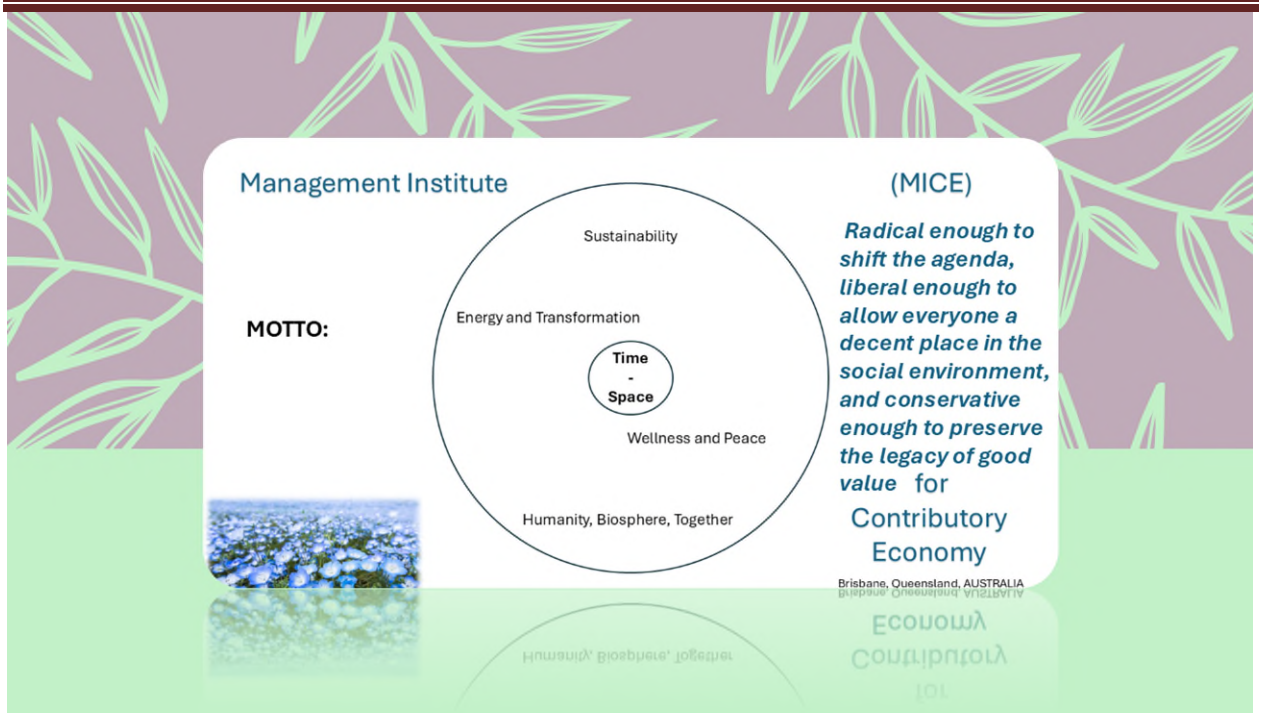
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