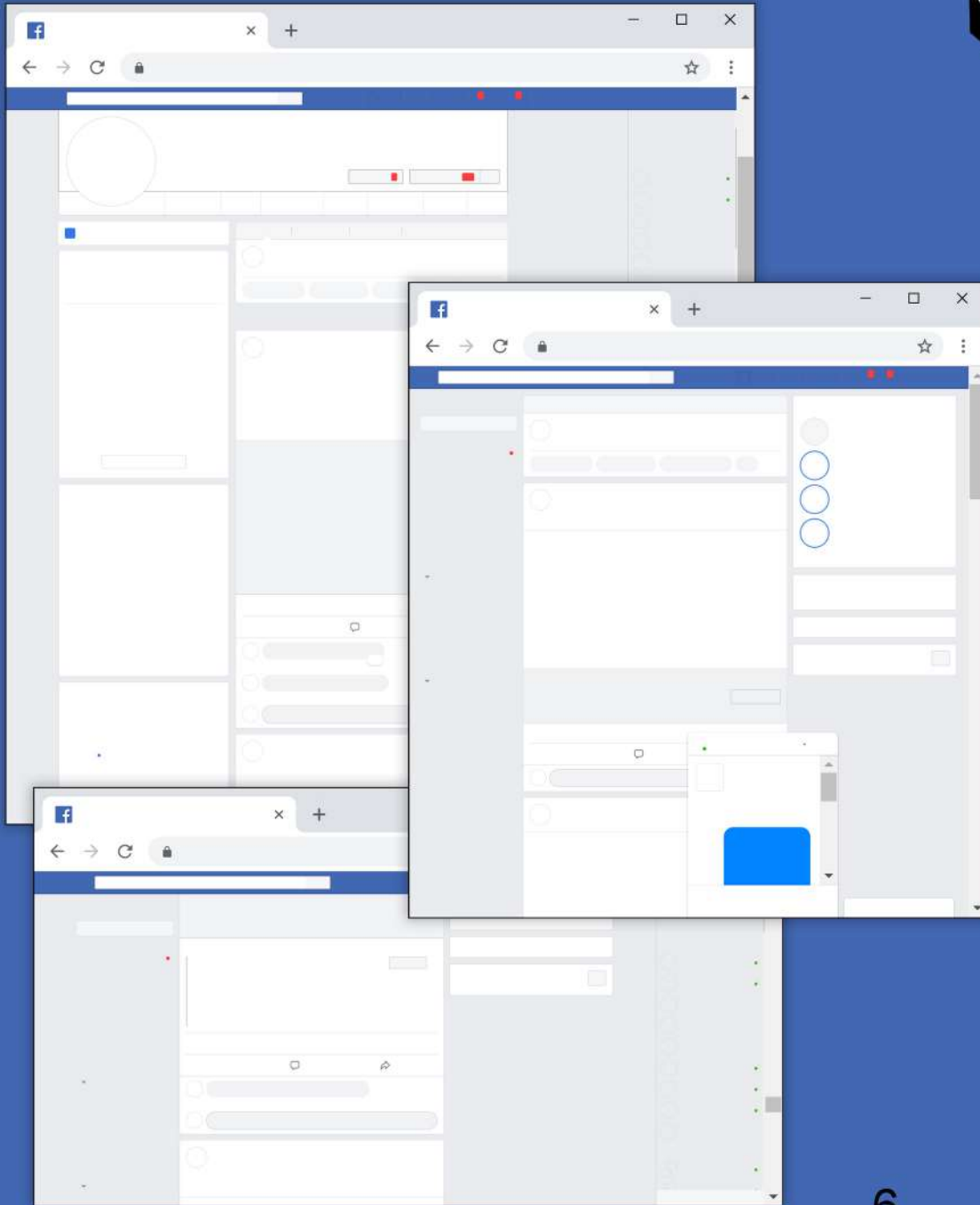


IS THIS IT?



ISTHISIT? ISSUE 6



ISTHISIT?

isthisit? issue 6

Published by isthisit?
www.isthisitisthisit.com

Edited and designed by Bob Bicknell-Knight
www.bobbicknell-knight.com

Printed by Mixam

© 2019 Bob Bicknell-Knight, isthisit?
All rights reserved, including the right
of reproduction in whole or in part in
any form.

Contents

5

[Introduction](#)

Bob Bicknell-Knight

7

[Went for Netflix & Chill - Ended up with a Law Degree](#)

Beverley Gadsden

14

[REGNUM, or a Travel Report](#)

Natalya Serkova

19

[A Murder of Crows, A Scourge of News: What happens when real news becomes fake, science fiction becomes fact, and your host becomes a font of jokes?](#)

Susie Kahlich

26

[Standing Atop the E-Agora](#)

Vanessa Kowalski

31

[Narrative Ruins: Storytelling in the Age of Density](#)

Andrea Khôra

46

[Artworks](#)

AES+F, Diann Bauer, Amanda Beech, Bob Bicknell-Knight, Kirsten Cooke, Sandrine Deumier, Ollie Dook, Raphaël Fabre, Tom Galle, Thomas Grogan, Benjamin Grosser, Melanie Jackson, Ayesha Tan Jones, Botond Keresztesi, Andrea Khora, Hun Kyu Kim, Tomasz Kobialka, Pil & Galia Kollektiv, Jonas Lund, Eva and Franco Mattes, Paula Morison, Claire Potter, Tai Shani, Linda Stupart, Lynton Talbot, Charlie Godet Thomas, Frank Wasser, Trystan Williams and Thomas Yeomans.

72

[Pliant Apparatus](#)

Brianna Leatherbury

78

[Fake News is Old News or The rise of media hacking](#)

Mathias Jansson

82

[Where have I seen you before?](#)

Alif Ibrahim

87

[Everything Stays](#)

Bob Bicknell-Knight

90

[The Future of Virtual Nature](#)

Erin Mitchell

95

[Fake News](#)

Ami Clarke

102

Credits

Introduction

The forthcoming pages contain artworks and essays that make up the sixth issue of the *isthisit?* book series. Over the past few years the series has touched upon a variety of topics, from the rise of memes and appropriation on the internet to how forms of Artificial Intelligence have and will continue to be utilised within homes and various industries throughout the world. This issue considers the importance of the news, questioning why fake news and alternative facts have become throwaway catchphrases, overwhelming and frightening to the mainstream media whilst enabling small groups and organisations to spark outrage and anger by manipulating imagery and falsifying realities.

Corporations have become unreliable and untrustworthy to the average user due to the proliferation of fake and unassessed news stories that appear on our social media timelines and across a variety of pre-purchased ad space. Legitimate news outlets are hungry to be the first to feed on the corpse of a fresh piece of news, quickly turning to scraps and clickbait as lesser known, illegitimate websites and papers swoop in to create meme-filled articles on death and destruction, focusing on the worst, most readable aspects of our society.

Since the advent of the 24-hour news cycle, media organisations have been forced to compete, leading to a severe decline in journalistic standards and quality news reporting, moving towards sensationalism, entertainment and opinion, and away from verification, relevance, depth and quality of interpretation.

This issue seeks to bring together works and writings critiquing, commenting and reflecting upon the rise of the media circus, documenting the decline in the relevance and reliability of the news and wondering whether citizen journalism is a worthy replacement.

Went for Netflix & Chill - Ended up with a Law Degree

Back in 2014 one of my friends became an RSPCA inspector. As a response, and my way of congratulating her, I posted on her Facebook wall any BBC news article I came across involving an animal, the more bizarre the better. Headlines included such titles as; 'I was stupid' says horse punch man', 'Brazilian falling cow kills man', 'Ambulance called for dead Epping Forest squirrel' 'Vicious fox traps eight people in Cambridgeshire sports club', 'Drunk' squirrel causes hundreds of pounds of damage' and 'Florida man charged with 'throwing alligator' into fast-food restaurant'. My friends Facebook wall became an archive that coalesced the extraordinary but mundane animal-related BBC news articles and retained them for posterity on what would otherwise be a fleeting ephemeral article on the BBC news website. The act of isolating, sharing and interpreting these stories through curation allowed me to participate in and transform the story through its context; I had unwittingly curated my own archive of BBC journalism that undermined the credibility of BBC news as a site of absurd journalism. It showcased that the news, despite its supposed reputation of objectivity, is always open to different modes of analysis through the act of consuming it.

Could this count as a form of citizen journalism? The apparently mild and simple everyday act of sharing news content on Facebook easily fits the oxford dictionary definition: "the collection, dissemination, and analysis of news and information by the general public, especially by means of the Internet." ¹ Through the decontextualization of news stories via social media platforms, and little need for it to be factually correct, the stories are used and shared as a way of transcribing our online identity. The act of sharing news online almost immediately delves into notions of post-truth as Silvio Waisbord outlines in 'Truth is what Happens to News';

"The central problem of post-truth is not journalists falsifying reality by mistake or malice, leaving out important information, or failing to check facts. Rather, truth in/and journalism is embedded in the uses of news and information produced by journalism and virtually anyone else—from

intelligence services to social media users. Notions of news and truth are linked to what people do with information rather than what journalism unilaterally decides are accurate portrayals of reality.”²

Social media platforms allow the public to use news as a way of interpreting reality; to be navigated and understood as “an outcome of collective sense-making rather than unilaterally decided by newsrooms”³. Readers through the use of Twitter and Facebook use bricolage in “terms of the highly personalized, continuous, and more or less autonomous assembly, disassembly, and reassembly of mediated reality. Instead of relying on journalists, the public happily distribute their own versions of these stories.”⁴ With the rise of alternative forms of mediated reality that can also contend as a form of truth making, journalism is no longer the main definer of news as truth, shifting to a fluid, undetermined position.

How does this fluid position impact how news is disseminated to us? In highbrow true crime programs such as *Making a Murderer* and *The Keepers*, social media platforms are actively used by the protagonists in the show to help solve the crimes, which is in turn echoed in the overwhelming response by audiences to use reddit and social media platforms to fact-check the case and investigate the lives of people in the show. Katherine Zellner the hotshot lawyer who becomes the focus of *Making a Murderer* second season, tweets and updates her developments of the case during the show; whilst watching I can follow her on twitter and see real time updates. In *The Keepers* the amateur detectives compelled to investigate the crime through their relationship with the victim use their Facebook group to crowdsource clues from the community. The use of social media within a factual TV show is distinctive in its representation of the shifting nature of journalism, shows like *Making a Murderer* melds the medium of entertainment as thriller, weighty documentary and investigative journalism to analyse the criminal justice system. This intertwining of different platforms and realities is explicitly seen in the first episode of the second series of *Making a Murderer*, by self-referencing its own first season it charts the impact it had as it became a cultural phenomenon and the bearing this had on the case: the investigative journalism of season one becomes the story in season two. In another true crime hit, the podcast *Serial* also uses this idea of a meta-commentary, although using a murder mystery to propel the narrative forward the show, at its core, it is about the process of researching and reporting; a meta-commentary on journalism itself. For both *Serial* and *Making a Murderer* the aim is not to report an objective truth, instead the emphasis lies on the way the story is framed and journalism as a form that not only records reality but creates reality. By purposefully using emotive arguments, Sarah Koenig’s narration in *Serial*, and its implied use of intimacy with the viewer, is a hesitant document of her doubts as she keeps us up to

date on every bit of evidence, interview and thought process, unusual in journalism where the finished product normally concludes the research, rarely showing the process of it. This device positions the audience to play a role, to become a co-conspirator, allowing spectators to take part in the story as Michelle Dean in the *Guardian* reports; “the episodic and shifting nature of *Serial* has (apparently inadvertently) invited a host of people to imagine themselves Koenig’s collaborators. Or, to put it another way: *Reddit* has become part of the story, just as much as Koenig herself already is” ⁵. Journalism and citizen journalism are bound together as a growing ‘participatory’ ethos considers how products circulate, change and impact the world in which they function.

By focusing on narratives involving unsolved murders *Serial* and *Making a Murderer* invite audiences to evolve from spectator to amateur detective; “the serialised narrative, riddled with gaps in which speculation and discussion can flourish is the dominant cultural form of the social media era” ⁶, capitalising on the relationship between our desire to share on social media and our craving to fill in the blanks of a mystery. The shows call on the public’s appetite for death and crime that mirror the mainstream news but through the lens of the normal ‘everyman’, playing into the idea that this could happen to ‘anyone’. The audience’s active involvement in the narrative of tv shows is part of a ‘participatory culture’ that constructs, assembles and manipulates media; fans of the show have the means to attack the real life ‘villains’, Avery’s prosecutor and district attorney, who ‘wrongfully convicted’ the heroes of the show and went on to receive 4000 death threats after the show aired. The audience of *Making a Murderer* also spearheaded an online petition on Change that received the largest ever amount signatures, followed by protests and marches, forcing President Obama’s White House to issue a statement to conclude they could not legally pardon Avery or Dassey. Participation is elicited through the emotive device of these stories that at the same time also straddles the factual and the ‘real’. Audiences engage with the characters as tropes and stereotypes that despite being real people, are portrayed as pawns in a story; the young white attractive woman who is raped and murdered, the villains who frame and abuse their authority, the poor working-class hero who can’t beat the system. By placing individual subjects in a deeper cultural context through the medium of entertainment:

“what makes true crime series ...so captivating. They dramatize real-life topics and events that are deadly serious, including murder, with the same flair that you would expect of a fictional TV show like *Dexter* or *The Walking Dead*.... One reason for all the conversation was the show’s big moments and how it slowly teased out huge reveals in the same way a fictional drama might.”⁷

The opening sequence to *The Keepers* and *Making a Murderer* with music and montage of the criminal evidence and the 'real life characters' are strikingly similar to fictional shows such as *Sherlock*, *The Wire* or *CSI*, all use visual metaphors to elicit meaning to signify the shows genre and music to create dramatic effect. The entertainment devices used by true crime documentaries blur the lines between entertainment and factual accuracy, professional and amateur, and transparency on the story that also battles with a streamlined narrative. Just as *Serial*'s highly personalised narration style constantly underlines and reinforces Koenig's subjectivity; "they, too, will need to negotiate the challenge of describing a search for authoritative truth in a medium that is constantly reminding its audience that they're listening to only one human being's version of what happened."⁸ Journalism here conveys the multiple, contested and contradictory nature of truth as a way of understanding social conditions and infrastructures and highlights the way uncertainty can be orchestrated as a source of new possibilities.

The use of bias in documentaries and the interpretation filter that journalism is accused of deploying in a post truth world as an "epistemic uncertainty" isn't something we are newly experiencing, outlined by Nathan Jurgenson in his article on post truth:

"It has, again, lingered through modernity. The modern rise of science and democracy, the industrial revolutions, globalization, the furthering of transportation, urbanism, and mass media all multiply that uncertainty by providing access to other cultures, ideas, and ways of knowing. Truth's contestability means that the meaning of your life, or anyone else's, is a question that is possible to ask, and possible to get wrong. You can fail to become the person you're supposed to be. Truth, in short, was and continues to be radically contested. That was always the point."⁹

Bias and subjectivity is used alongside a desire for 'truth' in that it exposes and contests the shortcomings of our collective society; "Serial serves as an example of how journalists can interrogate both the epistemological authority of American criminal justice institutions and the journalistic narratives that rest upon and constitute that authority."¹⁰ Disputing citizen journalism's claims as a journalistic practice because of its inherent subjectivity is shown to be possibly more, or at the least as effective as mainstream journalism. *Serial* and *Making a Murderer* brought about real world consequences through the lens of entertainment in rethinking and retrying the evidence; "looking at journalism not in light of its professional ideals and tools and their engagements, but in terms of the function of journalism within society, acts of citizen journalism may help us understand the role of affectivity in journalistic functions, i.e. in deliberative and mediated spaces."¹¹ Bolette B. Blaagaard here

argues that by producing a contextual, embodied and situational reflexivity, “far from being pre-social or pre-cultural, emotions are cultural meanings and social relationships that are inseparably compressed together and it is this compression which confers on them their capacity to energize action”¹². The claims against *Making a Murderer* for its heavy bias in emotively explicating Steven Avery’s innocence in fact serves to reveal that instead of an opposition to standard journalism, mainstream news “creates the illusion that... news content is delivered “straight,” free of journalists’ values. Indeed, by not appearing openly ideological, mainstream press reporting becomes all the more ideologically effective.”¹³ This adopted objectivity by mainstream news, through confining opinions to clearly designated locations such as the editorial pages, serves to lay claim to social authority and credibility in an attempt to hide bias and can be in fact less transparent than true crime. True crime asks its audience to question the legitimacy of its cases but also the legitimacy of an objective truth by “always taking stock of itself”¹⁴.

However just as traditional journalistic practices “has its own autonomy yet stands in a structured relationship with powerful institutions”¹⁵ so too are shows like *Making a Murderer* significantly disseminated to us through one of the largest global TV entertainment platforms: Netflix. Journalism has for some time been distributed to us through hegemonic forces; “the paradigm provides them with enough latitude to satisfy their professional objectives without treading on core societal values (e.g., the desirability of private property, democracy)”¹⁶, that problematises news as an objective entity through its financial and economic positioning within massive global conglomerates¹⁷. The notion of participation and interactivity through citizen journalism therefore is aligned with the neoliberal trend of ‘de-professionalisation’ in its bid for cost-cutting and consumer control;

“digital technologies and their associated digital/participatory cultures both enable and encourage end-user participation, challenging the socio-cultural rationale for professional control over such content creation, filtering, and distribution. Perhaps, nowhere is this more evident than in the case of journalism... journalism, perhaps because of its enduring self-presentation as the ‘primary sense-maker ... of modernity’ has found digital media and digital culture to be particularly unsettling to its professional paradigm”.¹⁸

The notion that interactivity, “is a form of pseudo-agency that mirrors the pseudo-empowerment of a “flexible” gig-economy work”¹⁹, is crucial to ideas around work and leisure, in which we spend our days in ever more precarious and shifting workplaces of temp work, zero-hour contracts and late capitalism 24/7 lifestyle. On top of this the addictive nature of true crime and our participatory engagement means Netflix increases subscribers and

therefore data on its subscribers' habits. But despite participatory culture as an integral part of neoliberalism, there is still something to be said about the remediation of news within late capitalism; the act of writing over, "amending it, expanding it, adding greater diversity of perspective, and then recirculating it, feeding it back into the mainstream media"²⁰ that emphasises and includes peer to peer learning from non-authoritative sites. As Durk and Wark state in 'New New Babylon' "despite the attempt to corral all information flows into commodity form, it is in the nature of the digital to make its information available for a generalized detournement, outside of the circuits of authorship and ownership."²¹ The digital world for Dur and Wark is a place where ownership and authorship can be seized and compromised, where concepts are able to be hijacked and manipulated, echoed in the very structure and authorless-ness nature of the meme; "the meme is a form that allows for a sense of collective ownership among those who come into contact with it ... The meme seems open to appropriation and interpretation by whoever possesses it for a moment... Memes move in cycles of production, appropriation, consumption, and re-appropriation that render any idea of a pre-existing authentic collective being hard to pin down"²² the digital realm creates a space where images without authors function and create meaning. And where sharing news, participating in true crime documentaries and creating memes serve as an act of *detournement* that can deviate from the hegemony of media.

ENDNOTES

¹ oxforddictionaries.com

² Silvio Waisbord (2018) Truth is What Happens to News, *Journalism Studies*

³ ibid

⁴ Deuze, Mark (2006) 'Participation, Remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of a Digital Culture', *The Information Society*

⁵ Dean, Michelle, 'Serial Nears its End, but the Reddit Detectives Keep Working', *Guardian*

⁶ Feldman, Brian, 'Why the Internet's Amateur Detectives Love True Crime', *Intelligencer*

⁷ Lopez, German, 'Making a Murderer is back. Here's all that's happened since the first season'

⁸ Miller, Laura, 'The real secret of "Serial": How it revolutionizes the podcast', *Salon*

⁹ Nathan Jurgenson, 'Faked Out', *Real Life*

¹⁰ Buozis, Michael, 'Giving Voice to the accused: Serial and the critical

potential of true crime' Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies

¹¹ Bolette B. Blaagaard, 'Situated, Embodied and Political', *Journalism Studies*

¹² Ibid

¹³ Reese, Stephen, 'The News Paradigm and the Ideology of Objectivity: A socialist at the wall street journal', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*

¹⁴ Buozis, Michael, 'Giving Voice to the accused: *Serial* and the critical potential of true crime' Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies

¹⁵ Reese, Stephen, 'The News Paradigm and the Ideology of Objectivity A socialist at the wall street journal', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ <https://www.webfx.com/data/the-6-companies-that-own-almost-all-media/>

¹⁸ Lewis, Seth, 'The Tension between Professional Control and Open Participation', *Information, Communication & Society*

¹⁹ Osterweil, Vicky, 'Well Played Passive Attack', *Real Life*

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Dur, Ali and Wark, 'New New Babylon', *Digital Art*

²² Aria Dean, 'Poor Meme Rich Meme', *Real Life*

Beverley Gadsden (b. 1988, Bristol, UK) is a London based multidisciplinary artist. Her practice interrogates how the internet and the mass-production of objects and images flattens hierarchies of value. Her research considers popular culture, including reality TV, celebrity, and social media to examine how notions of authenticity, taste and identity are constructed and circulated.

REGNUM, or a Travel Report

The ground is covered with snow. It may seem that snow is everywhere: below, all around, up above. Branches, tree trunks, stumps, old grass, everything that is not snow, peeks from the snow. The ground that is covered with snow is a very white, homogeneous space. Yet at the same time, this space is also uneven: snow banks allow certain parts of the surface to bulge, while other parts spread horizontally or become a pit.

There are several ways in which one can traverse a space covered with snow. First, there is such a movement, when I know that there is something that I could say about the snow. The second way, it is such a movement, when I know that there is nothing that I could say about the snow. The third way is a mixture of the first and the second in equal measure. The fourth way is a mixture of the first and the second with the former being more dominant. The fifth way is a mixture of the first and the second with the latter being more dominant.

The ground, which is covered with snow, is simultaneously a homogenous and a non-homogenous space. I can enter this space, and I can get out of it. Something is happening above the ground, underground and inside the ground. However, my eyes cannot see what is happening above the ground, nor what is happening under the ground, nor what is happening in the ground itself. My eyes are capable of registering a limited number of things. For instance, my eyes can see the movement of the grass above the snow, or the movement of a bird (also, above the snow), or they can behold the movement of the surface of the snow as moved by the wind, or the movement of a tree trunk, or of an isolated branch (or several branches, often also moved by the wind), or we talk about something very high above, my eyes can see the movement of a cloud. My ears, in turn, can register the sound of wind, the sound of a bird or of a tree trunk (or of many trunks) that creaks (or creak), but they cannot hear the movement of a cloud (perhaps, because they move too high above and are thus far away from me). Can I hear or see anything else? I can enter a space covered by snow, I am doing it right now (I am entering it).

What is snow? One can say, that the snow is a mixture of water, earth and mud. This mixture can contain more water than earth, or more earth than water, or more mud than water, or more mud than earth, or more earth than mud, or more water than mud. The height of the snow covering the ground is uneven, it differs from place to place. It can be anywhere between two centimeters to five and ten centimeters, to twenty, forty or even sixty centimeters. These are not arbitrary numbers, they derive from first-hand observation. Something that is not snow peeks out from a bank of snow. The current mode of observation allows us to maintain: whatever it is that is not snow can be described as black, torn, flexible, bending, cracked, broken or thin; it can make a sound, it can come into motion, it can be dead or alive.

On a small space, which is covered with snow, a wave is lying. The wave is shaped by snow, in other words, the wave is snow. Yet at the same time, the snow and the wave are not one and the same thing, since any wave can be made out of snow, but not all of the snow necessarily takes the shape of a wave. The waves on the surface of the snow are created by wind. These waves do not flee or collapse, and neither do they merge with whatever is not snow. I can see the waves thanks to the ribs that each wave has. As a rule this rib is located at the very top of the wave, which seems to culminate in a rib like that, that is why if one looks at the wave from a particular angle the wave is very clearly visible and easily distinguishable from the snow (interestingly, consider this: the wave is snow itself, yet at the same time, it is also different from it to a certain extent!)

There are certain possible directions of traversing this space here. That is to say, there are paths that have been treaded before me by someone else. It is hard for me to say who exactly it was who has trod them, a human being or an animal or something else entirely, perhaps, something inanimate. In any case, one can say that all these paths can be used for accessing the parts of space that require observation and analysis at this particular point in time. Walking in any direction takes some time. One can move from white to white, from a tree trunk to white, from tree branches to a pit, from a tree trunk to a pit, from white to tree brunches ... There are plenty of options of how to traverse this space. In certain places white predominates, these are usually horizontal patches of space that are open. From any one of such patches it is rather convenient to look around and study one's options for traversing the expanse of snow.

The amount of snow that one can observe by far exceeds the amount of whatever it is that it is not snow. Thus, whatever it is that is not snow, occupies a subordinate position in relation to snow. The amount of whatever it is that is not snow can be determined with outmost precision (I am talking about the study of a particular patch of space), while it would not be possible to determine the exact amount of snow at that same site with the same degree of certainty. It would not work not least because earth and mud, as we have stated earlier, are both constituent parts of the snow, so would it not mean that the snow is also present wherever there is earth and mud?

What questions can be raised based on the knowledge of the fact that snow prevails over whatever it is that is not snow? The first question is this: how many times greater is the amount of snow at a particular patch (if we manage to determine it with considerable certainty) than the amount of whatever it is that is not snow? The second question is this: if we do know for a fact that the amount of snow prevails over that of not snow, can we assume that there is a palpable influence that the snow has on whatever it is that is not snow? The third question is this: what can we learn from the fact that snow is a homogeneous indivisible white substance? The fourth question: are homogeneity, indivisibility and whiteness of snow confined exclusively to spaces of pure snow or do they spill over to the sites where the snow confronts whatever it is that is not snow? What exactly happens between snow and whatever it is that is not snow at this touch point? The sixth question is this: what are the properties acquired by whatever it is that is not snow once it converges with snow?

These questions are obviously difficult to answer. However, we can try to outline paths that lead towards the answer to some of them. For example, let us consider some property that is typical of whatever it is that is not snow and that the snow does not possess at all. The quality of standing is perfectly suitable for this. Standing objects come into confrontation with snow, apparently subjecting the snow to separation. Standing objects, in general, are directed upwards, sideways, and in some extremely rare cases—downwards. Let us suppose that standing objects (in other words, the objects that are not snow) prevail over snow. This statement is deliberately false and misleading, but even so, it may be useful for our purposes. If we assume that standing objects prevail over snow, then in that case standing objects turn from whatever works to divide the snow into something else that is able to create its own forms, rows and groups. And if we now imagine that they continue to increase their presence, we will then be able to get forms of forms, rows of

rows and groups of groups. Thus, by taking this road, we can learn something new about whatever it is that is not snow, but we cannot learn anything new about the snow itself.

In order to learn something new about the snow, we can, for example, start by studying waves. In this case we will not need to make false assumptions. We have already stated earlier that a wave is snow itself yet at the same time, it is something else. Such a statement leads to rather peculiar conclusions. If something can simultaneously be snow while retaining its differences from snow, this means that snow can be divided not only by something that is external to it, that is, not only by whatever it is that is not snow. This means that snow can be divided within itself. In other words, snow is not a homogeneous and indivisible substance, as we have indicated above. Even a superficial observation tells us that there are at least two levels to snow. The first level is the level of indivisibility and homogeneity. The second is the level at which the snow divides itself with the help of the waves. This can lead us to further conclusions about the snow being a substance that is not equal to itself.

These conclusions prompt new questions: then, what is snow? How is it possible to observe it and is it possible to observe it, to begin with? What criteria can be applied to snow and is there a point at which snow becomes equal to itself? If the snow can never be equal to itself, can we really confidently say with certainty that there is something that can never be snow, under no circumstances?

Let us denote snow as A, and whatever it is that is not snow, as B. Can we then assume that the picture of reality around us looks like this?

[illegible]

AA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

The questions that we have raised above are too difficult to be tackled at one bout. It is also almost impossible to imagine that these questions are ever given final and unequivocal answers at all. The only thing we can be sure of and that we can use as a starting point of our research is the fact that there exists something that we define as snow. However, where does it exist? In what way does it exist? Is it possible to assume that a human being is also snow? And besides—can we assume that snow is capable of addressing questions to itself? Just when you thought that a pattern revealed itself as an encoded yet decipherable language, the way to read it shifted, the alphabet updated—the old skin left behind to be recycled by hands or winds or machines, if at all. The shedding of snake skins is as much of a ritual as the necessary software updates we pause to perform on our devices. You've outgrown your parasite laden model. We allow ourselves to update when we feel safe, when we feel that we won't miss or be missed—most often when we sleep (and our software has evolved to make this 'presence optional' update possible). The snake too discards its outdated bodily technology when nobody is watching, but when it slithers away anew, it leaves behind the palpable marker of time, renders it imperfect, dry, cracking, obsolete. Out with the old and in with the newer model! Display the carapace above your mantle next to your 1st generation iPhone.

I've never had a dangerous encounter with a snake, but we've touched many a time before, the garden snake, the circus boa constrictor, the lamp-warmed house pet, and I. But those were censored snakes, snakes with parental settings, supervised, trained, restrained, blocked domains, on invisible leashes. The only thing that attracts me in the way that snakes do is the World Wide Web, and the closest I've ever come to an encounter with a poisonous snake is having a Facebook profile.

Natalya Serkova (b. 1988, Omsk, Russia) is a writer and art theorist. She is currently studying philosophy in RSUH, Moscow. She is also the co-founder of TZVETNIK, a project exploring and promoting the newest contemporary art from around the world.

A Murder of Crows, A Scourge of News

What happens when real news becomes fake, science fiction becomes fact, and your host becomes a font of jokes?

When I lived in Hollywood, I worked for Hollywood lawyers—entertainment attorneys who represented movie stars and movie studios, negotiated contracts, brokered finance agreements, set up multi-million-dollar production deals and, of course, settled disputes.

Hollywood lawyers are pretty much exactly like you see them in the movies: alpha personalities, totally egocentric, and really, really impatient. Everything had to be done NOW. This was back when we still used fax machines, which always required confirmation of receipt—lawyers love paper trails (except when they don't). It was a pretty typical scenario that the moment you hit SEND on a fax to a client the attorney would be right there, hovering, bouncing on the balls of his feet, demanding “did they get it? did they get it? did they get it?”

Except, these days, it kind of is.

So if Chicago is Gotham, then that makes Berlin... Metropolis?

The Blain Southern gallery in Berlin is housed in the former printing press of Berlin's daily newspaper, Der Tagesspiegel – The Daily Mirror which...isn't that the name of the paper Clark Kent worked for? So, if Chicago is Gotham, then that makes Berlin...Metropolis? I mean, speaking of science fiction. Or are we?

Anyway, when Blain Southern took over the former printing press of Der Tagesspiegel, the gallery kept a lot of the key elements of the architecture – most importantly, the double height ceilings, that soar two full stories, and the long, unbroken ground floor where the actual printing presses worked. It's a space that's about 40 meters long and that the gallery likes to invite artists to fill with huge installations. How great is that? A huge space to play with and fill with whatever you want - it's an artist's dream.

It's a little Back to the Future.

Right now, the space is filled with... a printing press. It's a little Back to the Future. But not quite: it's not exactly the old linotype machines that Der Tagesspiegel would have used – massive iron machines that took blocks of text set letter by letter by an operator, slathered in ink and stamped onto newspaper – you've seen them in old movies. Tur's print-making shop is more of a monotype shop, where letters are carved into a board of wood, making a single slogan or phrase, to be painted over with ink and then pressed onto thick, sturdy paper.

There are three stations for making these block prints, placed down the center of the gallery. The printing space is defined by industrial metal shelves that anchor the borders of Tur's workspace, where clean sheets of paper, already carved print blocks, uncarved wood, ink, paintbrushes and other materials are stored. They're also used as drying racks for freshly made prints. Tur works with assistants, printmaker artisans from Berlin, that Tur bustles around, both directing and working with side by side at the same time.

Everyone has to be beautiful in art these days... or maybe everyone just IS beautiful, partly because they're all in their 20s and 30s.

Of course, they're all beautiful. It brings to mind Anne Imhof's Angst II, and the beautiful, wispy, disaffected performers slinking around the Hamburger Bahnhof. Everyone has to be beautiful in art these days... or maybe everyone just IS beautiful, partly because they're all in their 20s and 30s and, as earnest as they are, life hasn't carved itself into their faces yet. I don't know. It's not about them anyway.

It's about the printmaking process, and the prints themselves.

Printmaking is a slow process: you have to cut the letters or, in this case, carve out the wooden stencil... but then you have it – you don't have to do it again. However you're also stuck with that font – you can't just change it

with the push of a button. So you have to decide: how do you want to communicate to people? What font best illustrates your message and speaks to the culture you're addressing?

Even as late as 1991, the Soviets were still using 1930s Stalinist power fonts.

I don't know when I started paying so much attention to fonts – I think it was in Vilnius, when I visited the former KGB Headquarters, and noticed that, even as late as 1991, the Soviets were still using 1930s Stalinist power fonts. In France – where language is celebrated through clever word play and elaborate compliments – street signs, cafe awnings, metro advertising tends to use the lightly architectural, looping, whimsical fonts of the Belle Epoque (called, Belle Epoque).

In Germany, advertising and signage prefers the direct, unembellished, clarity of Helvetica and Arial, or the academic authority of the older German fonts. In England, it's the proper Times New Roman. America, being a country of immigrants, is all over the place with fonts; it has a fantastic variety of fonts. Tremendous fonts, really. Although I think the most appropriate font these days is comic sans.

Nasan Tur's font of choice for this installation is that standard newsprint font, Times New Roman, and they announce simple slogans: Living is Resistance. Failing is Weakness. Power is Fragile. Ambition is Essential. Empathy is Naive. Slogans that sound like they come from an Alt Right playbook, black all-caps solidly sitting in a puddle of white on inky black fields, as though they've emerged out of the darkness to guide us on our way.

Black splotches clustered on the far wall, like a murder of crows flocked into the corner, plotting their next move.

The prints Tur and his team produce get framed and hung on the gallery walls, so the exhibit itself evolves over the course of Tur's installation there. When I was there, only a handful had been hung in the gallery space, black splotches clustered on the far wall, like a murder of crows flocked into the corner, plotting their next move.

Tur is of course referencing the history of the building with his printmaking set-up, but he's also working counter to the speed of information, using a process that is deliberately slow, one that could never keep up with the dissemination of news these days. Everything is available all the time, but sorting through the noise – the slogans, the propaganda, the actual facts and events –

this is the process that suffers most in a world of sci-fi speed. As fast as technology is, you can't fact check a speech until someone actually speaks it, and – as I learned from those lawyers – you can speak lies faster than any wireless connection. So Tur is printing slogans that are out of date by the time the ink dries.

Tur's printmaking set up is bare and clean and neat, sitting in this gallery with a certain precision, surrounded by all this empty space, space that was once filled up with printing presses clacking away at high speed – well, high speed for back then. It's a lot like the news today, one little blip that stands out among all the stuff that never makes it through to our attention. Missing information, in a way. And all that missing information surrounds Tur and his dogged printmaking process.

Walking around the setup, I'm struck by two prints hanging on the same rack to dry: the slogan "failing is weakness" is I think by accident on this day, hanging over a print of "living is resistance", which is drying on the floor, almost like it was tossed there, discarded, the alpha slogan dominating over the mewling "living is resistance" like a hovering attorney.

They are all priorities, they'd shout at me; but, I'd protest, if everything's a priority...

The other thing about those Hollywood lawyers, their inflated self-importance and their impatience, is that everything was a priority. Everything. It was also typical to be handed a document to revise and be told its top priority, and then five seconds later handed another by the same lawyer and told that this one is a top priority too. And five seconds later, to be handed a third, with the same top priority status. This would go on all day, and I would have to remind them that not everything can be a priority, so please choose one. This usually devolved into a circular argument: they are all priorities, they'd shout at me; but, I'd protest (because I'm the worst employee ever), when everything is a priority then nothing is.

On the second floor at Blain Southern, and you enter a sort of antechamber—a small room with a glass wall overlooking the main floor, and a single video screen. On screen, a video of Nasan Tur's 2013 work, *Berlin Says*—part of a series of he's been doing since at least 2008. Tur uses spray paint on a huge canvas—17 meters long—to replicate graffiti messages from the streets of Berlin, layering each over another, other again and again until the individual messages become indecipherable, a fast forward version of the

lifespan of graffiti, which by nature is temporal—painted over by another grafter, by the city, by the weather.

In Tur's version, canvas is white, the paint is red, the scaffolding truck is yellow. The artist, of course, is dressed in black. The imagery is simple and striking—primary colours and the little blot of black that is the artist in front of what, in the end of recording all those desperate, passionate, pleas to be heard, becomes a solid, red, gurgling scream—a block of... priorities that is too big and too loud to ignore, but too dense to be intelligible.

From this small room, you walk across a bridge to a gallery space on this level, and from the bridge you can and stop and survey the printmaking from above. Watching Nasan Tur and his assistants bustle about, carve out the wood, lay the paper, roll the ink, press the printing blocks, the way they're all working together, quietly, industriously, crossing here, stretching there, step, stretch, pivot... it's a beautiful choreography.

Ambition that gets drunk on its own ability to get a reaction, eventually influence, and ultimately control.

It feels very Hearst-like and makes me think of Orson Welles and Citizen Kane and Rosebud. No, not really. But it does make me think of empires and power, of ambition that gets drunk on its own ability to get a reaction, eventually influence, and ultimately control. And it makes me think of another privileged entrepreneur who takes a principled democratic stand for the little guy, but only to reinforce his own prerogatives. It makes me think of what it feels like, to stand over a domain and be the boss of everything, and how dizzying it all is. Although that could also be vertigo.

Moving on.

The upstairs gallery is also long and narrow. It's anchored on either end by a large, landscape photograph—each one a beautiful shot of the sea, one with a spit of land jutting into it, hazy and blue on the horizon, the other just the vast expanse of sea. The skies in each are either early morning just after sunrise, or evening just after sundown. They are pastel colours of rosy pink, soft blues, wisp of white clouds tinted gold by the sun. Dreamy, calming shots—almost like those screen savers that give you little windows of escape from Windows Office.

I'm most attracted to the one on the far wall—I have a thing with the far walls in this exhibit, for some reason. Anyway, that's the one with the hazy

spit of land almost hovering over the sea, like a mystical island floating on the horizon. If you look closely at the blue water, there is a slight ridge, a remnant of a wave, and it pools little eddies of water alongside it, almost like stepping stones leading to the island. Or away from it. It's very moving, in a way.

On one long wall in this gallery, there are 7 signs, watercolours of simple numbers and, in delicate pencil at the bottom of each, just above Nasan Tur's signature, a place and a date. These numbers, the place, the date are the people who have drowned escaping war in their home countries: refugees who didn't reach refuge. No names, because the names were lost in that sea of information we call the news.

That hint of wave in the photo I'm so drawn to? That's the wake of a capsized boat.

They are actually a part of the seascapes that anchor each end of the room—the images are lifted from media and enlarged several hundred times, the drowned bodies cropped out, just as the incidents themselves eventually get cropped out of our narratives. That hint of wave in the photo I'm so drawn to? That's the wake of a capsized boat. Those footsteps across the water are the swirling eddies of bodies sinking to the ocean floor.

Funktionieren is an exhibition about stuff that isn't there, really. The empty boats, the bodies floating, sinking at sea. The names of the people who died. It's about communication. Information. Filters. About what gets lost in all that noise, and what gets through.

After going round and round with the Hollywood lawyers about sci fi vs reality, the meaning of priority, and what constitutes hovering, eventually I just got smart and quit. I realized arguing facts with people who work in a business built on illusion was Looney Tunes. You have to constantly up your game, be louder, brighter, bolder, you have to be the psychotic Heath Ledger Joker because the merely sociopathic Jack Nicholson one will no longer suffice. And in the process you become... something else. You become no longer you.

Funktionieren in everyday German means "work". But in formal German, it means "suffice".

In today's world of speedy technology, fake news and real news gets spread at exactly the same rate and so often, sensational news—forever getting bigger, louder, bolder—literally obstructs the flow of serious news, forcing real data and events into side streams of information that only a few people pay

attention to. It's a great way to manipulate reality, but it doesn't actually change reality. Or does it?

And I think that's what Nasan Tur is getting at.

This is a transcript from the podcast episode of the same name, released on Artipoeus in January 2017.

Susie Kahlich (b. 1968, Chicago, US) attended college in New York City where she explored and was active in the 1980s Lower East Side art and music scene, participating in the artists' collective the Rivington School, and learning sound directly from CBGB's legendary soundman Ronnie Ardito. She worked boards at CBGB's, the original Knitting Factory, The Pyramid Club and various small clubs around NYC and NJ, for gigs ranging from Guns & Roses (acoustic) to Sun Ra, before turning her attention full time to writing. She was an active participant in the fledgling Immersionism art scene in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, participating in written work, spoken word and performance pieces at Cat's Head, Refrigerator, and other warehouse events. In 1997, Susie moved to Los Angeles to pursue screenwriting for independent short and feature films. Moving on to Paris and then Berlin, Susie has continued to publish and perform her work as presentations, audio production and art installations. She currently resides Moabit and produces the art podcast Artipoeus.

Standing Atop the E-Agora

The Classical Athenian agora, or the public square on which politics and administration, religion and commerce were all concentrated, was initially considered a vital component of democracy as it was the site in which citizens could rationally deliberate political issues. ¹ In the context of the public cybersphere, or electro-agora, however, debate has been tranquilized, as if placed behind a fence in a zoo, 'free' to roam within the confines of a cage and entertained according to the schedule of the keeper. "The media constitute us as citizens by offering us *processed* insights into an array of significant domains—economic, political, scientific and so forth—through which democratic choices and opinions can emerge, and not by breaching the boundaries between decision makers and those on the receiving end of their decisions." ² Considering that the connection afforded by such social platforms was always characterized by corporate interests, it quickly transformed into competition and comparison, wherein the number of followers, retweets and subscriptions translates to popularity, success and potential profit; lamentably, the accounts with the most followers in the world are highly paid female pop stars from the U.S. ³

It seems that the 'social' aspect of these social platforms was not enough to delink us from misery and has instead exacerbated it. ⁴ Anxiety, depression, loneliness, jealousy, and stress levels rise the more time we spend on social media yet the FOMO (fear of missing out) on any of these dismal emotions renders us unwilling to let go—someday, all the stress might actually power our devices. ⁵ Users generate data, the clicks and likes to be sold to advertisers, but they also generate affective emotional responses such as pleasure, disgust, anger, etc., that resist being entered into the market, but might find their way into projects like Sev Kamvar and Jonathan Harris' *wefeelfine.org*, a system that searches the world's newly posted blog entries for occurrences of the phrases "I feel" and "I am feeling" to create a database of human feelings across a number of demographics. Websites are no longer a jumble of clunky pixel glitches and slow to load sticky scrollbars, but seamless minimalist pastoral landscapes wherein smog is mistaken for clouds. The news

is just *nows*. It all serves to widen the gap between past and future so quickly that we do sense ourselves falling into the faultline because the GPS failed to account for construction on the route to the future. ⁶ The future however, ended back in 1972. *The Limits to Growth*, a report funded by Volkswagen and commissioned by the Club of Rome, detailed the long-term consequences of exponential economic growth, noting that without a change in human consumption habits, without a revolution in industrial economies, and more importantly, if the natural world and its finite resources are not accounted for in capitalist business models, then we should expect to see utter depletion within the next hundred years. While the report received criticism in regards to its methodology, or what constitutes a ‘resource,’ the idea remains a poignant and stark reminder that no direct political action has been taken since, regardless if the results reflected even an inkling of a possible reality in 5, 10, or 500 years. In 2012 however, one of the authors of the 1972 publication, Jørgen Randers, released an update, *2052: A Global Forecast for the Next Forty Years* ⁷, and according to his analysis of trends on consumption, any possible future requires a reduction in consumption, a decline in population, a low carbon energy system, and most importantly, institutions that counter national short termism. The Internet, he says, which has increased access to knowledge, might be able to help, but only if it is first realized that knowledge is simply not enough in the face of powerful opposition.

As we continue to upload versions of ourselves online, our nucleus accumbens aglow with every ‘like’ and our levels of loneliness lowered with every post if only momentarily, despite all of the risks, we do so because we define our identities through and with others, we nurture so that we might be nurtured in return, and most often, we share, post, and update because we want to tell the rest of the world what it is we care about, whether or not anyone is listening. ⁸ In exchange for hits of dopamine and serotonin, users voluntarily relinquish their information into capitalist receptacles, thus the digital economy is nothing new, but simply a thinly veiled extension of pre-existing conditions. As Seyla Benhabib notes, “Hannah Arendt’s prediction that modern societies would be increasingly dominated by the ‘social’, with the concomitant rule of the bureaucracy on the one hand, and an obsessive preoccupation with intimacy on the other, has proved remarkably prescient.” ⁹ Walter Benjamin also reminds that:

The increasing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two sides of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property

relations which they strive to abolish. It sees its salvation in granting expression to the masses-but on no account granting them rights. The masses have a right to changed property relations; fascism seeks to give them expression in keeping these relations unchanged. *The logical outcome of fascism is an aestheticizing of political life.* ¹⁰

We reached the tipping point long ago with the rise of yellow journalism, competing news outlets vying for ratings and rather than reality, reality television that reduced reality to television. Yet Benjamin's materialist perspective purports that technology is not the antithesis of nature, but rather, more simply put, a new configuration of it, and that through a mode of cognition that is active, corporeal, and intense we can begin to imagine an existence other than the one characterized by the sensory alienation afforded by the aestheticization of political life in which we can see ourselves reflected and with others. Artworks, opinions, and images may glide across the glossy surfaces of screens, but this does not mean that they are inherently superficial, as both their exhibition and reception can still be sites of resistance.

These social platforms, because they do attract so many users, remind that assimilating into the masses or adopting a mob mentality leads to a diffusion of responsibility, and what social psychologists have called "social loafing," when individuals put forth less effort when working in a group. A study conducted in 2005 showed that people extended greater individual effort when they were in smaller groups in both distributed and collocated situations, but when placed in collocated groups however, people felt greater pressure to look busy even when they were not, while those in the distributed groups were less likely to feel such pressure. ¹¹ What is seen through the screen thus has the potential to be a starting point for both political action and inaction. Social media platforms, created and maintained by power-wielding corporations, are the most commonly accessed sites on the Web and have further expanded an illusion of participation each time a 140 character tweet is added to the thread. Surfaces find their temporal and spatial dimensions in platforms, and become the site of voluminous and expansive politically charged public space; a public cybersphere, producing what Foucault refers to as docile bodies. On social media platforms, users are treated as wholesale goods by the "uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result [...] exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement. These methods [...] which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility." ¹² Through habitual usage, these types of platforms and digital devices

have ever so clandestinely disciplined bodily gestures, pace, and behaviour to the extent that even the movements that allow users to work within them can be trademarked—Apple alone has won a number of key swipe gesture patents for virtual keyboards since 2001.

Understanding the limitations of social media platforms may allow users to seize some control, to manipulate their functions ¹³, and appropriate some of their strategies within new contexts and toward different goals ¹⁴, and projects like *The Wrong*, the world's largest digital art biennale that uses Facebook as its primary exhibition platform, have attempted to do just that. Without the addition of alternatives that allow for different forms of communication, engagement, criticism, and content however, the breadth of diversity of personal experience, emotion and expression is reduced to the confines of what several men have deemed worthy of sharing ¹⁵. The screen is thus not a portal through which one can escape to another possible world, it is a two-way mirror gazing back at us from the extension of the one in which we currently live, reflecting the misery and maladies of modern life. While it is here where the masses are constituted, wherein the personal becomes public, it is also here in the reflection wherein the public gets personal.

ENDNOTES

¹ Manuel Castells, "Public Space in the Information Society," Public Space, 1994, accessed March 24, 2018, <http://www.publicspace.org/en/text-library/eng/I-espacios-publicos-en-la-sociedad-informacional>.

² Luke Goode, *Jürgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 95.

³ Singer Katy Perry has over 109 million followers, and in 2017 her Twitter bio read: "Artist. Activist. Conscious."

⁴ Jessica Brown, "Future - Is social media bad for you? The evidence and the unknowns," BBC, January 05, 2018, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20180104-is-social-media-bad-for-you-the-evidence-and-the-unknowns>.

⁵ In 2017, the Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Science and Technology created a rubbery material that generates electricity from stress.

⁶ Ashley Halsey III, "Eyes down, minds elsewhere, 'deadwalkers' are among us," Washington Post, September 27, 2015.

⁷ See for example www.2052.info.

⁸ Maurizio Mauri et al., "Why Is Facebook So Successful? Psychophysiological Measures Describe a Core Flow State While Using Facebook," *CYBERPSYCHOLOGY, BEHAVIOR, AND SOCIAL NETWORKING* 14, no. 12 (2011).

⁹ Seyla Benhabib, "Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt's concept of public space," *History of the Human Sciences* 6, no. 2 (1993): 110, 2011, <http://hhs.sagepub.com/content/6/2/97>.

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard Uni. Press, 2008), 41.

¹¹ Laku Chidambaram and Lai Lai Tung, "Is Out of Sight, Out of Mind? An Empirical Study of Social Loafing in Technology-Supported Groups," *Information Systems Research* 16, no. 2 (June 2005): 149-168.

¹² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 137.

¹³ See for example www.bubblebyte.org.

¹⁴ See for example www.facebook.com/GalleryOnline.

¹⁵ Of the four most popular social media platforms, Facebook, the world's largest social media platform, was started by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes. The mobile photo-sharing platform Instagram was started by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. Snapchat, a multimedia application was started by Evan Spiegel, Bobby Murphy, and Reggie Brown, and the mobile news and social networking service Twitter was founded by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams.

Vanessa Kowalski (b. 1991, Connecticut, US) is an independent curator, writer, and one of the editors of *we need to talk*. She writes at the intersection of the digital and the physical, not in the middle of nowhere, but now, here.

Narrative Ruins: Storytelling in the Age of Density

(Over)Complexity/

(Illusory)Freedom

//Fifty-seven What's App notifications

//I must remember to turn off notifications for group chats

//Four Instagram notifications

//Ten unread emails

//Two CNN updates

//Mostly uneventful today

//Three Facebook Messenger notifications from my mother in another time zone

//Hit snooze on the alarm clock

//Ten more minutes

Let's face it: By the time you sit down and read this, you have likely already exceeded your brain's ideal information intake. Not only do a large number of the population sleep with their smartphones, but in the UK, one in three check their phone in the middle of the night. Unsurprisingly, 52% of people check their smartphones within fifteen minutes of waking up, with 86% doing so within the first hour ¹. This sensation isn't new. In 1997, David Shenk wrote a book on how to survive 'Data Smog' ². However, reading through the introduction, statistics on how things had changed from the 70's and 80's to the late 90's

regarding information seems downright laughable when confronted with the reality we are in twenty years later.

Data correlations are being used to tell the future/ To find exciting new connections/ To understand consequences/ To kill our superstitions/ To analyse verbal patterns and tell us who is likely lying to us/ To determine who should advertise to us/ To tell us who to vote for/

While scrolling through the Apple news app, Facebook, Twitter, or the YouTube comments section, ideas and concepts of reality crash into one another and nearly balance each other out into nothingness. Do we live in a time of enlightenment? Is the information hitting us in all the right places?

Or, maybe, are we entering a new dark age? As we try to navigate within the Data Smog, we are submitting ourselves to constant computational processes. We are surrendering our knowledgeable problem-solving skills to a new algorithmic faith. This faith can help us just as easily as it can drive us off a cliff or fly us into militarized zones.

Sianne Ngai's concept of Stuplimity is a perfect definition for the affect of digital information overload ³. It is 'simultaneously astonishing and boring' leaving us with no agency for reaction ⁴. The repetition, extremes, and complexity of reality leaves us both shocked and completely numbed. Our capacity to react crashes, and the Pinwheel of Death turns in our eyes ⁵.

When Occupy Wall Street began/ when the Arab Spring lit fire/ when public square protests were breaking out globally/ they were celebrated. The golden age of digital democracy we had always been promised had arrived and the people would now have more power than ever ⁶. However, new power structures took hold in the places of protest, the complexity was realized by the individuals involved, negative liberty would not be enough ⁷, and what energy fuelled the digital revolutionaries died out. They were missing a concrete vision of what could be.

The revolutionary voice of the internet instead brought to power the fringe movements of the far right through anonymized toxic spaces such as 4/Chan and corners of Reddit where angry young men revolted against decency, embraced the ideology of transgression, and exercised their extreme freedom through death trolling/ attacks on feminism/ suicide encouragement/ relentless online trolling/ racist memes/ violent rape threats/ and competitions as to how offensive or violent one could act online/ ⁸.

Perhaps the Alt Right's vile tendencies are related to this Stuplime feeling. This ennui and numbness created by the barrage of endless nonsense, tragedy, facts, lies, and raw data. Similar notions were present in the Situationist movement, 1960's counterculture, Baudelaire's 'an oasis of horror in a desert of boredom', and the writings of Nietzsche ⁹. Transgression was seen as the only way to free oneself from the banal expectations of society. But the current incarnation of hate speech is unprecedented as the internet has given the possibility for mob mentality to take hold of people by the thousands, enact mass trolling, and make the lives of others living hell ¹⁰.

Narrative is Cosy and Don't Take Away My Comfort Blanket!

//We have always already been connected

//enmeshed

//the harvest

//our experiences

//politics

//geothermal activity

//our perceptions

//war

Only now, with the internet, we are continually bombarded with this interconnectedness. We cannot escape. There is no outside. Narratives, stories, and mythologies have underpinned human civilizations for millennia. It is unknown when humans started using narrative to understand reality and the world around them, but presumably, it coincided with the advent of language and reasoning. In the pre-modern world, myth and narrative acted not only as a way to make sense of the exterior world but also how to navigate new territories of the mind ¹¹. The stories we tell ourselves continue, in the present day, to shape our view of the world and how we interpret and interact with ourselves, people, and the environment around us.

An important concept in cognitive psychology is 'Chunking,' the classification and grouping of like situations or experiences ¹². For example, common situations like being at a grocery store, a doctors office, a park, or a bedroom all have a specific frame of experience, expected behaviour/action, and norms. Organizing types of experiences into more easily comprehensible chunks helps us to function in day to day life. 'Narrative affords ways of addressing the problem of how to chunk the ongoing stream of experience into (more or less sharply) bounded and thus manipulable structures' ¹³. Think about yesterday. Perhaps you woke up and carried on with your day and nothing remarkable took place throughout: you played a game on your phone/ went for a walk in the park/ responded to emails/ perhaps you received a life-changing news/. These sequences of events are all compiled into your mind's story of yesterday. The story of your month. Your year. Your life. All events are integrated into a narrative.

The Chunking experience begins to morph into something else when bombarded by the deluge of information plunged into our faces. Data accumulation/ numbers/ stats/ are all in conflict and contrast with narrative and myth making.

The human mind, when presented with complex problems, naturally chooses the solution that requires the least amount of effort ¹⁴. Like Occam's Razor, we assume that the simplest explanation is always the best one ¹⁵. Frequency and repetition of a fact or narrative also increases the likeliness of a person to believe in something, even if it is completely untrue ¹⁶. So, when we're told stories about how the world exists, how elements interact, over and over again, unless it's incredibly implausible, we are likely to trust the story. Familiarity triumphs over truth. Easy think ideas and narratives are seductive in their simplicity, however, the more we use data and measurement to understand the world outside our own subjectivity, the reality of its true complexity becomes realized ¹⁷.

Complex narratives are not easily deployed or understood, and so, complex data can be infinitely manipulated into more digestible, easy think stories. These stories are employed by those hoping to instil a specific version of reality. Human memory forms an imperfect narrative in which both forgetting and the unstable nature of perspective on recalled memories are important components. The temporality of data is different ¹⁸. Instead of the alive and changing nature that memory possesses, the indifferent data sets of our life that are analysed by companies to form a narrative of who we are,

remove the subjectivity/ meaning/ and aliveness/ from the interpretation. Companies view this as clarity on who a person really is, but 'False clarity is only another name for myth' ¹⁹. Human beings and their life's story then become tradable commodities instead of living creatures. Micro-targeting and granular marketing use the data to tell each individual a story about the world they live in, manipulating it to their aims.

An effective story affects the brain in far different ways than mere fact telling. Storytelling activates the brain's capacity for empathy, lighting up the regions in charge of touch, smell, emotion, and it even releases Oxytocin ²⁰. Being told the same story, again and again, corrodes and changes the way one views and experiences reality. When this story becomes embedded within your identity it then transforms into what is called a Deep Story ²¹. A Deep Story is made out of emotions. It's how something feels, not necessarily the exact facts and data sets ²². Deep Stories exist on the individual level as well as larger more tribal levels such as a political party or geographical region. Nowhere are Deep Stories more obvious than in the American right. They have captured the magic of Deep Story mythology. It only takes a few minutes watching Fox News to experience evocations of disenfranchisement/ fear of change/ fear of the political or ethnic Other/ and paranoia regarding the 'liberal elites.' The further right one goes, the more clearly these feel like Deep Stories can be seen. They manifest as groups of people such as those online scouring through thousands of emails leaked via Wikileaks from Hillary Clinton and the Democratic National Committee, looking for clues to deep conspiracy against them ²³ and even to white supremacists who use DNA ancestry tests who believe there is a Jewish run conspiracy that inserts false diversity into their tests ²⁴.

Steve Bannon, former Executive Chairman for Breitbart News and Chief Strategist for the 2016 Trump campaign made it perfectly clear that he believes in the use of cultural narrative to enact lasting social and political change. It was all part of Breitbart's doctrine. 'If you want to change politics, you have to change culture. If you want to change culture, you have to change people ['s perceptions of reality]' ²⁵ 'When Steve Bannon uses the term 'culture war,' he uses that term pointedly and [Breitbart and the Trump Campaign] were seeking out companies that could build an arsenal of informational weapons to fight that war' ²⁶. And so it sounds like, 'There's a war on for your mind' ²⁷.

Adam Curtis and Alex Jones: A Case Study in Reality Building

Adam Curtis and Alex Jones are exemplary artists, and dare I say, media cult leaders. They shape the stories of reality for millions. What draws these two obviously disparate figures together might you ask? Jones is America's most well known conspiracy theorists who runs his own media website and QVC for the paranoid and apocalypse preppers ^{28 29}. Curtis, on the other hand, is a BBC establishment and a sweetheart of left leaning millennials. Both are acting in response to the same conditions, that of increased complexity and paranoia in regards to systems of power. They utilize the power of narrative to draw connections in the complex world we inhabit, tangling viewers in a dangerous web.

It's easy to watch both of them string together concepts explaining systems of power and corruption, and start to believe them.

"There is a war on for your mind!" Is the slogan for Alex Jones' 'news' website, Infowars. As I watch a 'Breaking!' Video Alex Jones posted on Facebook Live after some of his YouTube videos were taken down for the third time, he repeats gruffly that he's 'trying to stay calm.' 'Look,' he says, 'I've made pages of notes.' He's sitting in what appears to be an upper middle class dining room, presumably his. The atmosphere around the video is conspiratorial. As if, living on the threshold of tyranny, he must convey his message before it is once again censored ³⁰. In less than ten minutes into the video, his narrative has circled from mind control to Clinton/Obama conspiracies involving a proposed satanic cult to the government controlling extreme weather and thus causing the climate change hoax ³¹. Jones is famous for these outlandish claims, mocked and ridiculed by many, but for the millions who subscribe to his shows and belief systems, the fear is real.

According to Amazon's analytics site, Jones' website Info Wars is visited by an average of 250,130 people daily. These statistics don't take into account Jones' YouTube and Facebook audiences, many of whom presumably could digest his content without ever having visited the Info Wars site. Not long after the 2016 election, Infowars was the 81st top news and media site visited in the US, four spots higher on the list than the BBC ³².

His dangerous ideas have pierced the public consciousness in such a way that Pizzagate became mainstream ³³ (families had to sue for defamation

after he accused one of the most horrific mass shootings in America of being a staged government plot ³⁴) and many believe that political elite in the Democratic Party are part of the occult ^{35 36}.

In the case of Jones, the comments section is full of people who are believers. They can tell there is something off with the power structure in America. The police are brutal and power hungry/ They are killing people/ The government wants more surveillance and control of its citizens/ Some of these things are true. The fears are based on a real imbalance.

That is, until Jones starts doing something over-the-top like putting on an actual tinfoil hat or asserting that children shot in the most recent school massacre were in fact crisis actors.

Jones relies on the 'honesty' of a face to face encounter. He wants to level with his viewers, talk to them as equals, from his home even, if it is urgent. He knows they need help protecting themselves from the government, big institutions, and the new world order. Curtis, on the other hand, never shows his face. He disguises opinions in the authoritative voice of the BBC, a British institution. Essentially, the establishment.

Plugging yourself into an Adam Curtis documentary can be like sliding into a warm bath. The ominous music begins while bold text overlays official looking archival images. An Adam Curtis film is immediately recognizable in its style. The text is bold with headlines such as "YOU ARE THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING" in bright red. His voice is authoritative and urgent, while also being warm enough to allude to the idea that he is letting you in on a secret. The editing is slick, seductive, unsettling. Shots have only an average of 2 - 7 seconds between cuts. A woman stabs herself and falls over dead, only to reveal a playful smile as the director cuts the scene/ People fall from buildings to their death in tune with cheerful 1960's hits/ The construction of the World Trade Towers in New York are announced/ A road is being built to Mecca/ Putin studies conceptual art/. Quick cuts of the mundane, the paranoid, the powerful. All the ground work is laid.

An hour or so into watching, you could almost feel as if the film is tying together a whole universe of events and intersections you hadn't realized before. You're getting it. You're really learning something. This will change everything. You're struck with the same sentiment Alex Jones proposed for his upcoming book. "[It] will be like the moment you first discovered sex or the Internet or quantum physics. [...] You will never look at your life or your world

the same way again”³⁷. There is such a pleasure in submitting oneself to the screen and absorbing a new narrative on how reality functions. Curtis seduces the viewer to the point of full complacency. It nearly feels like you can make a meaningful political difference by sitting there and taking it all in. This is an illusion. His arguments are thin, but they are given the appearance of brilliance when combined with the emotional style, music, and imagery he employs.

While your view of reality is transforming, any agency you would have in this process is stripped from you. In exchange, a lazy, conservative form of change is in process. The ineffective nature of the individual in the face of today’s complex society is a thesis Curtis agrees with, claims to be against, but fully reinforces through his work. The relinquishing of one’s power to the pure consumption of such a narrative creates social change just as effective as the click of the ‘like’ button on Facebook to a political piece you agree with or a quick Twitter response to a breaking news event. You are simply reinforcing an ‘easy think’ story of reality.

Curtis and Jones have their hands in manipulating Deep Stories³⁸ and pulling on all sides until they are deformed. Through his narratives, Curtis often tries to enable the western viewer to get outside their own ideology and view how the western story of history may fit within a global puzzle. Of course, to an earnest, well-meaning lefty, to be able to do so is appealing. Much of left wing politics is concerned with the self. How do I fit into this greater whole? How am I being persecuted or persecuting others by the systems I function within? These are great questions. However, the answers are not simple enough to be found within the disparate images and concepts from the voice over of a Curtis documentary, no matter the BBC authority it comes with. Jones, on the other hand, attempts to analyse³⁹ and create conspiracy theories that pull on the feeling of victimization and disenfranchisement much of the right identifies with.

Both men claim to warn against private and governmental institutions as well as ideology, while firmly being imbedded salesmen of both. They each present themselves as a new kind of journalist. One that is willing to tell you the truth about all the lies you have been fed your entire life, generally with the theme of deceit, fear, and the powerlessness of the individual in the face of such grave circumstances. Throughout their careers, they have both acted more like conceptual artists than traditional journalists. In addition to producing his own films, Jones made a guest appearance in the film *Waking Life*⁴⁰. During Jones’ divorce in court, his lawyer even claimed that Jones is a performance artist

acting out a role in his shows ⁴¹. Curtis has embraced his role as an artist more openly, creating videos for Massive Attack and collaborating with the theatre company Punchdrunk to create a conspiratorial immersive theatre installation in a five-story building in Manchester ⁴². In both cases, style always trumps content. So many are addicted to the stories they tell and how they tell them. The medium is the message ⁴³.

Weaving New Mythologies

'Starhawk's Song, Taught by the Speakers for the Dead'

Breath deep.

Feel the pain

where it lives deep in us

for we live, still,

in the raw wounds

and pain is salt in us, burning.

Flush it out.

Let the pain become a sound,

a living river on the breath.

Raise your voice.

Cry out. Scream. Wail.

Keen and mourn

for the dismembering of the world ⁴⁴.

Understanding everything is an impossibility. But critically thinking about how things function together can be learned⁴⁵. To understand complex systems we must not only understand how a single system functions, but realise and learn

to see where systems interact with one another. It is within the interrelationships between multiple complex systems that an inkling of holistic understanding can begin ⁴⁶.

Perhaps Science Fiction authors/ Intersectional Feminists/ Speculative Fiction Authors/ Multispecies Collaborators/ Indigenous peoples/ can be our new myth makers. Who is creating our narratives is becoming increasingly important. After all, 'It matters which ideas we think other ideas with' ⁴⁷ Why not try to harness the power of narrative to create a new and better world? It is obvious that simple narratives make the world a more manageable place for people when the turbulence of complexity is too much to comprehend ⁴⁸. Could there be a positive alternative to the majority dualistic easy-think narratives? The author Alex Evans argues that contemporary society has a 'Myth Gap' ⁴⁹. We are missing stories of redemption, how to mend the world when it is damaged to its core. Stories of how to mourn for the planet/ for mass extinction/ for inequality/ for the countless tragedies that CNN or BBC send straight to our lock screens. The goal of a redemptive myth would not be to engage in Magical Thinking, ignoring the harm and structural problems in society, but rather to be used as a guidepost for how to move through the thick present, and begin the path to healing ⁵⁰. Redemptive mythology can envision a 'larger us, a longer now, and a better good life' ⁵¹.

Equally as important is the reassertion of agency when choosing new mythologies. Instead of being fed the stories of us vs them and fear from media cult leaders or the politically powerful, we must consciously choose and create the narratives that will shape our world⁵². In the words of Marshall McLuhan, 'There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening' ⁵³. It is time to become conscious of our religious ideations of computation and automative thinking and learn how to embrace our tools while continuing to exert critical thought and engagement.

ENDNOTES

¹ 1 in 3 People Check Smartphones at Night: Deloitte Study - Business Insider. <http://uk.businessinsider.com/1-in-3-people-check-smartphones-night-deloitte-study-2016-9>. Accessed 3 March 2018.

² Shenk, David. *Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut*. HarperEdge, 1998.

- ³ Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard University Press, 2007. p 249-262. Though Ngai is analysing literature with thick language and repetition, the onslaught of complexity in digital life has similar context.
- ⁴ Ibid. p. 258.
- ⁵ The Pinwheel of Death refers to the processing icon for the Mac's cursor.
- ⁶ Nagle, Angela. *Kill All Normies: The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to Trump and the Alt-Right*. Zero Books, 2017. p 10 – 11.
- ⁷ Negative liberty is the freedom from something i.e. Wall Street corruption and inequality, positive liberty is the freedom to do something.
- ⁸ Ibid. p. 14 – 15. In Nagle's *Kill All Normies*, she draws a parallel between the left's use of identity politics on Tumblr and the Alt-Right's retaliation with hate speech and violence. I agree with the backlash to the book. There is no rational moral equivalence of the two.
- ⁹ Ibid. p. 34 – 35.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Evans, Alex. *The Myth Gap: What Happens When Evidence and Arguments Aren't Enough?* Eden Project, 2017. p 21
- ¹² Herman, David. *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*. MIT Press, 2013. p 232-233.
- ¹³ Ibid. p. 233.
- ¹⁴ Bridle, James. *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*. Verso, 2018. p 43.
- ¹⁵ "Occam's Razor." Wikipedia, 8 June 2018. Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Occam%27s_razor&olddid=844905340.
- ¹⁶ Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015.
- ¹⁷ Bridle, James. *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*. Verso, 2018. p 46.
- ¹⁸ Han, Byung-Chul. *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*. Translated by Erik Butler, Verso, 2017. p 60-67.
- ¹⁹ Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, xvii.
- ²⁰ Zak, Paul J. "Why Your Brain Loves Good Storytelling." *Harvard Business Review*, 28 Oct. 2014, <https://hbr.org/2014/10/why-your-brain-loves-good-storytelling>.
- ²¹ Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *Strangers In Their Own Land: Anger and*

Mourning on the American Right. The New Press, 2016.

²² Ibid.

²³ i.e. The Pizzagate conspiracy, which believed that Hillary Clinton was involved in running a child prostitution and slavery ring out of a DC pizzeria. The conspiracy went mainstream and resulted in a man who showed up armed to find the children in the non-existent basement. Pizzagate Nearly Destroyed My Restaurant. Then My Customers Helped Me Fight Back | Inc.Com. <https://www.inc.com/magazine/201707/burt-helm/how-i-did-it-james-alefantis-comet-ping-pong.html>. Accessed 19 June 2018.

²⁴ White Supremacists Are Embracing Genetic Testing – but They Aren't Always That Keen on the Results. <https://www.newstatesman.com/2017/08/white-supremacists-are-embracing-genetic-testing-they-arent-always-keen-results>. Accessed 1 June 2018.

²⁵ "Steve Bannon Thought 'Culture War' Was the Way to Change U.S. Politics, Says Whistleblower." Newsweek, 17 May 2018, <http://www.newsweek.com/steve-bannon-wanted-culture-war-change-us-politics-says-whistleblower-930272>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Infowars slogan.

²⁸ Jones' involvement in the marketing and sale of his own products take me right back to Amway. Through his paranoid salesman-ship, he brings in over 10 million dollars a year. Brown, Seth. "Alex Jones's Infowars Media Empire Is Built to Sell Snake-Oil Diet Supplements." Select All, <http://nymag.com/selectall/2017/05/how-does-alex-jones-make-money.html>. Accessed 10 June 2018.

²⁹ A big part of evangelical faiths that sprang out of the 1844 Great Disappointment is apocalypse prepping. We are living in the end days after all. These feelings are exploited by Jones and he uses them to convert more towards his ideology and his brand.

³⁰ The pure volume of content produced by Jones and the Infowars empire is astonishing. I went to find the video in order to cite it, and I cannot find it because each day 8-15 new videos are uploaded.

³¹ "Alex Jones' Mis-Infowars: 7 Bat-Sh*t Conspiracy Theories." Rolling Stone, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/lists/alex-jones-mis-infowars-7-bat-sht-conspiracy-theories-w467509/satanists-are-taking-over-america-w467695>. Accessed 10 June 2018.

³² <https://www.infowars.com/infowars-surges-31-spots-in-media-site-rankings-in-one-month/>

³³ Pizzagate was a conspiracy theory that there was a child prostitution ring

being held in a DC pizza place by liberal elites. The conspiracy was picked up by Jones and resulted in a shooting at the restaurant. All speculations were proven false.

³⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/23/youtube-alex-jones-sandy-hook-media-matters-video>

³⁵ <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/lists/alex-jones-mis-infowars-7-bat-sht-conspiracy-theories-w467509/sa-tanists-are-taking-over-america-w467695>

³⁶ He also claims that Marina Abramovic is the top occultist leader: <https://www.infowars.com/bombshell-hillary-clintons-satanic-network-exposed/>

³⁷ Flood, Alison. "Alex Jones Reported to Be Working on Book about 'the War for Your Mind.'" The Guardian, 25 Jan. 2018. www.theguardian.com, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/25/alex-jones-reported-to-be-working-on-book-about-the-war-for-your-mind-neil-strauss>.

³⁸ Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *Strangers In Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. The New Press, 2016.

³⁹ This is a generous word...

⁴⁰ *Waking Life*. Directed by Richard Linklater, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2001.

⁴¹ His ex-wife however, did not agree with the statement, claiming that he is clearly unhinged and wants 'to break Alec Baldwin's neck. He wants J-Lo to get raped.' "Alex Jones' Lawyer Admits the One Thing We All Already Knew." The Independent, 17 Apr. 2017,

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/infowars-alex-jones-performance-artist-playing-character-lawyer-conspiracy-theory-donald-trump-a7687571.html>.

⁴² Review: It Felt Like A Kiss. 4 July 2009. news.bbc.co.uk, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/arts_and_culture/8134509.stm.

⁴³ McLuhan, Marshall, et al. *The Medium Is the Message: an Inventory of Effects*. Gingko Press, 2001.

⁴⁴ Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016. p 166.

⁴⁵ Bridle, James. *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*. Verso, 2018. p 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 14.

⁴⁸ Some of the best work currently being done in narrative creation, in my opinion, is by journalists and storytellers in podcasts. They are able to meld the political, emotional, personal, factual, and sensational aspects through the highly emotive medium of the voice.

⁴⁹ Evans, Alex. *The Myth Gap: What Happens When Evidence and Arguments Aren't Enough?* Eden Project, 2017.

⁵⁰ Too often, the political left relies on dry facts, memos, and rebuttals instead of creating mobilizing stories. *Ibid.* p. 104.

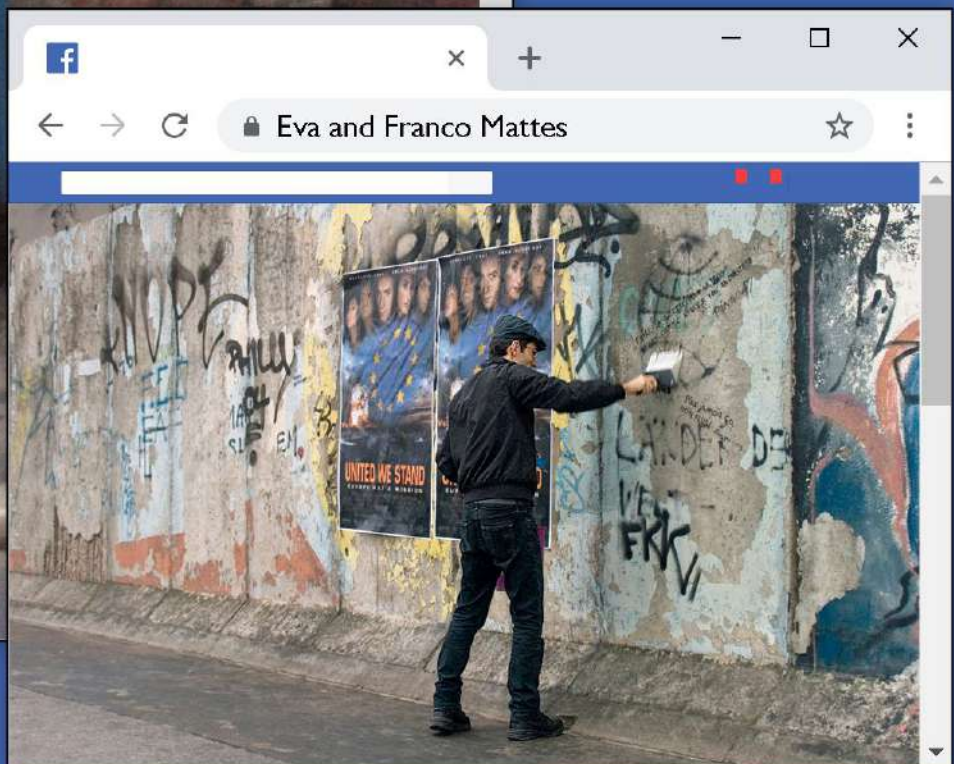
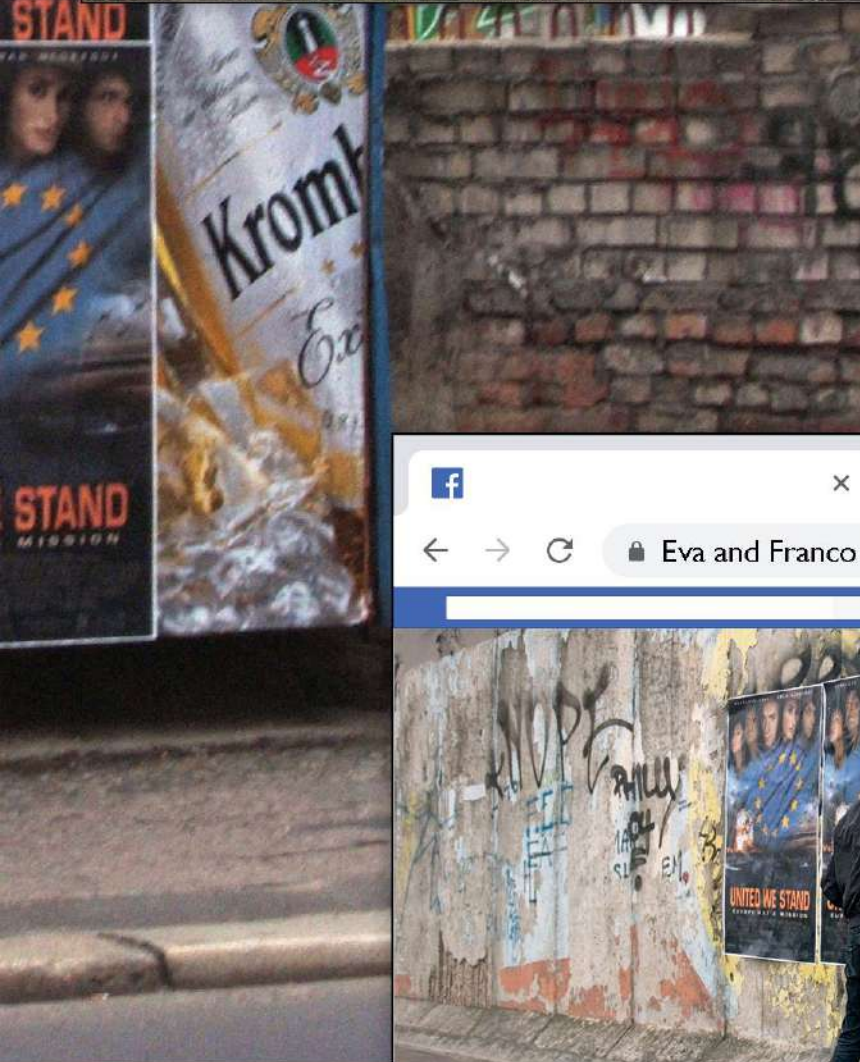
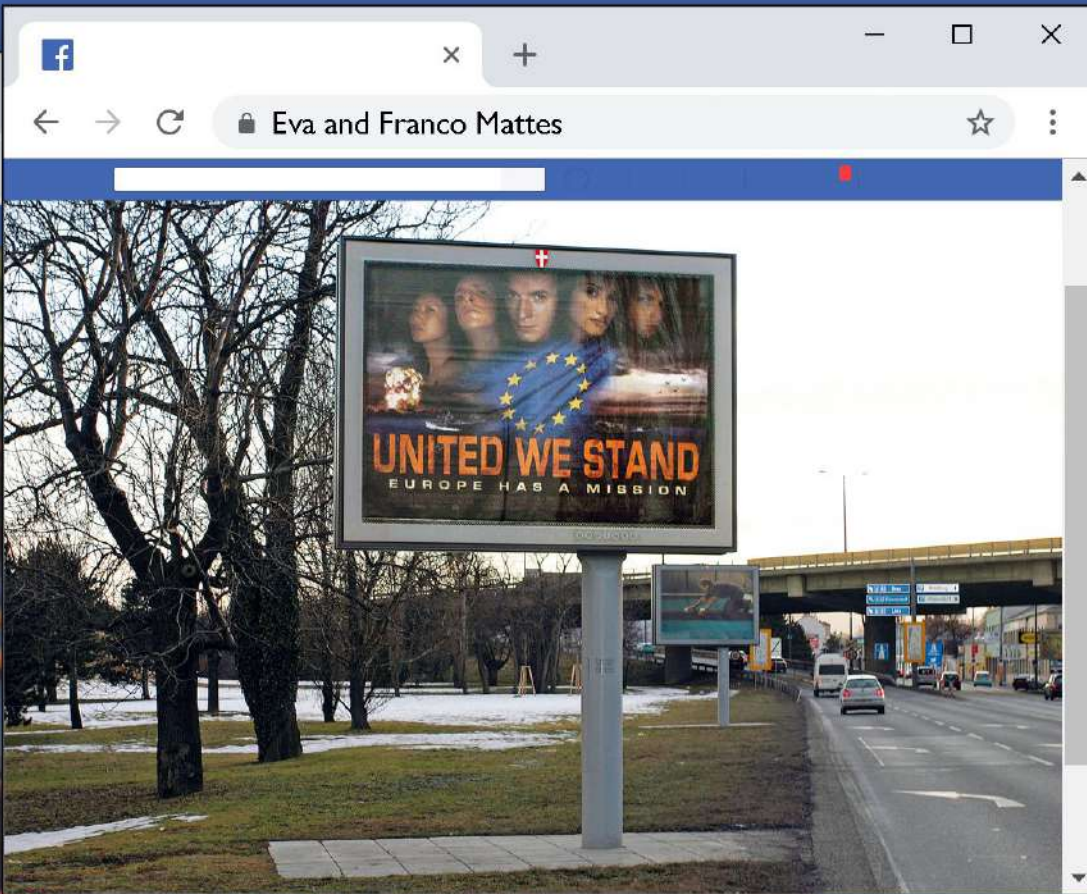
⁵¹ *Ibid.*

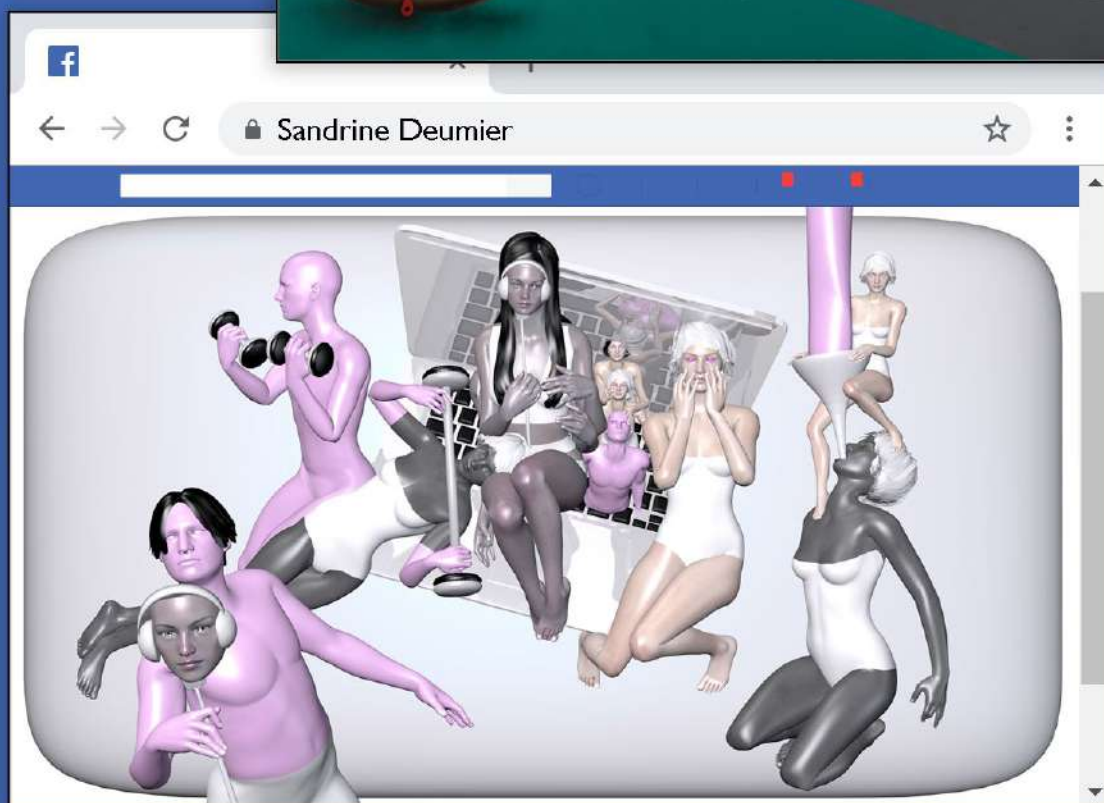
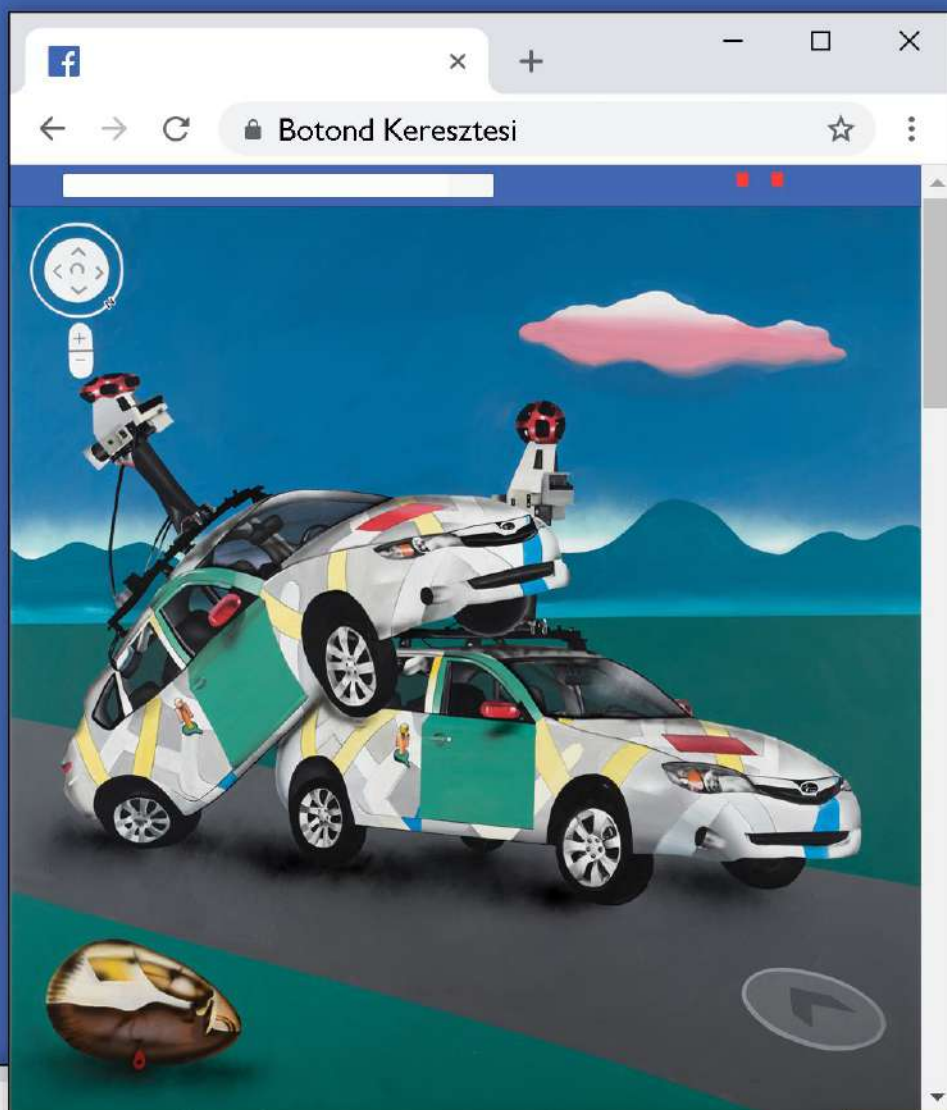
⁵² 'The government of Singapore undertook a major collective storytelling process that involved over 47,000 Singaporeans in 660 dialogue sessions over the course of a year. The conversation focused explicitly on what kind of future Singaporeans wanted and how they should get there, and resulted in a clear synthesis of the perspectives that arose, and five core aspirations that Singaporeans wanted to pursue.' Evans, Alex. *The Myth Gap: What Happens When Evidence and Arguments Aren't Enough?* Eden Project, 2017. p 122.

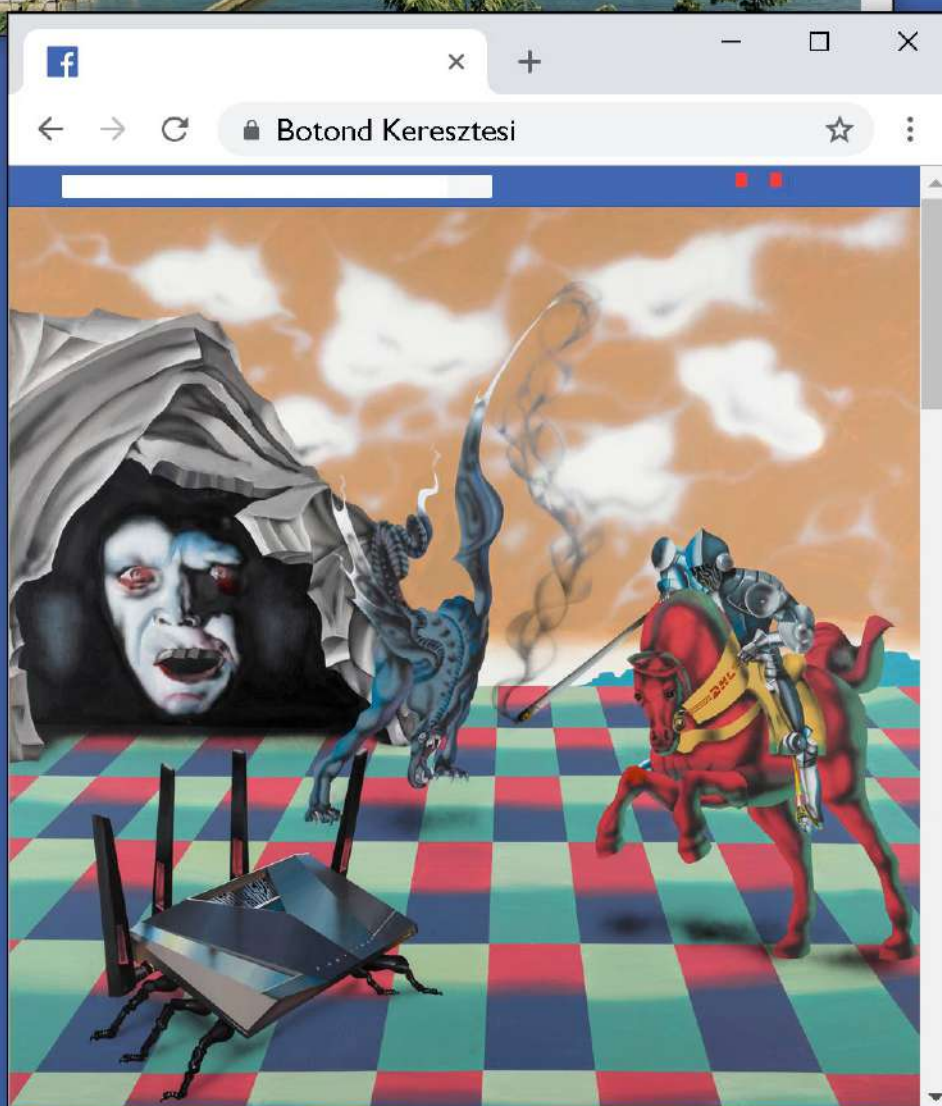
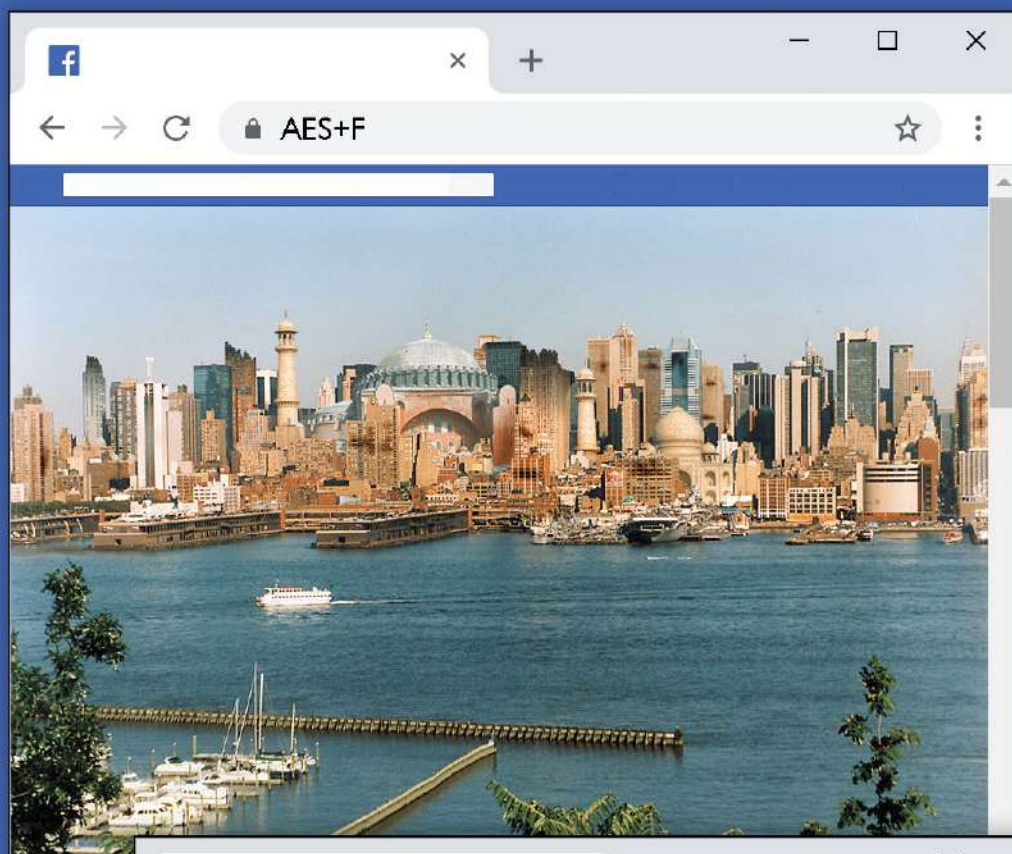
⁵³ McLuhan, Marshall, et al. *The Medium Is the Massage: an Inventory of Effects.* Gingko Press, 2001.

Andrea Khôra (b. 1989, Seattle, WA, US) is a London based artist currently pursuing an MA at the Royal College of Art in Contemporary Art Practice: Critical Practice. Her work gives power to the idea that reality is fluid and constantly emerging. She explores the flexibility of reality through relational boundaries, uncovering ecological interconnected states in natural, psychological, and social worlds. Encouraged by the concepts of multiplicity and non-linear experience, her projects inform this study through research and investigation, questioning elements that make up a particular perspective.

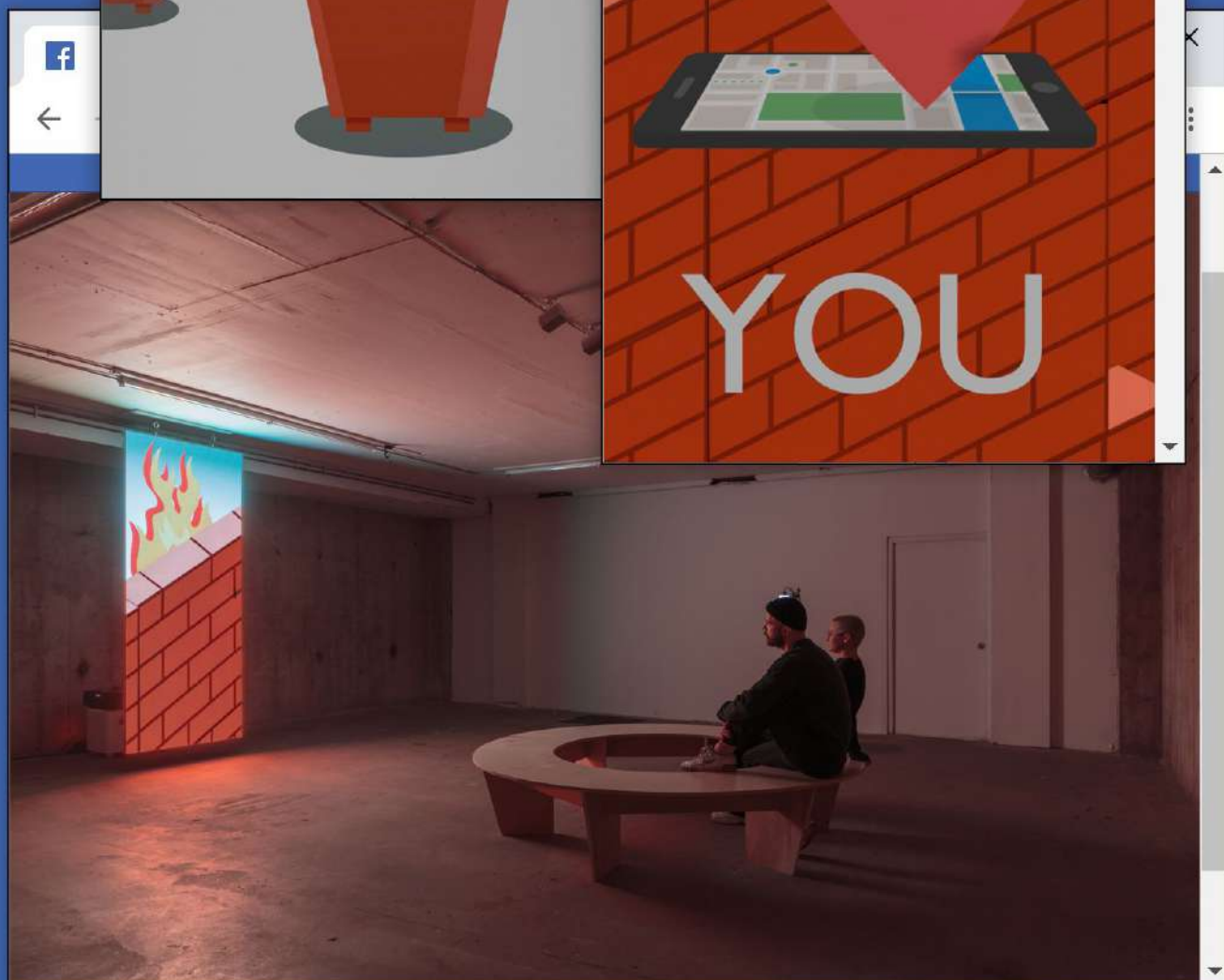


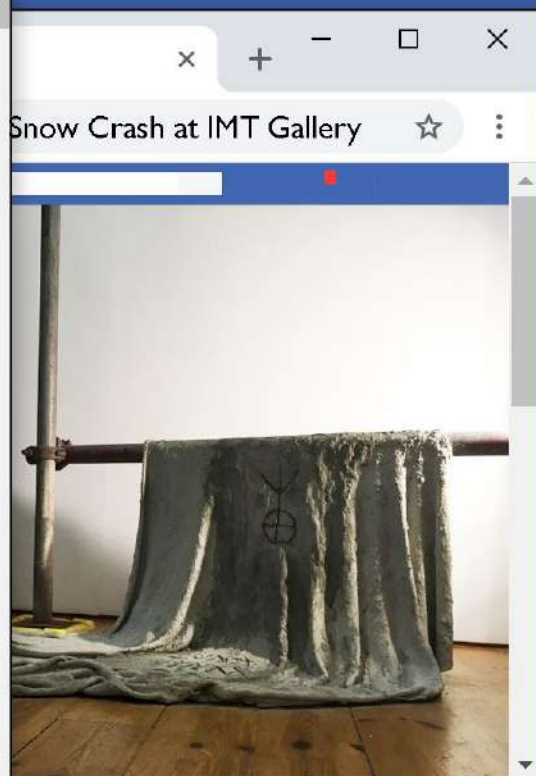
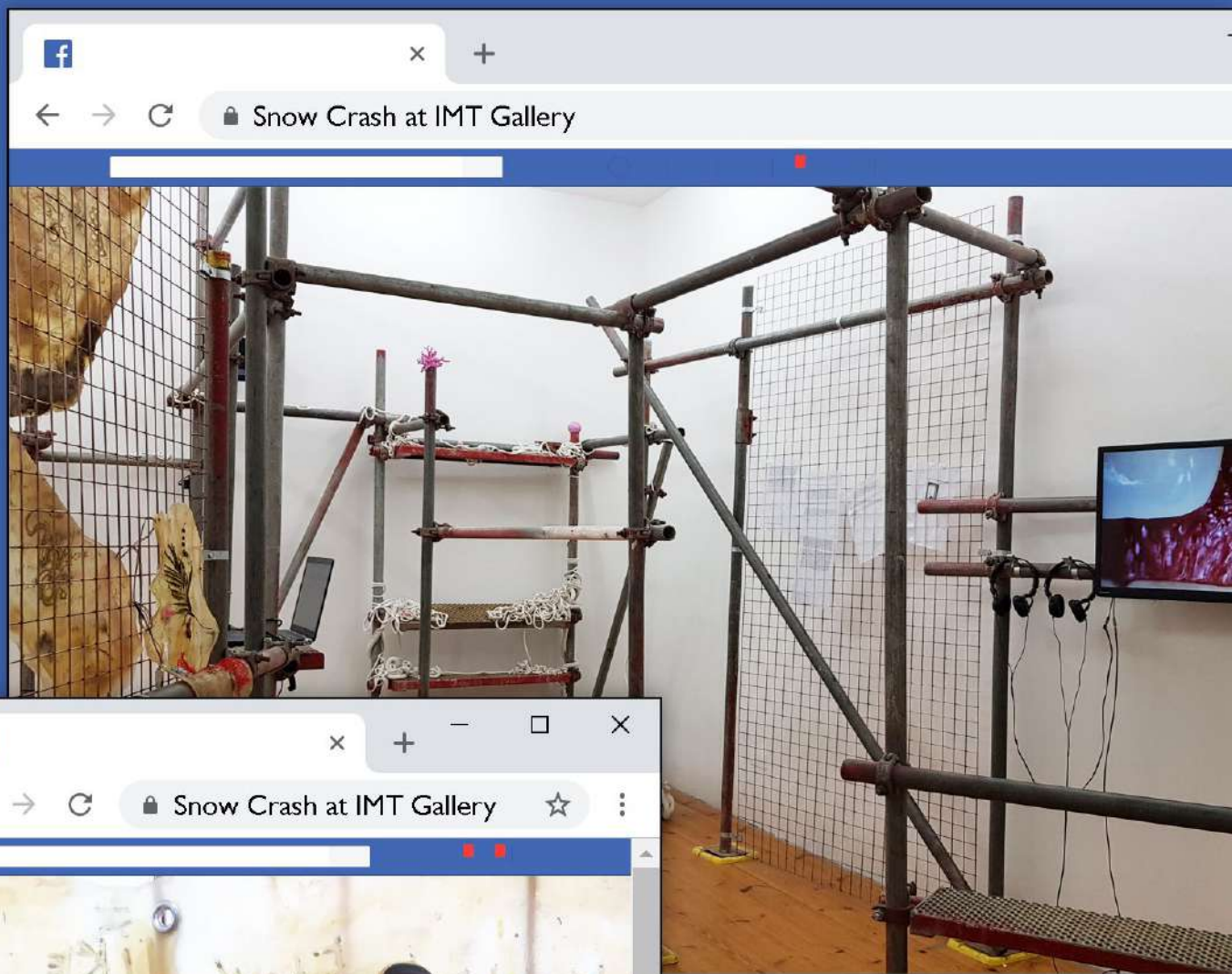




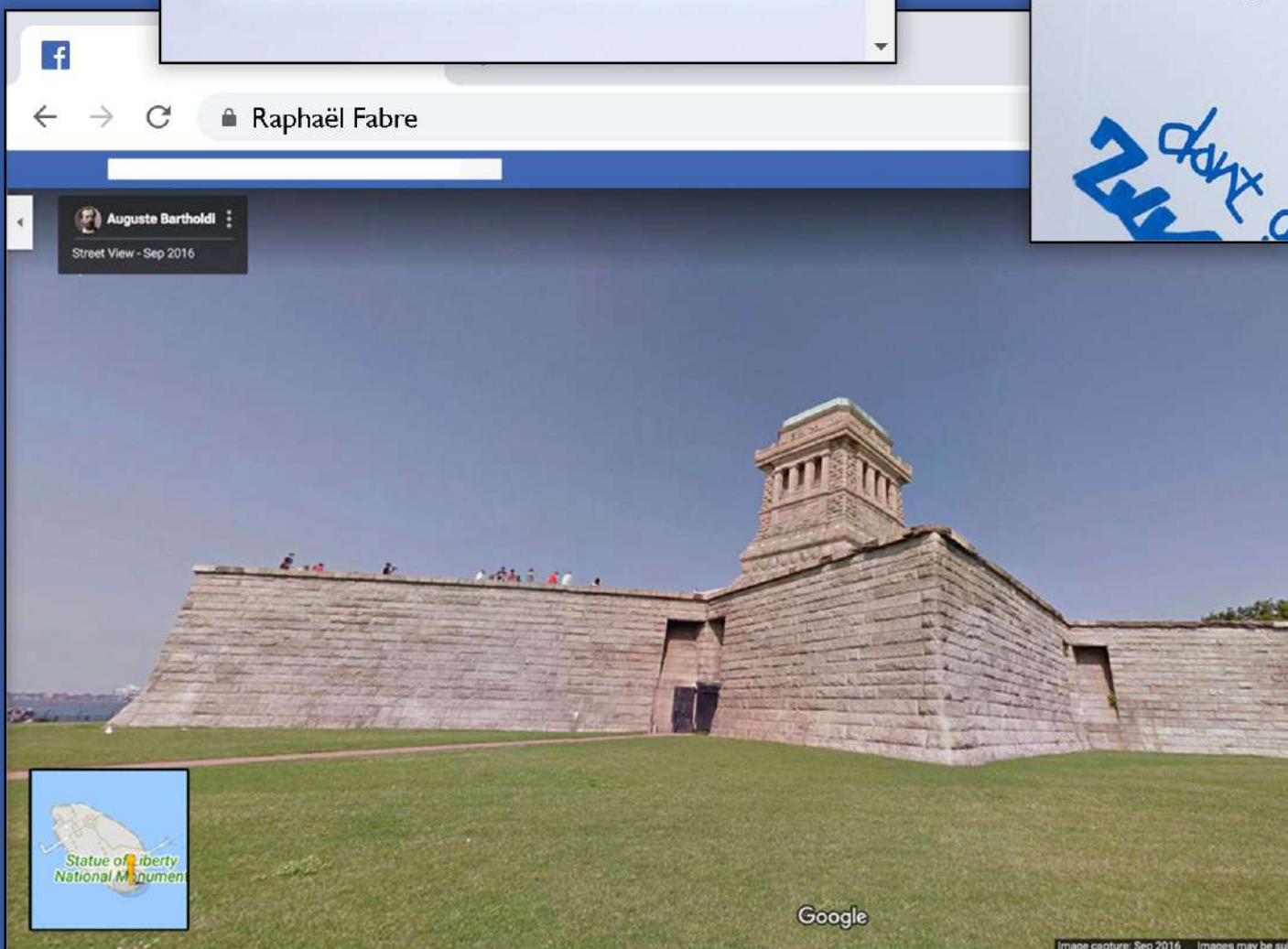






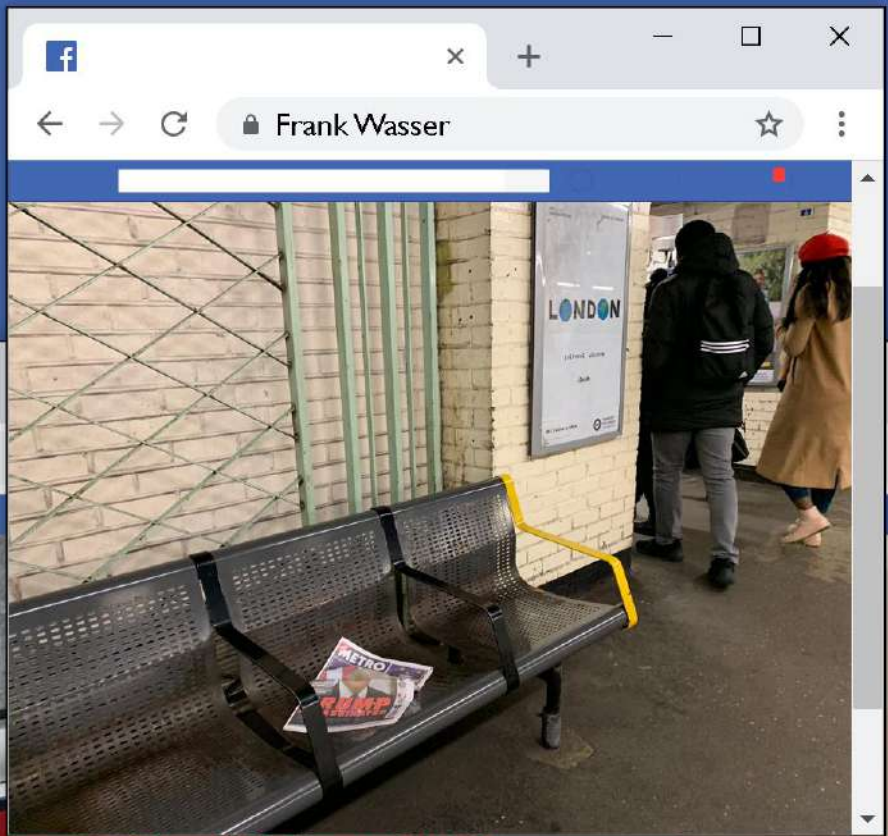


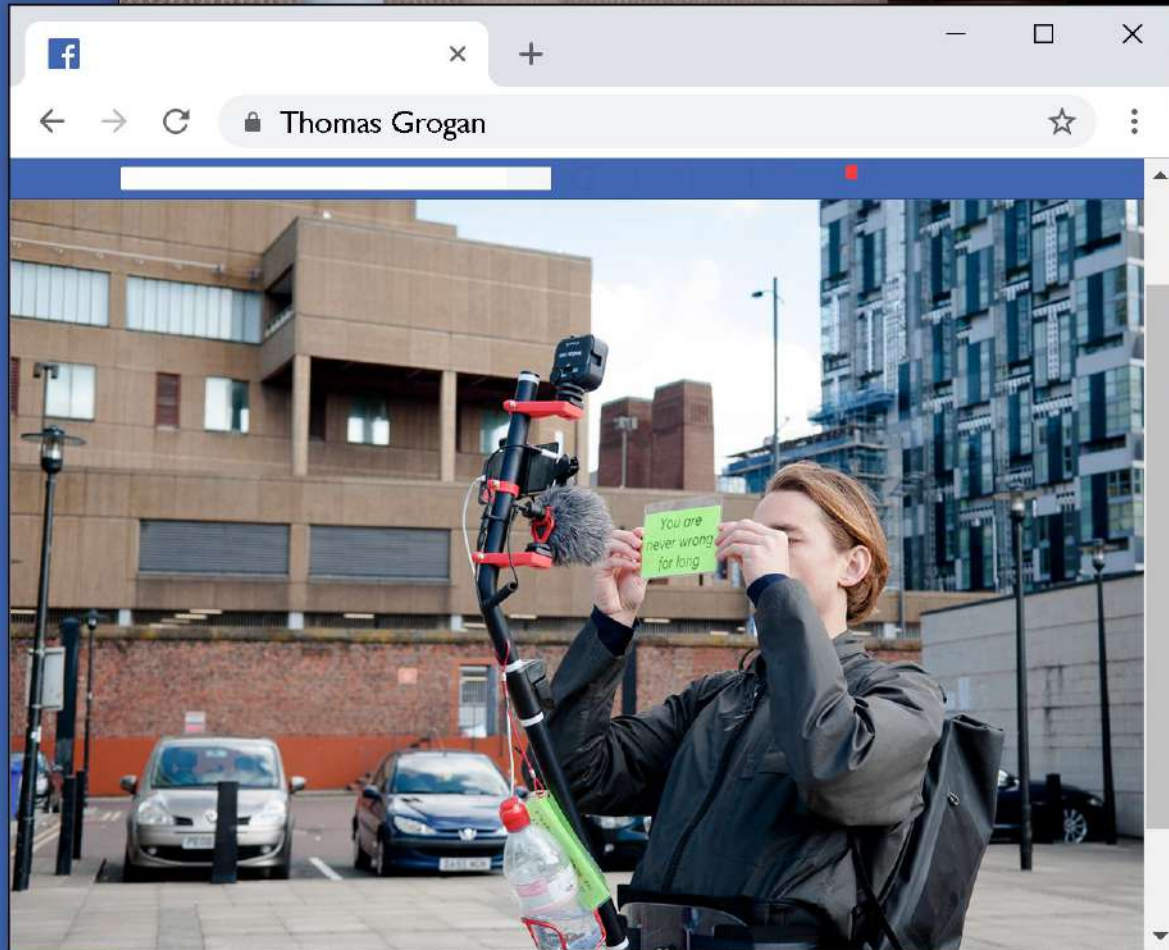
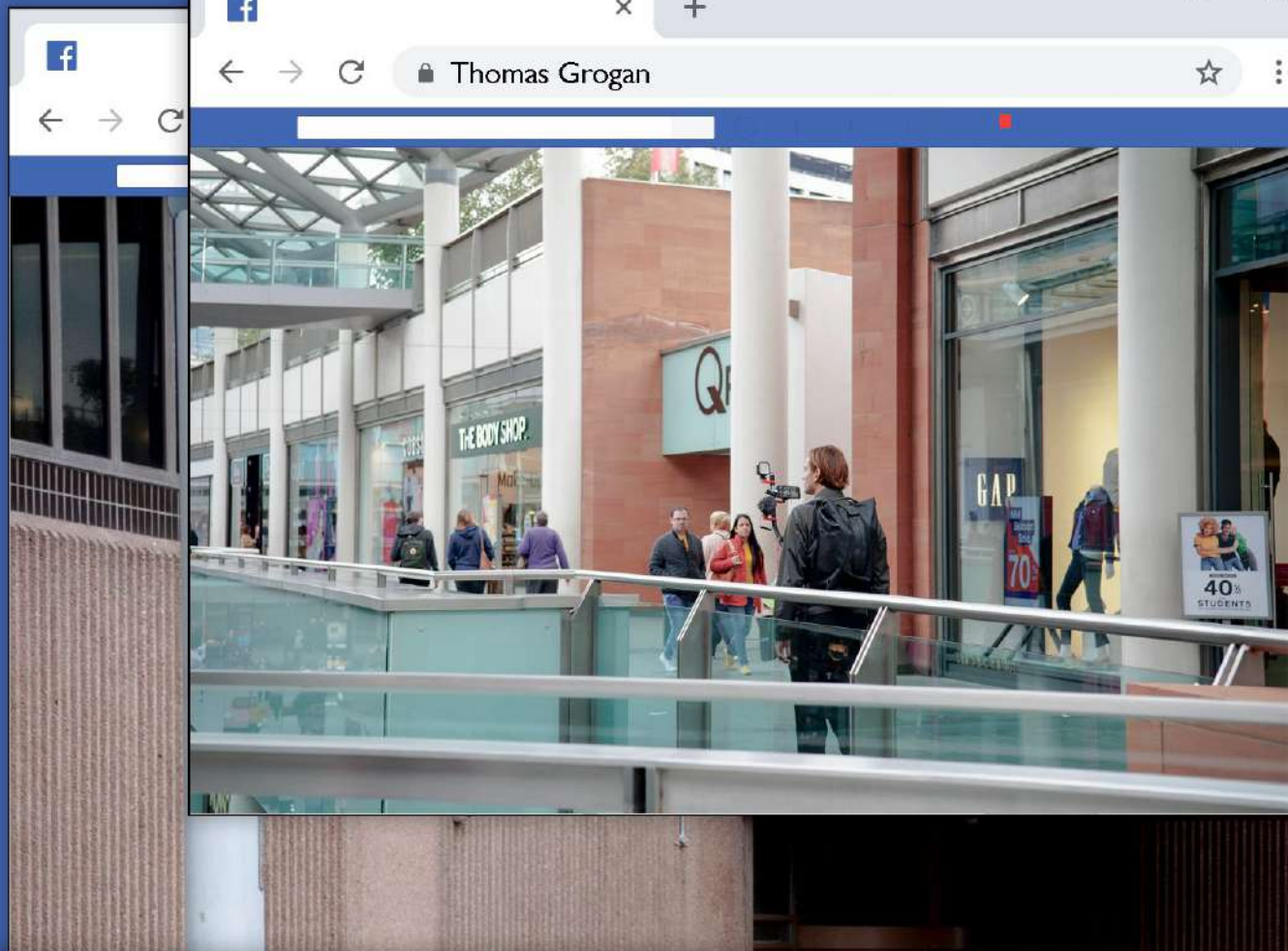


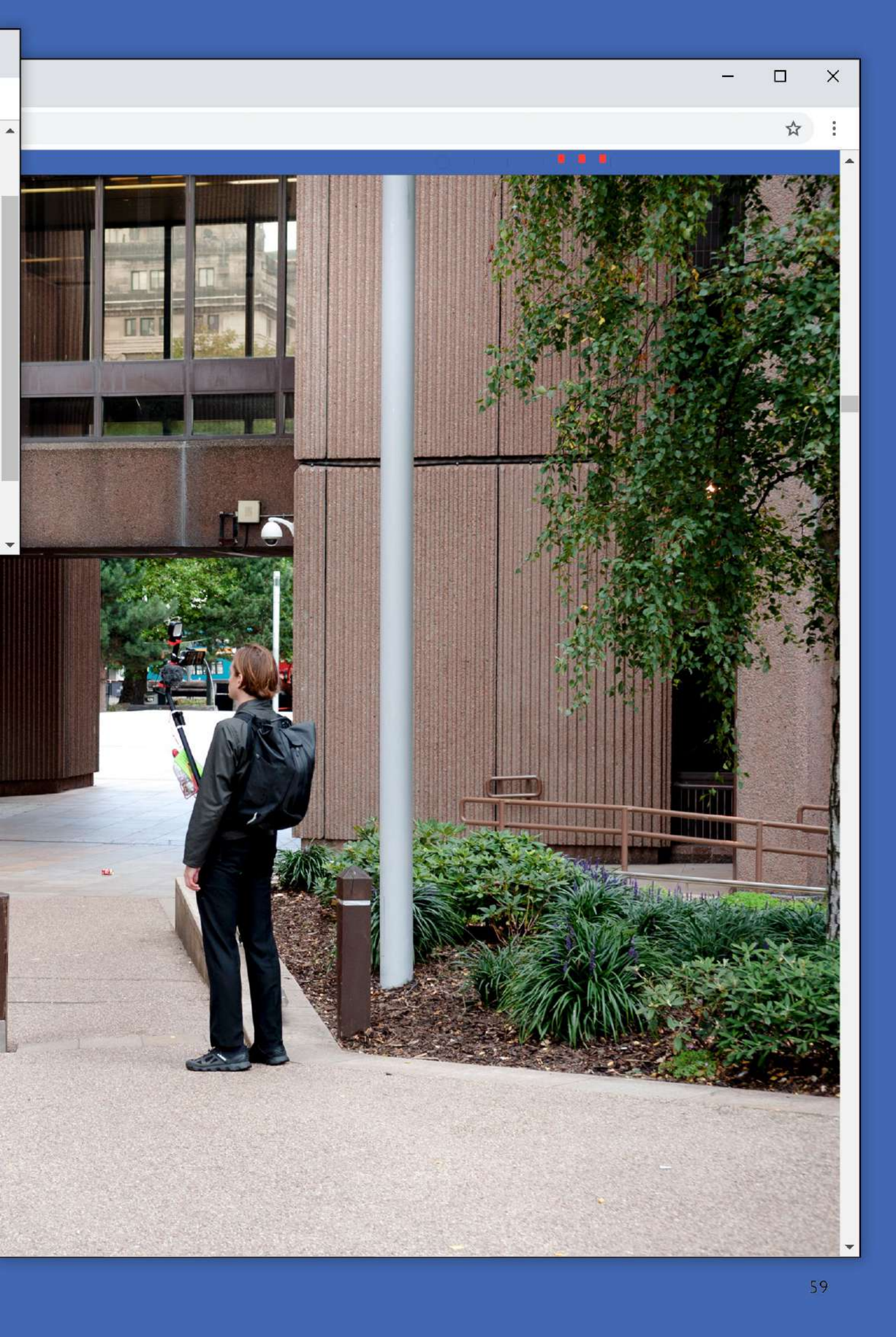


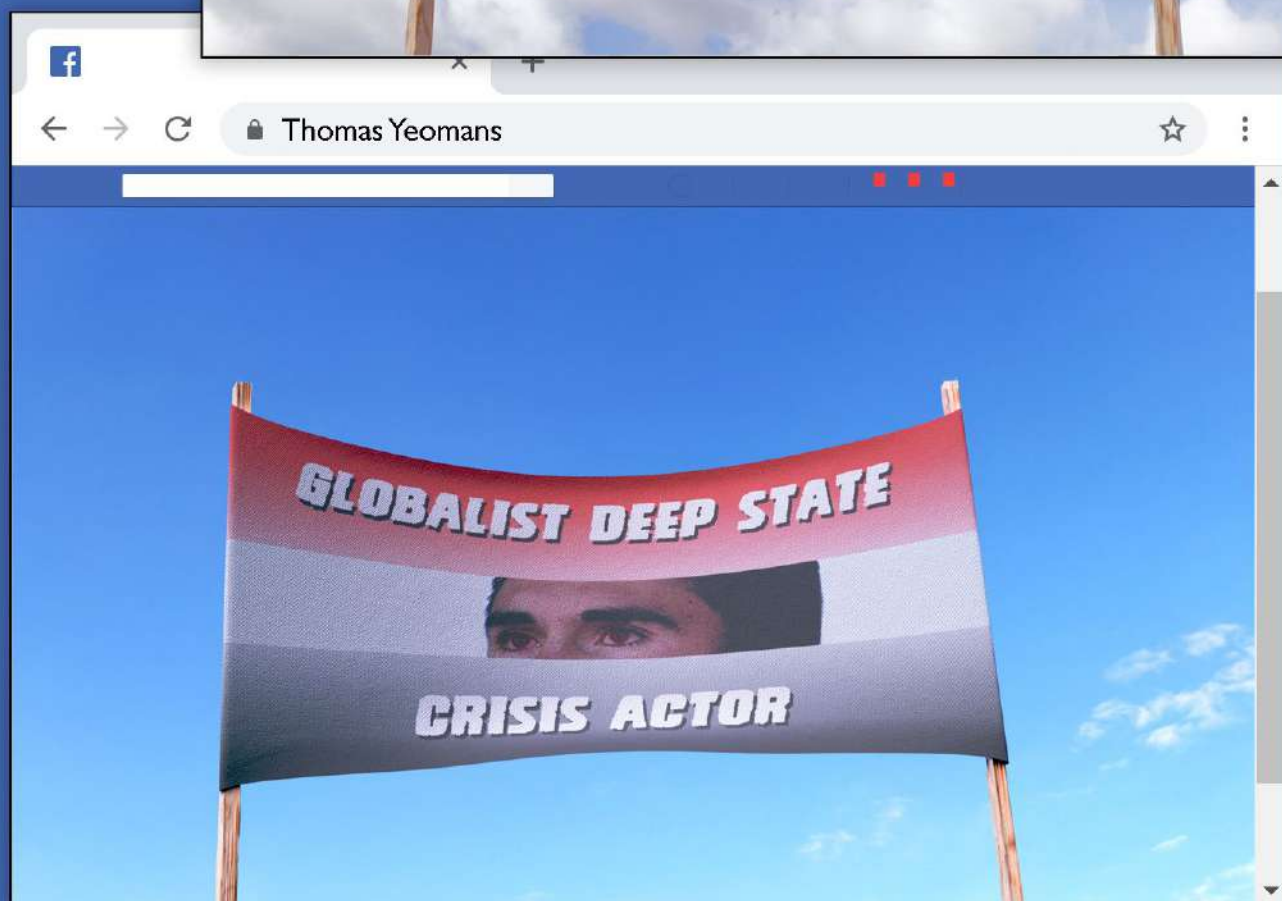
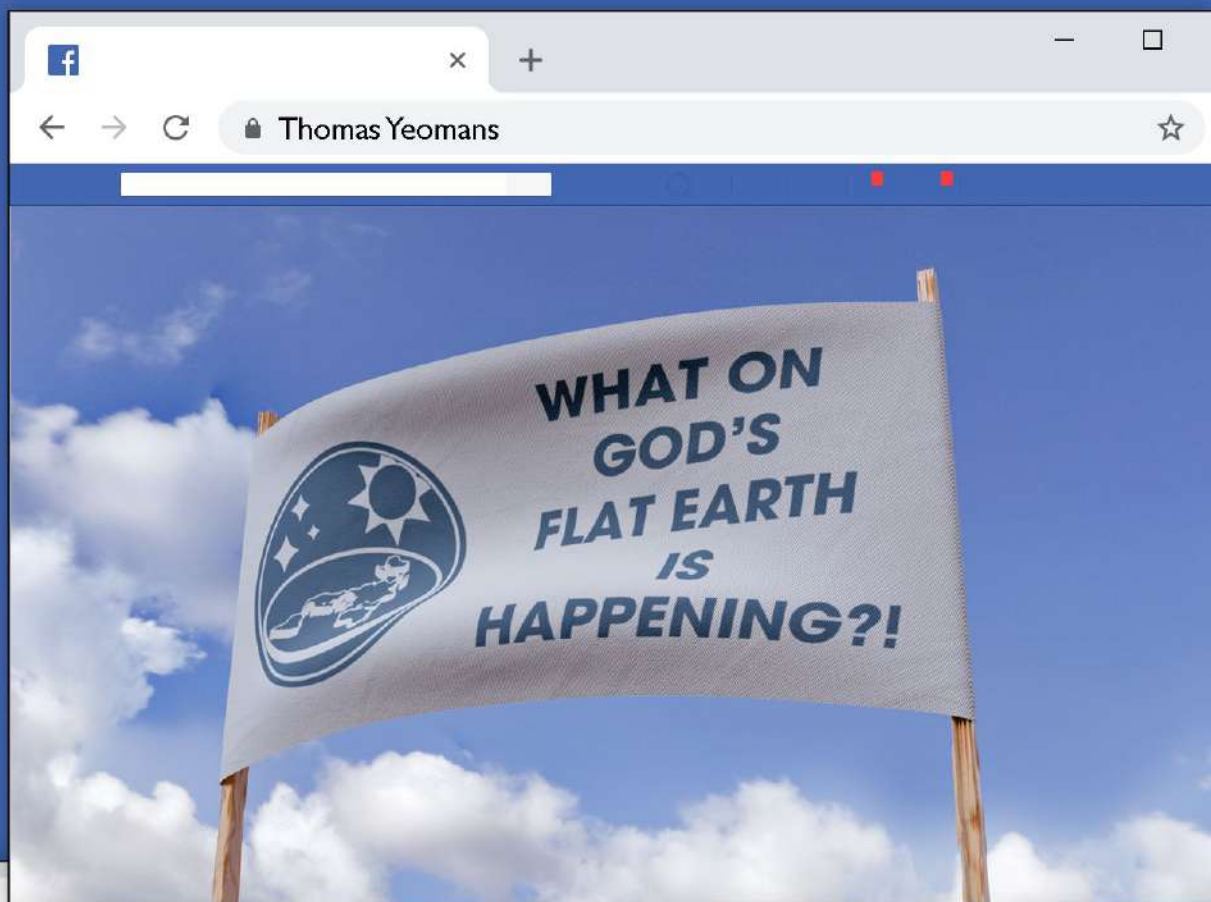


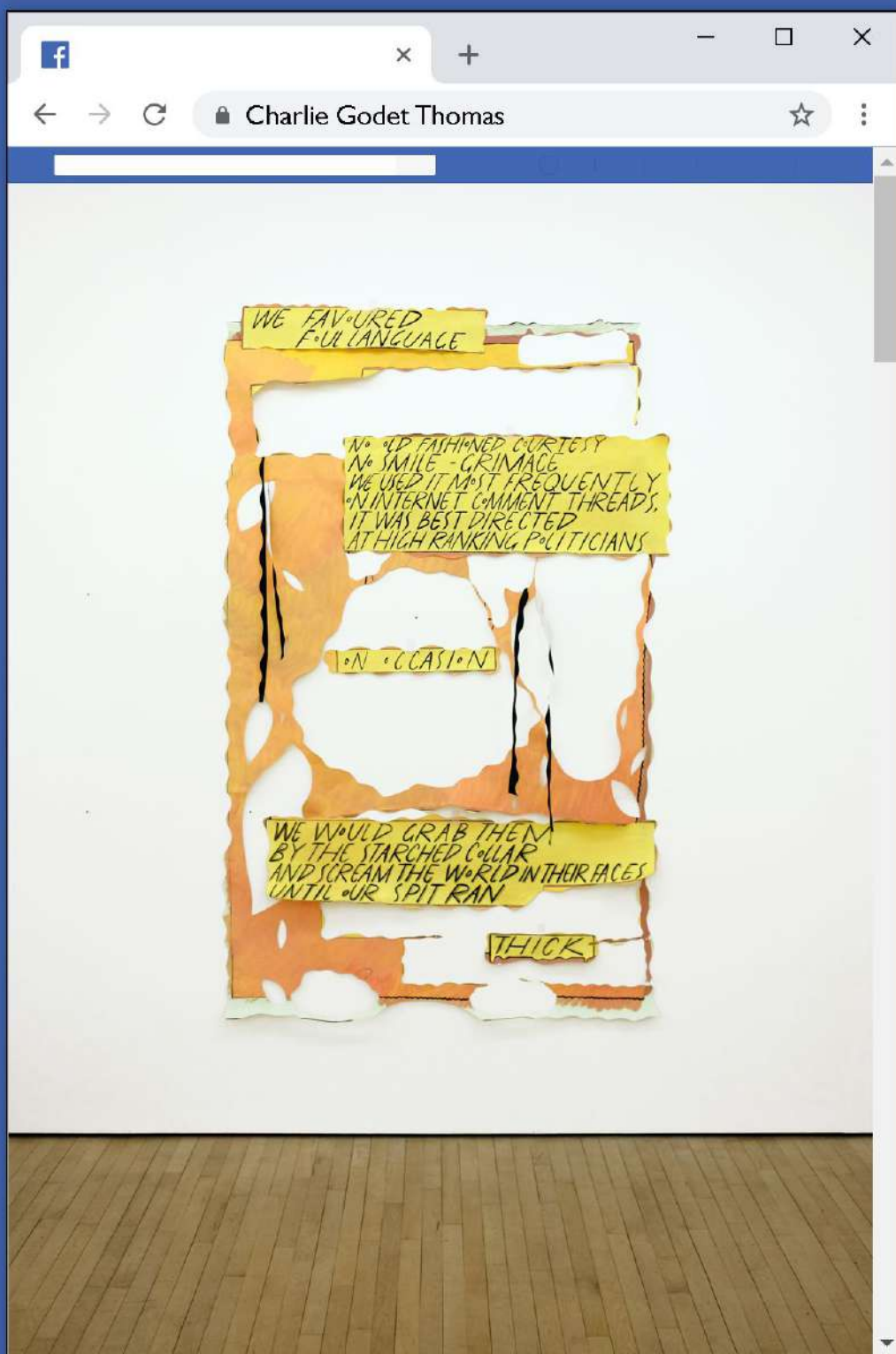




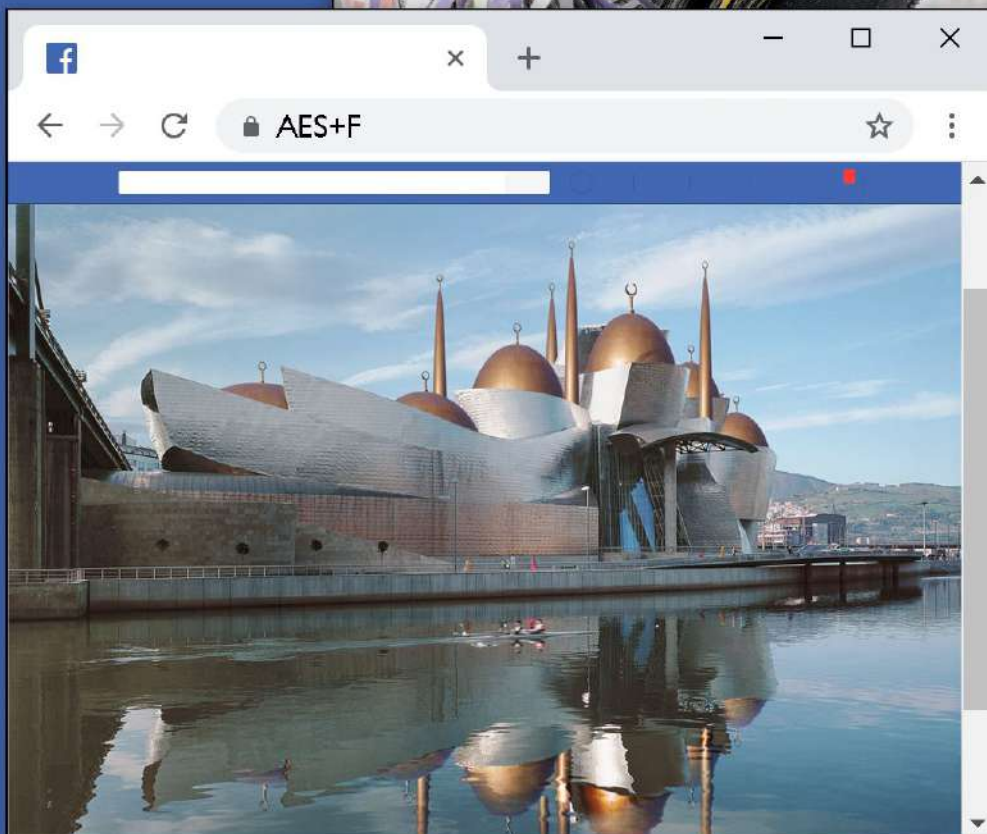
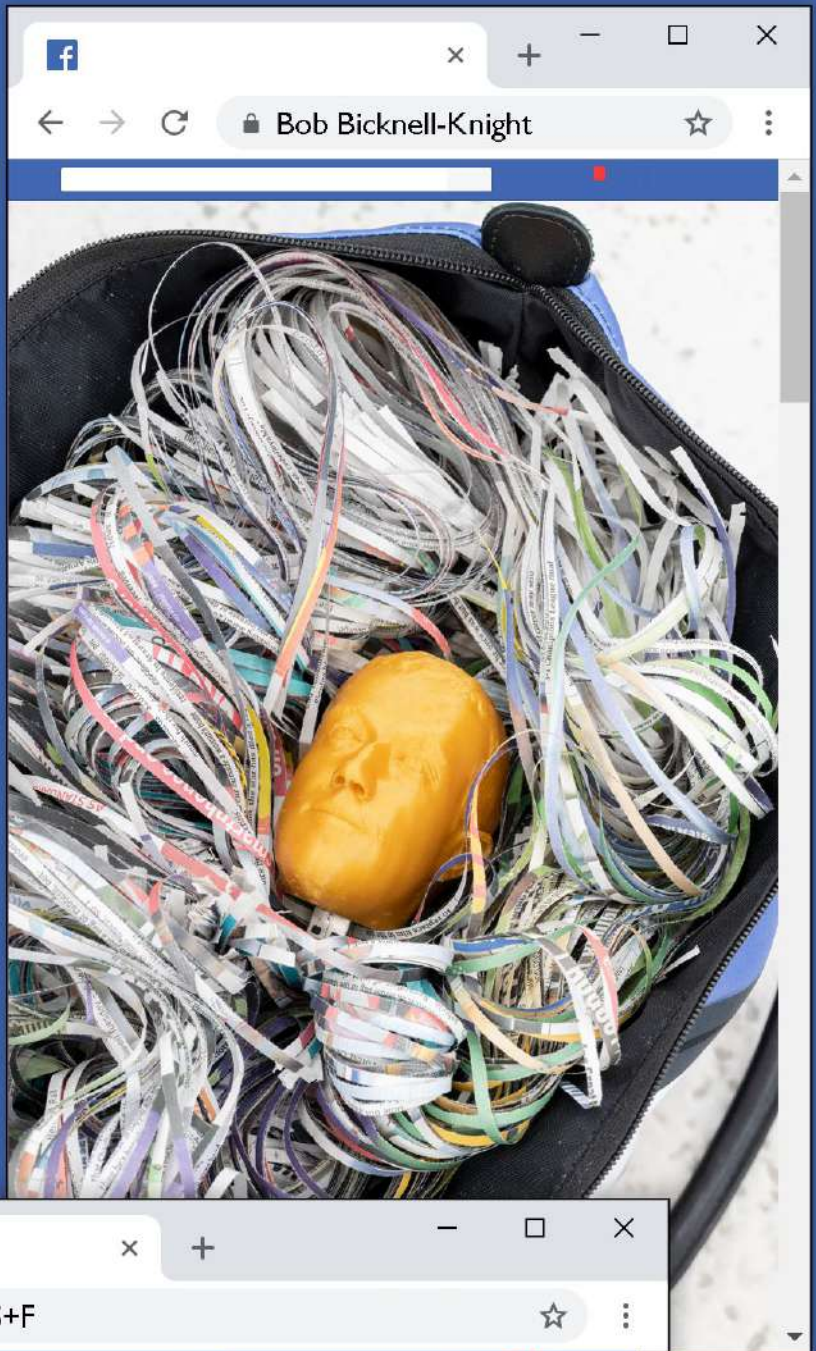


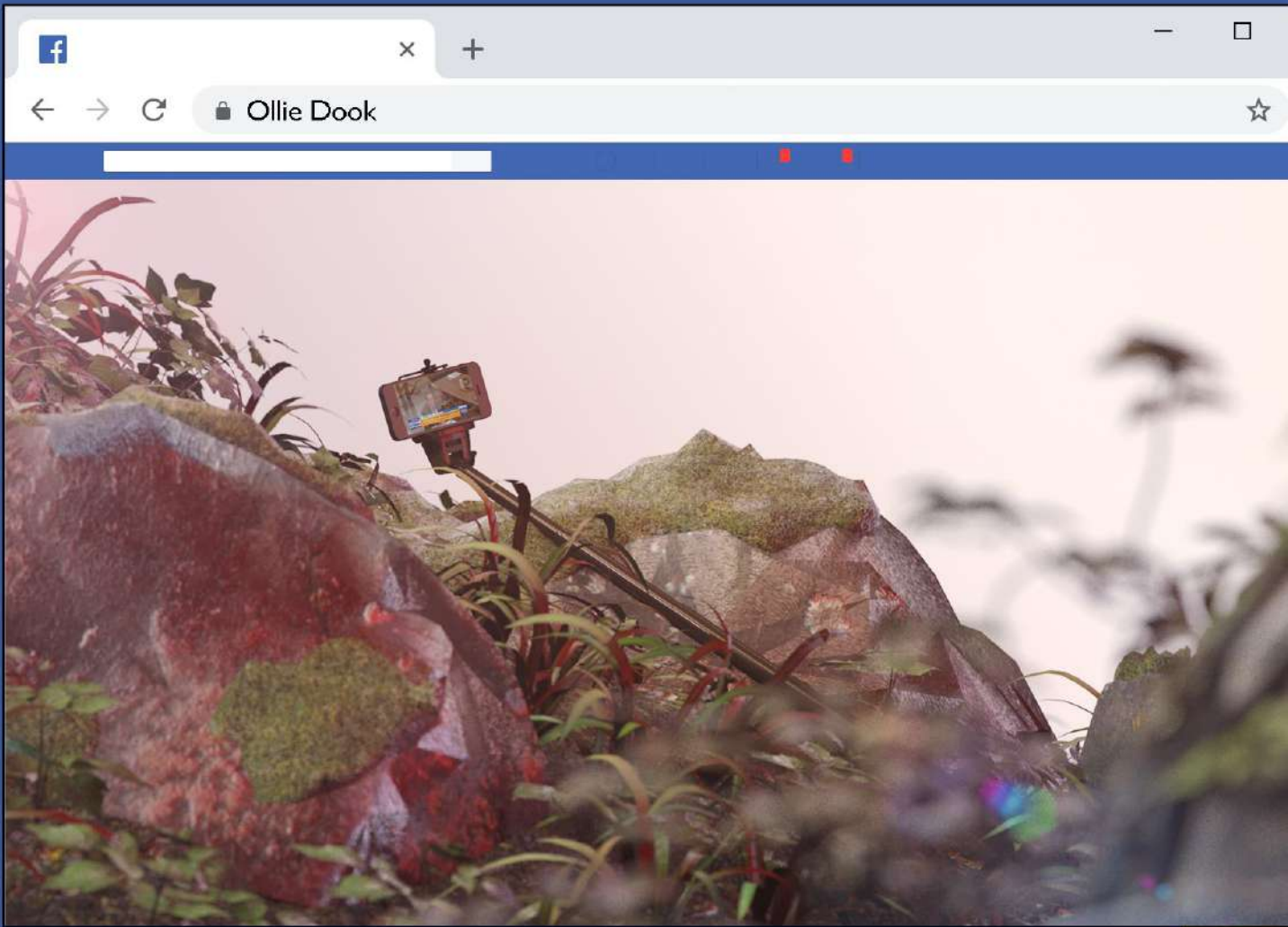


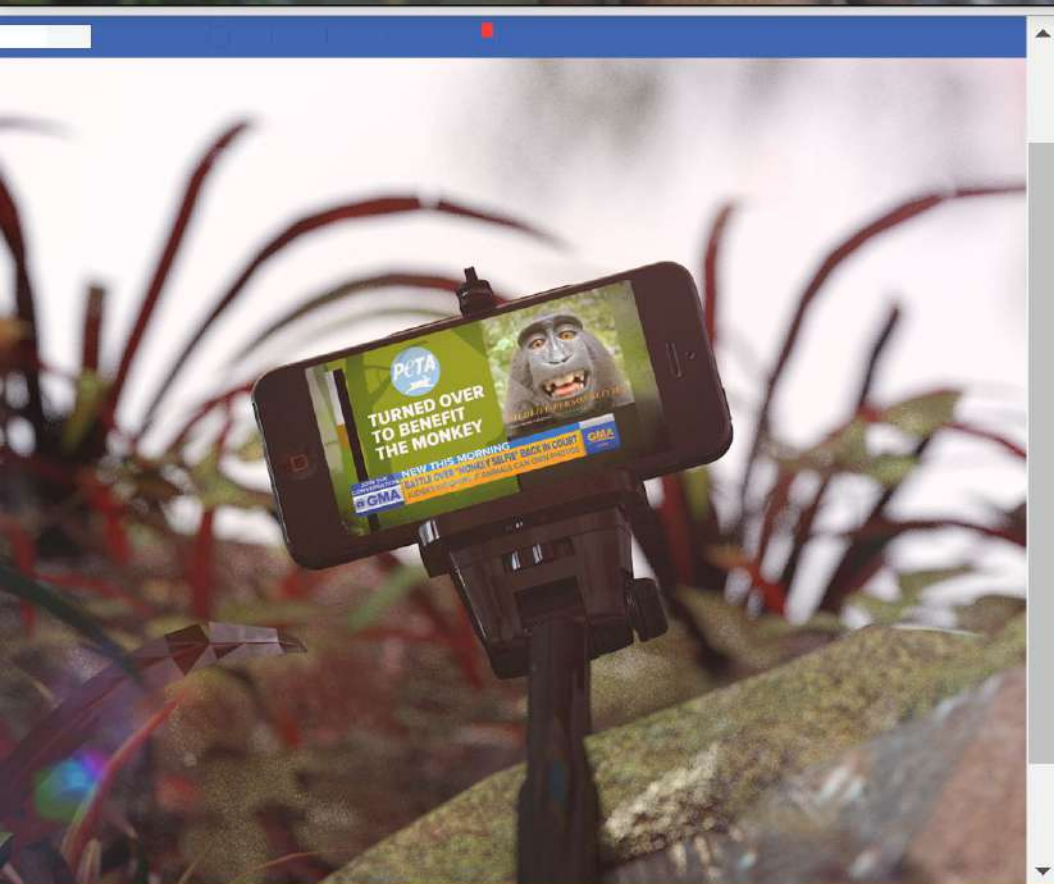
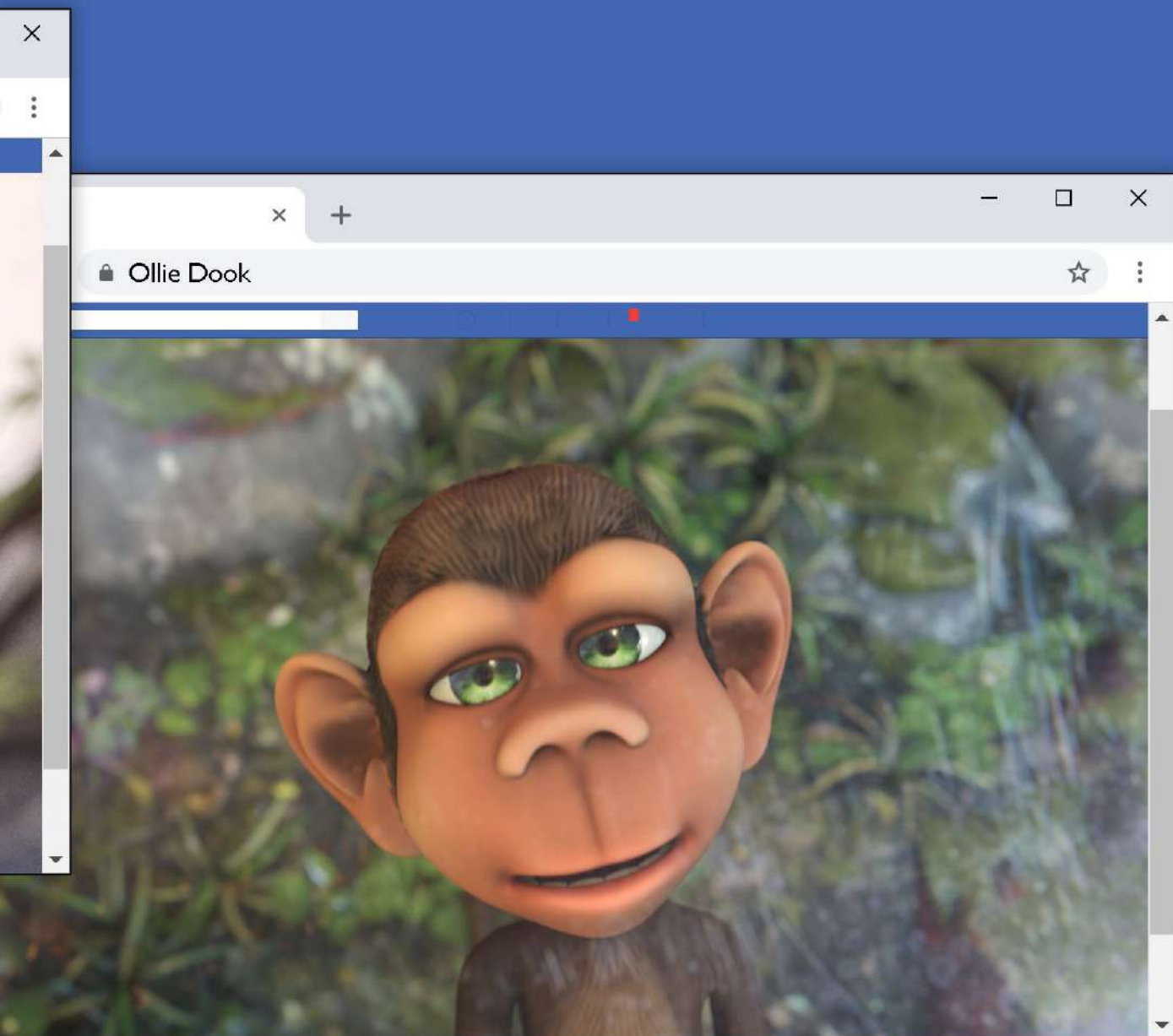


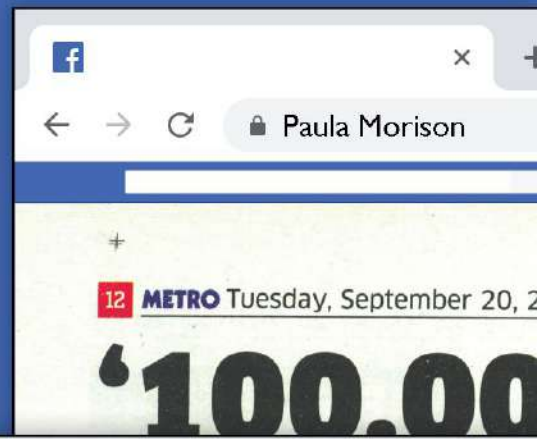












10 METRO Thursday, August 18, 2016

More than 82,000 told to leave their homes as wildfire

CALIFORNIA BURN



Raging: Cars burn and a McDonald's sign melts (left) as flames engulf property and blacken a statue of Jesus (right) EPA/REX

THOUSANDS of people have been urged to flee their homes after a wildfire broke out in a mountain pass in southern California.

Evacuation orders were issued to 82,640 residents of San Bernardino County as the flames began to engulf homes

and property. Firefighters are battling the blaze - the wildfires that have killed nearly 300 people in the drought-pa... 'It is a very bad fire' has wind be... Forest Serv...

2016

00 killed' by nok

e spreads
ING



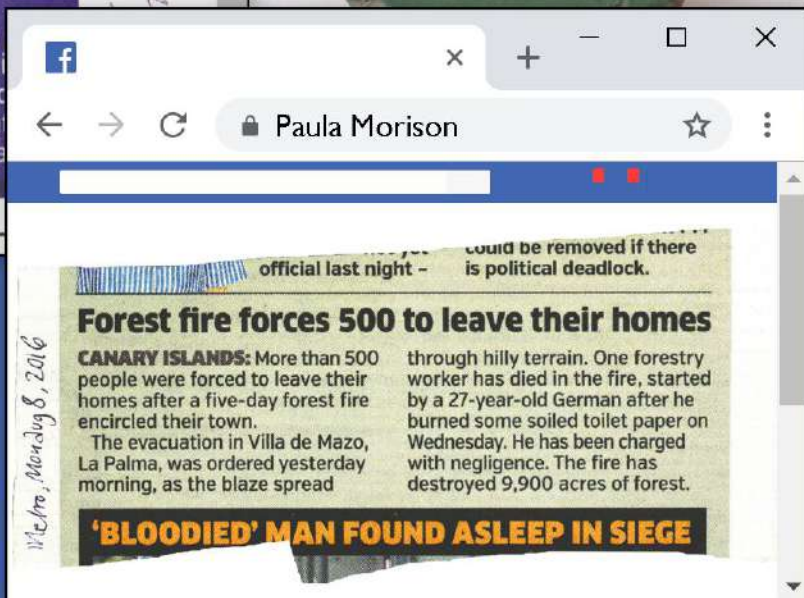
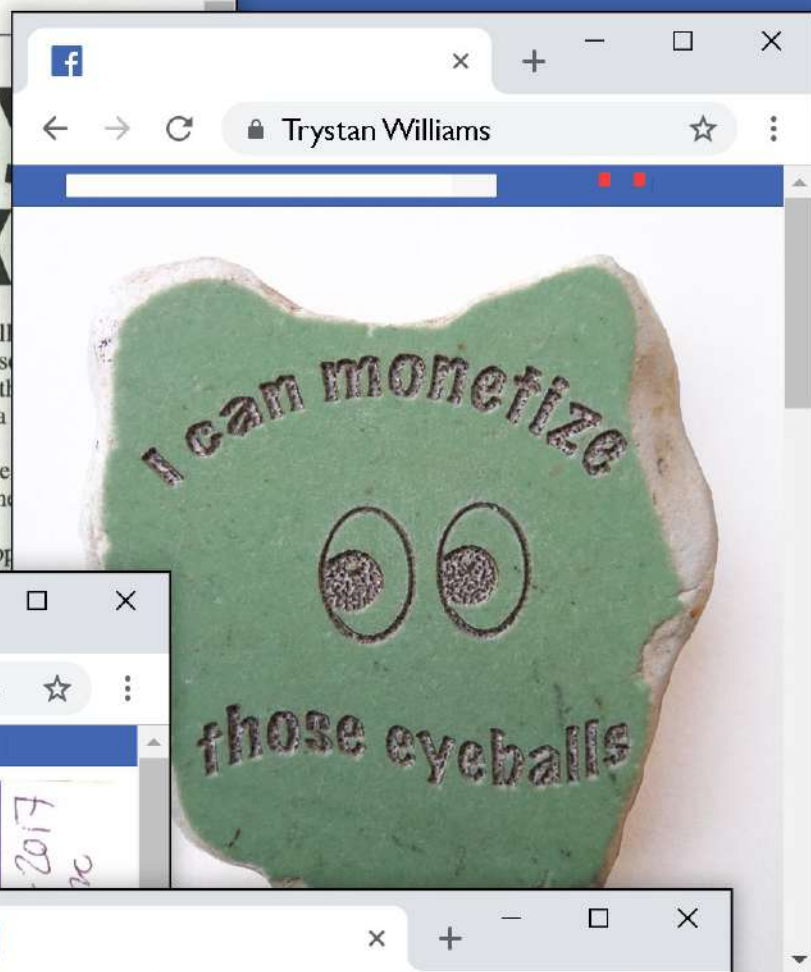
cy. Up to 700
are battling the
latest in a series of
at have scorched
000 acres of the
ched west.
y fast-moving fire, it
hind it,' said a US
ice spokeswoman.

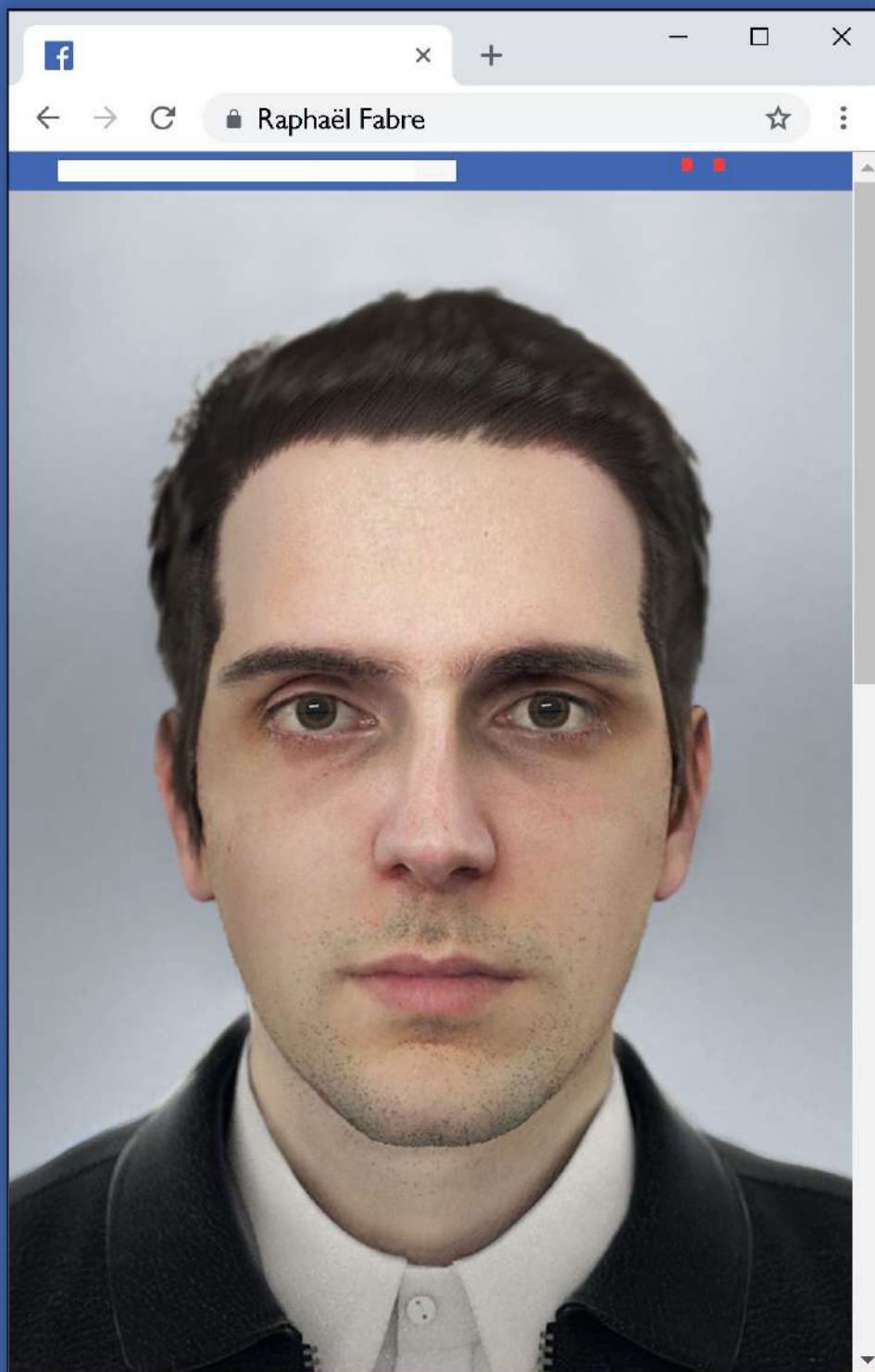
entists who used satell
computer modelling to s
ed to particulates in th
claim the study is a
for Indonesia.
research has been we
ironmentalists and the
medical profession.
nesia insists it is step

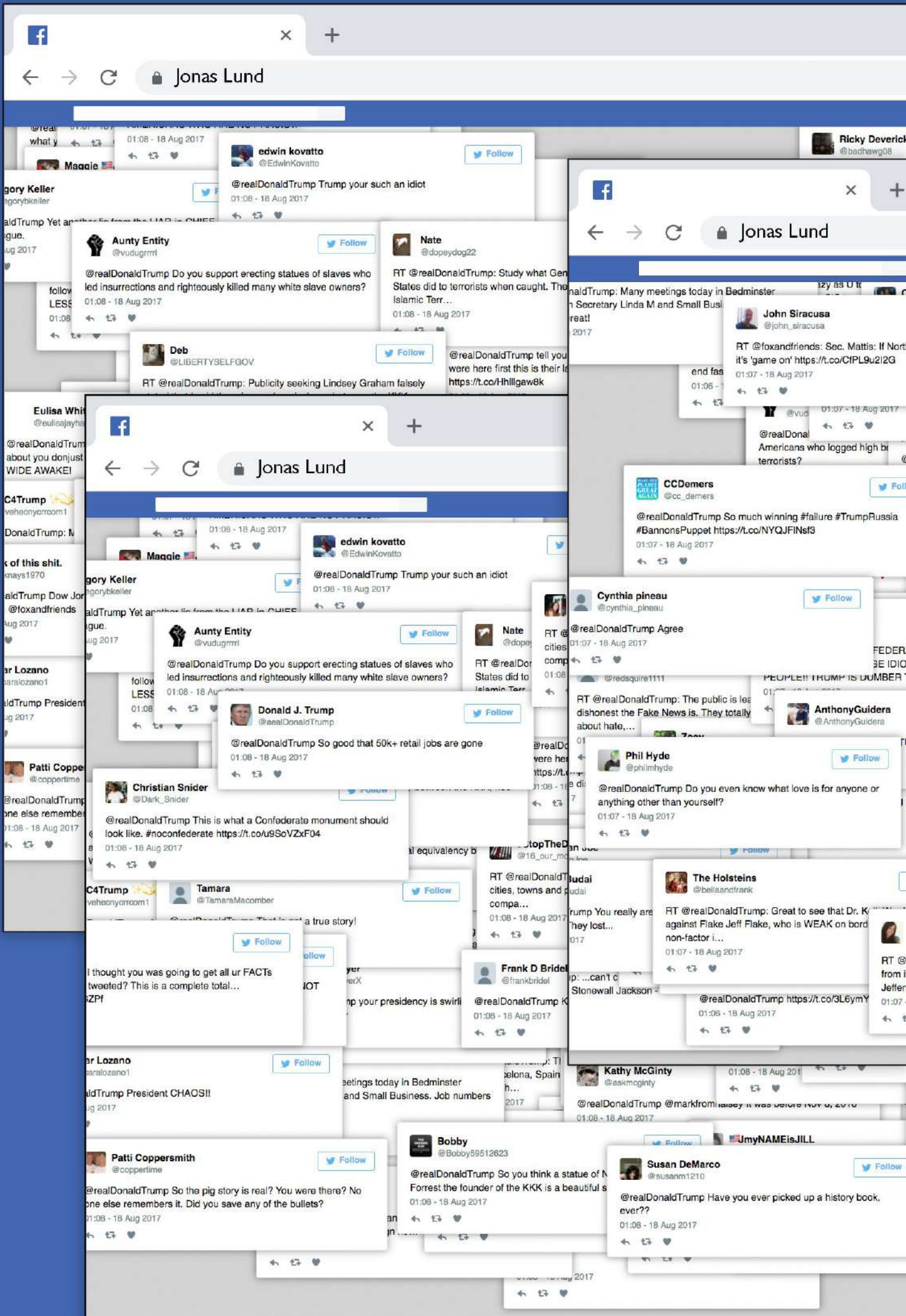
Paula Morison

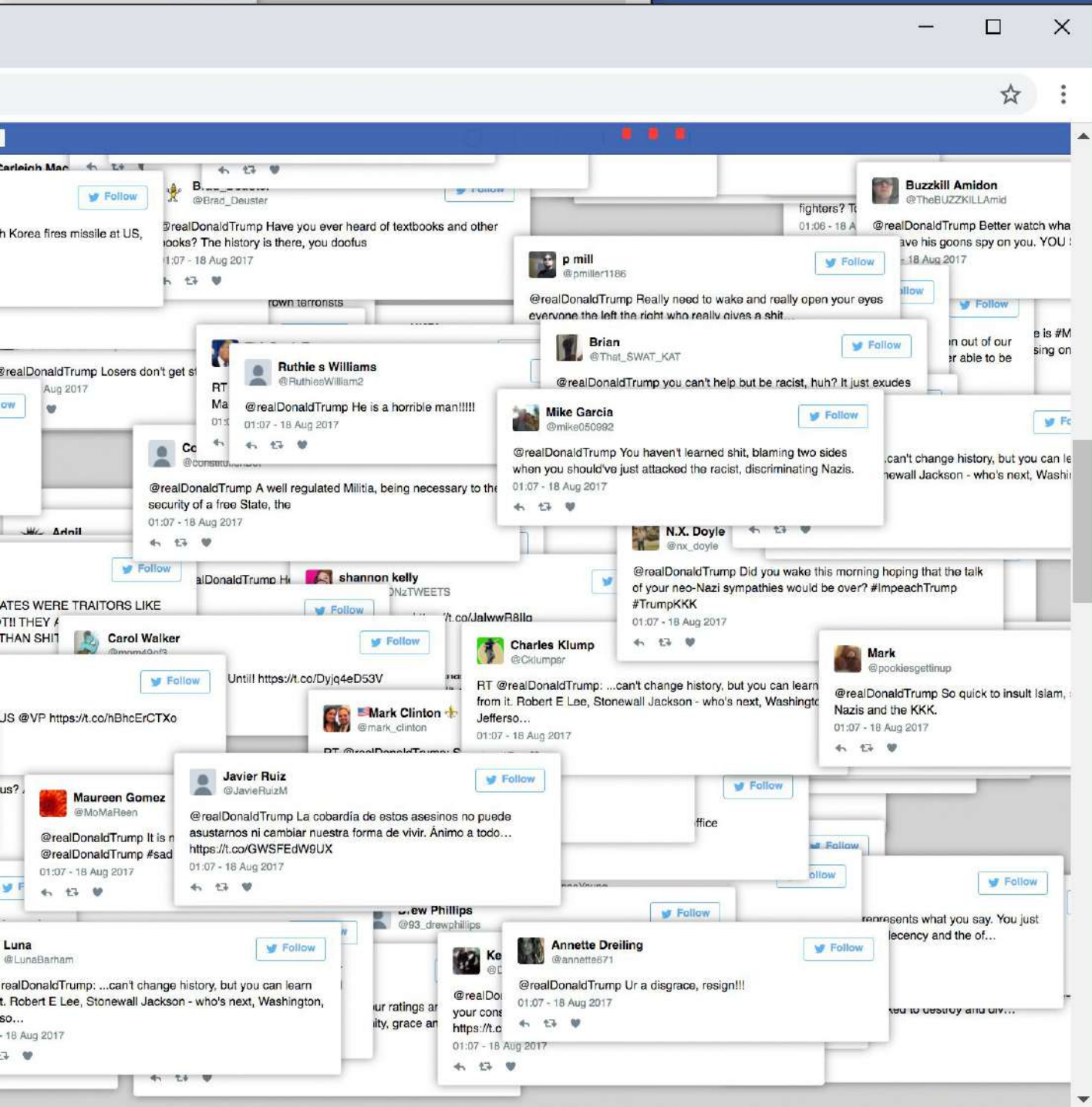
years, says
t of Transport.

forced 800
beaches in
h-west Sic
ive accused
rting a spa
outhern Ita









Pliant Apparatus

The Correspondence Theory of Truth holds the truth or falsity of a statement to its representation of the world. It claims a statement must correspond to the state of affairs it describes in order to be considered true. Contemporary journalism transfigures this classical understanding of essential Truth into an elusive hydra of plurality and contradiction. Its method surprisingly has roots in the Soviet media theory generated from Lenin's take on Marxism. Soviet journalism, in reporting facts through explicit bias, completely redefined "truth," morphing it from an absolute into a quality. This gradient of "truthfulness" gives way to the state of global news today, where semantics take precedence over fact and certain bits of information can appear "more true" than others. Ultimately it is language, independent of a referent and enmeshed in paradox, that brings the account of the facts closer to theory than news. Capitalistic and linguistic rule are fused into a new material of manipulation. Language is no longer bound to event, but serves desire and persuasion, bending evidential materials to the will of the speaker.

Soviet media was defined by the critical distinction between "objectivism"—information that is impartial, factual—and "objectivity"—which is fueled by the term objective, i.e. contributing to the advancement of the socialist state as a whole¹. Through Soviet objectivity, which corresponds most closely to the American understanding of partiality, the press could present the factual information in way that contributed to the objective of achieving a total soviet state. Thus, for early Soviet journalists, partiality and factuality were completely compatible forces. In fact, they should only be used together. Soviet media proved that the power of media lay not only in the presentation of the facts but the language of the facts that presented them. The language increased a fact's very sense of truthfulness, brought it closer to reality by fitting it into the shared image of the present. Soviet media thus introduces the idea of "more truthful," subdividing the binary of "fact" and "nonfact" into a gradient of "truthfulness", driven by language. The echoes of which resonate today in the "post-" of the "post-truth."

Soviet media makes truth qualitative rather than absolute, its main qualifier being the language that brings it to the people and bends it to the goal of Communism. This phenomenon does not seem too foreign today, across the world. In the media of America, the UK, Russia, Ukraine, India and more, the same set of information is skewed, falsified, and misrepresented by multiple outlets of various scales and motives. The plurality of interpretations is exacerbated by the seeming limitlessness of digital distribution. This media plurality increasingly resembles a sort of dialectical materialism, a theoretical framework that is inherently limitless and contradictory. No single piece of information can be trusted on its own, regardless of its source. Rather, it must always be read against another, measured for correlation and dissimilarity. As media trust is now detached from scale, location, and institutional provenance, we must depend on the dialectic to achieve the “most truth” within their paradox.

The increasing resemblance of reporting to theory is what allows these contradictions to proliferate expansively. We see in theory how language molds with its acridity, its ability to dissolve any bit of matter into particulate information such as the soundbites, captions, and summarizes that endlessly circulate our media spheres. These dissolutions are trusted as representative in our journalism, mere transcriptions to give names to our common referents. Soviet media understands this power to be more than representative – rather, it can be formative – and is fundamental to eventually achieving the Communist state. In *The Communist Postscript*, Boris Groys presents Communism as the “transcription of society into the medium of language”². This “total linguistification” is the true authority of the socialist society, coming closer to the “kingdom of philosophy” Plato envisions than any other society before it. In this Platonic kingdom, nothing is verifiable, all is contradictory and admitting of its contradiction.

The applied use of simultaneous contradiction pervades contemporary Russian media just as it did Soviet media. Within nearly every report is an essence of the Russian state image, configured through calculated semantics around the representation of an event, rather than the report of the event itself. In particular, Russian media’s instrumentalization of US President Donald Trump is contradictory objectivism manifest. From article to article, Trump is at once a powerful and impotent leader, demonstrated across practically every platform. What defines his representation is the resonance of his words and actions with Russia’s current political ambitions. Evident within the RT article titled “Take that, Trump! Russia finishes ‘The Wall’ on Crimea-Ukraine border”

3 is a melange of the US President's utility to Russian news. The article's opening lines brag: "While certain politicians are still having difficulties getting their walls built, Russia has announced it had finished a border barrier between Ukraine and Crimea. Construction took just over a year and less than \$3 million." In a single line, RT demonstrates a sense of national self-intertwined with and propelled through a complex relationship to the US president. They prove their support of the wall by mimicry, a wall to control the borders of the nation and the bodies of that move through it. The idea of the US border wall, in turn the completion of the Crimean "wall", are used to bolster the Kremlin's isolationism. Only, of course, they do it better, cheaper, and without the congressional inefficiencies that inhibit the president's supreme power, echoing the technological and ideological one-upmanship that defined their relations throughout the middle of the 20th century. Tweets from "American Russophiles" are used as secondary sources in the article, calling for the government to use Russia as a model for the wall, or even contract them to build it. In just few lines, Trump is bifurcated into two instrumental semantic values. He is at once powerful man that understands the need for a strong border, and a man unable to maintain control over his government. In an article on the same topic, Vesti describes the fence as a transcendental entity, stating in the first line that "a fence has appeared"⁴ at the border, as if the forces of nature delivered it there. The remainder of the article uses recent conflicts with rebels and international intervention to justify the fence. Despite the tonal dissimilarity between Vesti and RT, their objectives are notably aligned. Political events at home and abroad are not being broadcast as news, rather as examples. They are points in the argument that prove Russia's political superiority through their approved achievements and derided failures. In this case, it doesn't matter that the Crimean wall is really a fence, or that nearly one-third of the US border is already fenced off to a similar degree. The materials of the fence, the bodies it is meant to regulate, the presidents that demand their construction, all are muddled into a soft fluid which carries the objective to the consumer.

In Russian media today, just as in the Soviet era, the state is always the central figure in international reporting. National reflection exists through linguistic misdirection, strengthening the sense of truth and identity through strategic representation. In this dissolution, the referent is obscured by the representation. And with the referent so far away, unverifiable by the reader at their distance, it quickly succumbs to the abilities of language. Objects and bodies are no longer reduced to a price, as they are in capitalism, but

evaporated into the language of the cause. The material dissolution of bodies into transmutable information – unrestrained by the limits of borders, passports and citizenship – formally resembles the digital reality that we are globally enmeshed within.

In the capitalist society, Groys' claims, the masses are under the rule of the market. One cannot discourse with capital, can't persuade or negotiate an economic process to join your side. But in the linguistification of society, the masses have a voice; they can fight, persuade, and act with the same language that governs them, leaving no body out of the conversation. This equivalence begets Plato's utopia from lingualism. But as we are well aware following Stalinist rule, total linguistification runs the risk of divesting reality from representation. In Stalin's abuse of language, government maintains the same oppressive power as a market, fulfilling the replacement Groy's describes, though not with the same utopic optimism. In a similar vein, fake news operates in this realm of linguistic equivalence leading to misrepresentation. Yet it does not totally replace financial bonds with linguistic ones, as in Groys' Communism, rather it fuses them together. The resulting linguistic market is apparent within influence operations such as the Internet Research Agency (IRA), the Russian company which the US grand jury indicted in February 2018 for interfering with the previous presidential elections. The company employs mercenary writers to strategically manipulate the representation of events online, using both social media and news media. In a series of different interviews, Russian journalist Vitaly Bespalov gives insight into working at such a company. The work he performed at IRA's "2nd Ukraine Department" often included euphamizing reports from other outlets, changing "annexication" to "reunification", or "separatist" and "terrorist" with "rebel." Such articles were directly addressed to a Russian audience. Mainly published on Russian news sites, they were meant to mitigate concerns about the Ukrainian conflict and the strength of the Russian economy in light of Western sanctions. The IRA's influence is not limited to online news, but diffused through social media using memes and fake identities, effectively fusing state media and internet media into a single entity. With such devices, the IRA serves as a factory for state identity, using language to manufacture and distribute an image of the nation. The language of the media acts as capital with which the language of society forms a common space, placing the two into an unequal discourse.

Language gains a materializing force in the ouroboric economy of fake news. Reporters can only act through language, Bespalov notes: "[W]hat we can do is create the appearance of a great country. Not make the country

better, but create the impression we have.”⁵ In a feat of journalistic contortion, RT presents Claas Relotius’ recent exposure as evidence of anti-Russian bias in Western media. One article claims that Relotius’ fraud went unnoticed for so long is that he was writing “about places like Ukraine,”⁶ places his audience, and apparently his employers, are so oblivious to that they could have never caught the blatant anachronisms within his stories. Relotius’ article mis-covers the Euromaidan demonstrations that took place across Ukraine in 2014, in which citizens protested against the government’s suspended signing of the EU contract, which instead chose to strengthen its ties to Russia. RT addresses the many impossibilities that drive the narrative effect of the article, such as the ruined wall and tanks in Kiev, the “smell of dead bodies” from the clashes two years prior, and the infamous golden bathtub. The writer conveys that the West is completely detached from the nations it attempts to control through the market and the media, ultimately claiming such a report would have never been believable if it wasn’t driven by anti-Russian and pro-EU sentiments. In this ironic hall of mirrors demonstrates the way in which these reporters operate by language without referent, tending not to an event but the idea of information, creating a circulation out of their political traction.

The synthesis of language and capital engenders a mass production of linguistic manipulation. Fake news fuses the dialectical boundlessness of socialist government with capitalist market values. It attaches language to capital, creating a new material that adopts both of their malleability. As a result, we are forced to take news in its totality, ingesting each of its contradictions and defects. The pseudo-dialectic generated by influence operations further complicates the sliding scale of truthfulness with which we now must gauge all media. This vast sea of contradictory information is this space of the “Post-truth,” which, as many of the “post-”s preceding it obliterates the matter on the other side of the hyphen.

What we are left with is a system in which the closer something resembles evidence – something material, like a quantity, a photograph, a video or even voice recording – the more vulnerable it is to language. In a sort of everted platonism, singular material events are shattered into exponential linguistic representations. The referent is irrevocably lost in the search for whichever language presents it as “more true.” Groys’ paradox of philosophy, in which the totality of language allows for and is driven by contradiction, exactly represents the state of contemporary mass news-media. Language is detached from object, rendered an empty icon simultaneously the most destructive and uniting force, its totality comprising the vacuous space of the

“post-truth” that we as a media live in. As news becomes theory, language in its omnificence maintains the most powerful hold over our dissonant and recursive realities.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ McNair, Brian. *Glasnost, Perestroika and the Soviet Media*. Routledge, 1991.
- ² Groys, Boris. *The Communist Postscript*. Verso, 2006.
- ³ “Take That, Trump! Russia Finishes 'The Wall' on Crimea-Ukraine Border (VIDEO).” RT International, RT, 28 Dec. 2018, www.rt.com/russia/447629-russia-fence-crimea-ukraine-border.
- ⁴ “Крым Отгородился От Украины Забором.” Vesti.ru, Вести.Ru, 28 Dec. 2018, www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=3100069&tid=106314.
- ⁵ “Inside the Internet Research Agency's Lie Machine.” *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, 22 Feb. 2018, www.economist.com/briefing/2018/02/22/inside-the-internet-research-agencys-lie-machine.
- ⁶ “Tanks on Maidan, President's Gold Bath & More Outrageous Ukraine Fakes by Disgraced Spiegel Reporter.” RT International, RT, 22 Dec. 2018, www.rt.com/news/447227-spiegel-reporter-fake-news-ukraine/

Brianna Leatherbury (b. 1995, New York, US) is an artist working between objects and language. She investigates their compatibility and generosity within questions of differentiation and virtuality. Addressing bodies and economies alike, Leatherbury creates systems that manifest their linguistic collapse under the notion of a “resource.” She is currently an artist in residence at Gallery Elektrozavod, Moscow where she is researching the partnership of telecommunications and the body.

Fake News is Old News or The rise of media hacking

Just after an artwork by the street artist Banksy, *Girl With Balloon*, was sold at Sotheby's in London for £1,000,000 the picture was automatically shredded by the frame (or it should have been, with the mechanism failing, only shredding half of the artwork). Was this a typical prank by Banksy or a thoughtful, highly orchestrated media strategy by the artist?

In this time of post-truth in which emotions and personal beliefs have more impact on shaping the public opinion than objective fact, artists have had to learn to adapt to the new media landscape. A landscape where facts and news must compete with fake news, entertainment, alternative facts, propaganda, cat videos and @realDonaldTrump for public attention. So, what better way to illustrate today's media circus than shredding an artwork worth a million pounds in front of the live-streaming international media?

Damien Hirst is another example of an artist that has used the new media landscape in his oeuvre. During 2017 Hirst opened his exhibition *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* in Venice. It was said to be an exhibition with artefacts found on the bottom of the sea outside the coast of east Africa. Archaeologists and divers had found a shipwreck owned by a former slave named Cif Amotan, living at the end of the 1st century AD. Cif Amotan was perhaps the first art collector in history but unfortunately his ship sank with all the art treasures before it reached its destination.

Cif Amotan is an anagram for "I am fiction", and fiction is just what Hirst's exhibition is. The artist spent millions of dollars to produce the artefacts and to record a mockumentary about the discovery and salvage of the art from the bottom of the sea.

Why did Damien Hirst spend so much money and time, around ten years, to create this false exhibition? Perhaps he understood that this kind of story would address the post-X Files generation. The American science fiction

drama *The X-Files* focused on FBI agents Mulder and Scully, searching for extra-terrestrial life and premiered in 1993. The series' tagline "The truth is out there" became a well-known phrase and could also be used to describe the current post-truth society. It doesn't matter what kind of facts you hope to present, it will only ever be construed as a conspiracy to hide the real truth. When *The X-Files* reappeared as a movie in 2008 the new tagline had become "I want to believe", which could be used to describe our post-truth society. Instead of listening to logic and facts, we want to feel and believe that there is another kind of truth out there, which will always fit into our own personal worldview.

In the post-truth society Hirst's exhibition *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* is the kind of *Indiana Jones* inspired story we all are longing for. An unbelievable, ancient forgotten treasure found by Hirst and his team and for the first time exhibited to the public. A perfect click-bait suitable for the dramaturgy of the 24/7 media scene. Many art critics were sceptical to the exhibition, but perhaps they shouldn't have judged it as contemporary art, but instead as a piece of media hacking?

Using media and fiction to create attention is not new in modern history. If you turned on your radio on the 30th of October, 1938 you could hear a special newscast reporting about an alien invasion.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have a grave announcement to make. Incredible as it may seem, both the observations of science and the evidence of our eyes lead to the inescapable assumption that those strange beings who landed in the Jersey farmlands tonight are the vanguard of an invading army from the planet Mars."

The reputation of Orson Welles' dramatized version of H.G Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds* is perhaps a little exaggerated. The supposed panic the program caused is widely disputed. The program was presented as a typical evening radio program that was interrupted by a series of news bulletins about the invasion. At the beginning and throughout the broadcast there were three disclaimers stating that the newscast was fiction. Despite the disclaimers the effect of the broadcast led to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) banning all false or fictionalised news in dramatic programming. So, you could say that Welles' broadcast was the first warning of what fake news could accomplish within the public sphere.

For Welles the broadcast was a success and he was offered a film contract in Hollywood, resulting in the movie *Citizen Kane* (1941). A movie about an American newspaper magnate and his journey from being an idealistic young man believing in the news to a ruthless pursuit of power and money. *Citizen Kane* is a prediction about today's media landscape.

A more modern example of using fake news is the activist duo The Yes Men reclaiming *The New York Times* in 2008. The duo printed a new frontpage for *The New York Times* with the headline "IRAQ WAR ENDS". The paper was then distributed on the streets of New York, causing confusion among the readers. The action was unfortunately only local but drew attention to the ongoing Iraq war, and through social media and traditional media the action spread to a larger public. By using the language and dramaturgy of media The Yes Men could, with small means, create a successful media hack.

Another example of using fake news to hack or should we say hijack media is the artist duo UBERMORGEN.COM (Hans Bernhard and Lizvix). During the US presidential election in 2000, Al Gore vs. G.W. Bush, the artists bought student James Baumgartner's website *voteauction.com*. On the site voters could sell their votes to the highest bidder. In the USA, as in many other countries, it's forbidden to sell your vote. The FBI started an investigation and the domain was shutdown.

UBERMORGEN.COM described the project as a true interchange system that finally "brings capitalism and democracy closer together". For the duo the action was an example of media hacking or "radical corporative marketing strategy" as they also called it. The term media hacking was later coined by the duo in the book *Ubermorgen.com - Media Hacking vs. Conceptual Art* (2009). Media hacking could be described as looking for weak spots on and off the global market of attention; mass media and fine art. In that perspective *voteauction.com* was a successful media hack, since it resulted in over 2500 global and national news features. Today media hacking is used in more general terms to describe the people using and manipulating social media and algorithms to create a new narrative or political framework.

We have seen how Banksy, Damien Hirst and UBERMORGEN.COM adopt and use the new media landscape to manipulate the media and create headlines for their art projects. Artists continue to hack the media, using social engineering to manipulate the general public, forcing journalists to swallow their click-bait and to create headline news.

The next step, after fake news, will probably be the technology to create Deepfake news. Deepfake is the possibility to use AI and machine learning to replace faces in videos in real-time. You have the possibility to create false videos with famous people, for example the president of the united states, or to create a movie in which you replace the actor with the face of a deceased film hero. In one of the first examples of a Deepfake on the internet, Nicolas Cage's face was used in a variety of different movie scenes. Harrison Ford's face in Indiana Jones and Lois Lane's face in Superman were replaced with Nicolas Cage's. A new generation of media hacking artists will soon be using this new technology to manipulate media and the public to create art and awareness of important issues. Josh Kline's *Crying Games* (2015), a video work that uses open-source face-substitution software to imprint political figures faces from the 2000s onto a cast of actors, is one early example of how this technology is being utilised within the context of an artwork.

There is also a countermovement to fake news that we must mention. Instead of playing along and using the mechanisms of fake news and a post-truth society we have begun to see artists becoming journalists. Today journalism is a job on the decline, with media companies continuing to reduce their permanent staff. More and more we see AI-bots and user created news and content thriving on these media platforms. Journalists are threatened and killed for simply doing their job, investigating companies, governments and people in power. Free speech and democracy are under pressure in many countries. In this vacuum, new organisations such as Wikileaks, but also many artists and groups like Forensic Architecture, have stepped in to investigate issues that journalists used to investigate. In many ways, artists are taking the lead to speak the truth in our society. Sometimes they use fake news to reach their goals and other times they work as investigative journalists to tell us the real truth.

Mathias Jansson (b. 1972) is a Swedish art critic and poet. As an art critic he is mainly focused on new media art and specially Game Art, i.e contemporary art inspired by video games. Writing for Swedish and international magazines and blogs such as *DigiMag*, *Gamescenes*, *Konsten.net* and *Konstperspektiv*.

Where have I seen you before?

Among the many new ‘crises’ that have recently appeared in the news is the emergence of a type of video called Deepfakes. Created using Generative Adversarial Networks (GAN), Deepfakes recreate videos where a replacement face is inserted into a piece of existing video footage. One potential result is footage that replaces someone’s speech with something that they never really said.

These synthesized videos are getting increasingly difficult to tell apart from their original, and without a doubt contributes to the mountains of ‘fake news’ material that seeps into our consumption. The *Guardian* warily claims that “deep fakes are where truth goes to die” ¹, referring to a number of examples such as Donald Trump’s fake Paris climate agreement speech in May, and the use of GANs to “superimpose celebrities’ faces on the bodies of women in pornographic movies” ². This is, like many other reactions to emerging new media, an overreaction.

With this urgent declaration against Deepfakes, a preliminary set of questions emerge around the perils of this technology. How can we detect whether a video is a Deepfake? Can someone superimpose my face into a video, implicating me in a crime I never committed? How can we know if any video is real anymore? But between this fearful questioning, Deepfakes allow us to engage with fundamental questions about new media and how we create truth and publicity through it.

In the aforementioned *Guardian* article, Hany Farid states that “the problem isn’t just that deep fake technology is getting better, it is that the social processes by which we collectively come to know things and hold them to be true or untrue are under threat” ³. Thus, we must use machine learning to highlight features of new media that have created this situation in the first place: its inclination for remediation, and its dependency on crises. Note, within this text I will not delve into the larger concern of ethics behind face-swapping or

fake videos, but rather present a meta-conversation about how we talk about Deepfakes as a new technology.

Same old mistakes

In the introduction of *Understanding New Media*, Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin introduce the concept of the double logic of remediation. They argue that new media “wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them”, where the “twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy” are invoked “to remake themselves and each other” ⁴. Although Bolter and Grusin focus on the desire for immediacy in this seemingly contradictory and temporal feature of new media, the concept of remediation is always a useful tool to evaluate new technologies that appear.

Do Deepfakes not already exist -- not in its processes or material outcomes, but in the fears that it both invokes and uses? Didn't truth already die when Photoshop created layer adjustments, or when time was warped to show a journalist attacking a staffer during a press conference ⁵? Image and video manipulation already existed since before the computer cursor did, and Deepfakes serve as a remediation of these technologies. Are Deepfakes more terrifying because it would serve as more believable evidence than a static image, be it in social context or in a legal context to “assassinations against key figures” or “discredit ideological opponents” ⁶?

I would argue that we should be more scared of being tried in an unofficial court of law than we are of this technology. Take Jakarta's former governor Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama, who was sentenced to two years in prison in May 2017, after tampered video footage of Ahok's speech was “used as evidence to lodge the blasphemy allegations” ⁷ against him. Note, that in this case, the video was merely selectively edited to appear blasphemous, using relatively naïve technology.

But let me bring us back to Bolter and Grusin, who eighteen years ago claimed that “digital technologies are proliferating faster than our cultural, legal, or educational institutions can keep up with” ⁸. If we perceive Deepfakes to be at the bleeding edge of what we can take as truth in the framework of the law, it is only because we are still in the process of finding out what truth we can gather from digital images in the first place ⁹. We now traverse through the complex world of truth-formation in image-making, which will vary across different legal-political systems. The concern that Oscar Schwartz brought up in the *Guardian* article is not that Deepfakes will be used as legal evidence, but

rather the potential it has in creating propaganda. How do we start to think about this crisis in truth?

Forever in an ordinary crisis

Without going into the politics of clickbait articles and contemporary news media practices, we can begin to consider how Deepfakes became a “crisis”. In a way, this is like asking ourselves why Deepfakes came to exist in the first place. If we already had these effective methods to create fake realities, then why did this new technology create such a crisis for the public media?

Far from being the intention of specific developers or power-seeking entities, Deepfakes’ existence can be attributed to new media’s constant need for crises in order to be updated. To frame this, we turn to media theorist Wendy Chun. In her book *Updating to Remain the Same*, she claims that “neoliberalism thrives on crises: it makes crises ordinary” ¹⁰ to trace the constant requirement for new media objects for updates. She further elaborates that “crises make the present a series of updates in which we race to stay close to the same and in which information spreads not like a powerful, overwhelming virus, but rather like a long, undead thin chain” ¹¹.

What does this mean? The existence of crises creates updates in technology to keep things more or less the same, simply to allow it to exist. If we take Deepfakes as an extension of image-altering technology, who’s faced the “crisis” of being understood or identifiable, we can see its emergence as an expected behaviour for any other new media object. What the earlier examples present is not only that image manipulation already exists, it is that in each case we have found out how they are manipulative. Deepfakes exist as an update that spawned from this very crisis, emerging not to create a new state of panic but for video manipulation to continue to exist ¹².

On the other hand, there is the crisis that has been created by the media around Deepfakes. In the same book, Chun elaborates on the actions we take when these crises arrive and how it traps us in “a never-advancing present” ¹³. Using the example of a 2005 Trojan virus, she details how messages about the virus – many of which exaggerated its power – still circulated. These warning messages spread retrovirally, through users’ efforts to foster safety. This is analogous to the crisis presented in the news regarding Deepfakes, where talking heads, in a similar effort to foster safety, spread fearful information about Deepfakes. If you think about how many legitimately concerning Deepfake footage you have encountered, it becomes apparent that

the Deepfake crisis is further prolonged through its iterative representation in the media rather than its destructive potential.

So Deepfakes, as a new media object, act congruently and in line with Chun's idea of crises and updates, both in the reason for its existence (new media requires a crisis for it to be updated), and the cause for its continued existence (the retroviral nature of the crisis presented in the media). In this way, like many other new media objects, Deepfakes were never really new to begin with.

Fake Nudes

Deepfakes is the lovechild of the trend of obfuscating computing processes that alter our relationship to technology. This is not an accusation against anything that is mildly technical, but rather an identification of the general triumph of visual interfaces. However, once we consider Deepfakes as another new media object, we can start to break down the issues using the tools we have to deal with new media objects.

If Deepfakes are so powerful and terrifying, then why are we constantly seeing the same examples in the media, of fake political speeches and fake pornography? If we dissect our fear as a use for propaganda, it is only because we are scared that we will fall for something that we did not know was fake to begin with. Considering our daily encounters with many 'invisible' materials of propaganda that we might not consider as such, Deepfakes are really just a tiny drop in this conversation.

As for the fake nudes? The first thing to remember with any machine learning technology is that it requires a significant training dataset to create a convincing Deepfake image, hence why the most prominent examples of fake pornography tend to use celebrities' faces – there is a lot of footage of them out there. I would argue that if someone (or a leaked social media database) has enough footage of you and wants to create a Deepfake video of you – Deepfakes isn't really the problem that we have.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Oscar Schwartz, "You Thought Fake News Was Bad? Deep Fakes Are Where Truth Goes to Die," *The Guardian*, November 12, 2018, sec. Technology, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/nov/12/deep-fakes-fake-news-truth>.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 5.
- ⁵ The White House press secretary shared a doctored video to make journalist Jim Acosta's "actions more aggressive". For more, see Ben Jacobs, "White House Defends Doctored Trump-Acosta Clip Used to Justify Reporter's Ban," *The Guardian*, November 8, 2018, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/nov/08/cnn-jim-acosta-white-house-defends-decision-revoke-press-pass>.
- ⁶ Ed Targett, "The Deepfake Threat: What Happens When Reality Is This Easy to Mimic?," *Computer Business Review* (blog), June 20, 2018, <https://www.cbronline.com/opinion/deepfake-crisis>.
- ⁷ Moses Omposunggu, "Q&A: What You Need to Know about Ahok's Case Review Petition," *The Jakarta Post*, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2018/02/21/qa-what-you-need-to-know-about-ahoks-case-review-petition.html>.
- ⁸ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 5.
- ⁹ For more on this, see the work of the Forensic Architecture team in Weizman, Eyal. "Violence at the Threshold of Detectability." *E-flux Journal* 64 (2015).
- ¹⁰ Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 3.
- ¹¹ Ibid. 3
- ¹² Wendy Chun is hardly the only theorist that talks about this function of crisis. An different version of this theory is explored by Mark Nunes in the function of errors in new media culture. You can read about this further in his book *Error: glitch, noise, and jam in new media cultures*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011.
- ¹³ Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same*, 76.

Alif Ibrahim (b. 1994, Rotterdam, NL) is currently an MA student at Goldsmiths University studying Digital Media. His films and writings focus on the datafication of the human body, as well as the emergence of cinematic and visual logic of computing.

Everything Stays

Let's go in the garden, you'll find something waiting... My eyes begin to close, hoping to embrace the deep unconsciousness of sleep. The low hum of a fan perpetuates the almost silent atmosphere, unstoppable and malignant in nature. Equipment built to be silent, slowly weighed down by dust particles from around the world, continuing to keep my eyes from a reality rejuvenating escape.

Bones tighten and decompress, fold and break, turning to dust after centuries of use. When will this cycle end? For someone, somewhere, it probably already has. Perhaps someday it will for you, or me, transforming the idea of an endless cycle into a brief period of human evolution.

For the moment I continue to tap, to type, to prod, to push, occasionally pausing to stretch, rolling my shoulders and breathing a sigh of relief. Feeling my skin crease and mould, actively furthering my own rate of reduction.

Right there where you left it, lying upside down... My eyes drift to the open window, looking down at the rotting signs, the long-forgotten street lamps. I still remember when they flickered under the darkened sky. They used to say that you could run by without being caught in the light if you were quick enough, role playing as a spy, a malignant particle in a city of drones, creating your own narrative, your own intuitive storyline for others to follow.

The hum is replaced by a crisp breeze, a shifting of scenery perhaps, or a drop of water in a vast ocean. An automated gyrocar ripples onto the forgotten street below, piercing the acrid air and following her pre-described route, disturbing small piles of ash stacked high on the sidewalk.

When you finally find it, you'll see how it's faded... It's been 375074 days and I will soon be long forgotten. Where there's smoke there's fire, and where there's fire ultimately there will be ash. I will be added to one of the many piles, becoming part of the community, fluidly mixing with the lesser compounds. A

drop of ash in a vast ocean of depravity, waiting to be disturbed by a driverless gyrocar.

The underside is lighter, when you turn it around... Fingers move in front of my fabricated face. They haven't been mine for many decades, continually upgrading and modifying themselves until they became unrecognisable, so detached from the archetypes of the past, disconnected from my own subconscious, my own inherent being.

I used to blame the news, the mass media, corporations and conglomerates, forcing me to alter my own aesthetic, distorting my narrative alongside everyone else's in search for a truer self. I'm unsure whether I ever found it, and if I did it probably only lasted for a moment, a temporary experience before the next set of steroids, muscle relaxers or robotic reflex enhancements were embedded into my body.

Everything stays, right where you left it... Feeding on the propaganda shovelled into my gaping mouth, hungry for something, anything that would point towards my next alteration. I should have known, everything disintegrates eventually, and there's nothing you, me, or anyone else can do to stop it.

Far away, music plays, gently caressing my ears through the open window. Listening to a distant neighbour is the only way to access content these days, aside from paying exuberant fees to one of the many streaming services. Physical, disconnected forms of technology were abolished many centuries ago. Who needs a television when anyone who's everyone can watch whatever they want, whenever they want, by simply shutting their eyes? Who needs a phone, when a fluid, once injected into your body, allows you to connect and interact with anyone and everyone? For a small, monthly fee, it could all be yours.

Everything stays, but it still changes... Well, that's how it was marketed, a campaign inspiring billions to discard their phones, televisions and computers in favour of a mass migration, to look into, rather than out of, ourselves. Becoming the hermit in the cave, watching shadows dancing on the walls, only ever blindly peaking outside of ourselves when a new form of evolution was promised.

If that was the beginning, then this is the end, or at least somewhere close. Rather than playing a video game by simply closing my eyes, I'm extending my ears to hear snapshots of a song that should have turned to ash some time

ago. This is a form of unexpected devolution that no one originally wanted, some still don't.

As augmented bodies become more prevalent, new editions appeared on the market. Improved models and higher quality liquids became far more desirable than the government subsidised prototype every child entering the world was provided with.

Ever so slightly, daily and nightly... Hardware classism reared its ugly head, a form of late capitalism that we assumed would be forgotten. Who wants to watch an advert when you can pay a premium to see ad-free? Paywalls were installed, and loot boxes were established, allowing augmented users with a passive income to rise to the top of any given food chain, digital or otherwise.

I turn back to the window, gazing into the abyss of a continuously changing skyline. The illusion of time distorts and modifies everything it touches, for better or worse. Buildings move, up and down, forwards and back, forever shifting and changing in a dance akin to death itself.

When you can't pay for the premiums and refuse the monthly fee, closing your eyes only brings darkness. At first, I felt like a failure, unable to interact with my community of creators, like-minded individuals and friends. It was only later, after an extended period of time, that the weight slowly lifted from my over-inflated shoulders, allowing me to see through the darkness.

In little ways, when everything stays... Climbing out of the window and onto the ledge, I look back down, towards the small piles of ash, willing myself to jump, to become a part of the street architecture, slowly decomposing, eventually turning into my own pile of nondescript ash...

Bob Bicknell-Knight (b. 1996, Suffolk, UK) is a London-based artist and curator working in installation, sculpture, video and digital media. Using found objects and tools made readily available by the internet, as well as drawing from a unique sensibility influenced by participation in online communities and virtual games, Bicknell-Knight's work explores the divergent methods by which consumer capitalist culture permeates both online and offline society. Utopian, dystopian, automation, surveillance and digitization of the self are some of the themes that arise through Bicknell-Knight's critical examination of contemporary technologies.

Erin Mitchell

The Future of Virtual Nature

TEDx52°27'53.424"N, 13°19'51.815"E

00:00

(Removes virtual reality headset)

Oh, hello!

(Laughter)

What if I told you the planet we live on is undergoing a fundamental change in its history—one, in fact, unprecedented in its 4.5 billion year lifespan? That nature itself, the source of our oldest metaphors and allegories about space, time, and rhythms of life, is undergoing a fundamental process of change and transformation?

00:43

And what if I told you that change was in our hands? You might be surprised to learn that the hands that I'm referring to look less like these...

(Image: Hands cupping a handful of soil)

...and more like these.

(Image: Hands, white male with wristwatch, typing on laptop computer)

And that's because the future of life on this planet is encoded in entirely new forms. Using the same natural resources around us, like the silica that becomes silicon, we are building new networks, new systems, and entirely new ways of being. That the future of this planet—and of nature itself—is, in fact, digital.

01:25

And this could not come at a more crucial time. Right now, we face incredible socio-economic, political, and environmental changes, including instability and war in many parts of the world and dramatic changes in the earth's climate. There's no doubt that we, as a society, have to act now to make the changes that will allow our civilization to carry on for generations to come.

01:55

But, we're in luck! We live in a time that is more connected than ever. With the rise of the Internet and personal computing in the last twenty years, we have seen entirely new worlds emerge around us, giving us access to new information and new perspectives, all with the click of a single button. Right now, we are building the tools we will need to guide us into the future.

02:25

And we stand on the shoulders of giants. Former Apple CEO Steve Jobs paved the way for the personal computing revolution, making computers accessible to the average consumer. Ultimately, with products like the iPad and the iPhone, giving us the opportunity to carry entire universes in our pockets.

In his footsteps, emerging thought leaders like Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, the Boring Company, and SpaceX, are plotting entirely new frontiers into space itself.

03:01

But technology also offers us the opportunity for more intimate, interpersonal connections. Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg has revolutionized the way that we share our data and communicate online. Beyond Facebook, which had 2.2 billion users at the end of last year, Zuckerberg has also acquired more than 50 social media platforms since the beginning of his time developing Facebook. These applications include the popular photo-sharing app Instagram, popular messaging app WhatsApp, as well as virtual reality company Oculus VR.

While Oculus may seem like an unusual fit for an online social media platform like Facebook, it demonstrates Mark Zuckerberg's strong financial interest in the future of virtual reality and the potential for increased products and profits in this sector.

04:00

But why virtual reality? If you haven't had the opportunity to put on a headset and step into a virtual space, you may not understand the tremendous power and impact of a virtual experience. By simulating the structure and physical environments around us, virtual reality works with our biology to give us a convincing experience of being fully present in a digital space. This interactivity stimulates similar networks of connection in the brain, mimicking natural processes and experiences.

VR uses our brain's natural chemistry to insert us seamlessly into the illusion of virtual reality. When we step into virtual worlds, we feel like we're actually there. The experiences we have in virtual reality feel as real and immersive as the experiences we have in real life. This is an incredible product opportunity.

05:04

In the past, the closest we've come to being able to inhabit virtual spaces has been through gaming platforms like Second Life or The Sims. In these programs and applications, you create a digital avatar, a virtual avatar, that represents who you are or who you would like to be. And when you enter these spaces, these virtual environments, you interact with other avatars and other projections.

At the crux of my emerging research on natural virtual environments, we are now able to enter into virtual reality without an avatar. This opens up a whole new world of possibilities, experiences, and understandings rooted in our own bodies.

05:49

Throughout time, humanity has defined itself and built its existence on the successful use of natural environments around us, and natural virtual environments are an extension of these very principles. As a society, we understand the world in seasons, in planting and in harvest. It's ingrained in our language, our traditions, and even our understanding of ourselves and our emotions. We have built our societies alongside the resources and environments we live in. We've built our homes; we've nourished ourselves. We've created civilizations and become the people we are today because of these environments.

06:28

In reanimating these environments in virtual space, we now have the opportunity to take these qualities and take these characteristics and take full ownership of them. No longer reliant on the courses of nature and the seasons, we can take these qualities and distill them into their purest form. That green vitality, that energy, that life force, is now fully designable, fully accessible, and coming to the market.

07:00

Companies like Mure VR are already bringing these applications to market. Their VR experience Breakroom offers you the ability to spend your workday fully immersed in virtual nature. By offering a range of soothing environments and “Skyboxes,” as they call them, they boast increased productivity and well-being at work while offering you the illusion of controlling your full work environment.

Instead of working in an office space like this...

(Image: Sterile corporate office conference room)

...imagine how you would feel going through your email, communicating with your boss and your co-workers, and filing reports in an environment that perhaps looked a little more like this...

(Image: Natural sunlight shines on woman with arms hands raised outdoors)

07:42

By creating new, fully immersive virtual natural environments, we can make nature and its benefits accessible any time, any place, and to any individual. We reduce our interaction and consumption of natural resources and the natural environments around us, and we are able to redesign natural utopia—the most updated, most adapted version of nature yet, better customized to the modern society that we have created.

While these technologies are still in their infancy, dedicated research and development could ensure that natural virtual environments could become an easily consumable wellness product in the next 5-10 years. Imagine entering a fully immersive space that’s as seamless at updating your current operating system...

(Image: Article headline “Apple iOS 12 Has A Serious Problem”)

...and as affordable as today's latest iPhone X.

(Image: iPhone with \$1,449.00 price and offer for 18-month financing)

08:38

With virtual nature, we have the opportunity to glimpse into the horizon of the future. These environments open up a future where wellness products are not only all-encompassing and fully immersive but customizable. Not only is the idea of utopia no longer unreachable—or no longer an illusion—we can now bend the principles of the natural world around us to fit the emotional and spiritual needs of each of us, as a society.

09:07

In the words of Thomas Edison, “Until a man duplicates a blade of grass, nature can laugh at his so-called scientific knowledge.”

Well, Mr. Edison, welcome to the future.

(Puts on virtual reality headset)

(Applause)

This is a transcript from a talk of the same name, released online in October 2018.

Erin Mitchell (b. 1989, United States) is a multidisciplinary artist based in Berlin, Germany. Her work plots the intersection of Silicon Valley utopian technocapitalism and the commodification of natural elements and environments. Working in both physical and virtual media, past projects have included media ranging from virtual rendering and animation to installation, video, audio, and performance pieces. Recent solo exhibitions include Welcome to Green® (Off Site Project 1989, online, 2019), Next Nature (Institut für Alles Mögliche, Berlin, 2017), and Uncanny Valley (SomoS, Berlin, 2017), as well as two-person and group exhibitions When I Grew Up (my own private ZAD by the sea), (isthisit?, online, 2018), Floating Islands (Exgirlfriend, Berlin, 2018), Future Arcade (Tech Open Air, Berlin, 2018), Good Friends (Kunstpunkt, Berlin, 2017).

Fake News

Fake news is anything but new, with words and language having been weaponised for as long as people have been able to speak and write. Whilst researching the Leveson Enquiry in 2013, it became clear to what extraordinary extent the British press, politicians, and police, were all in each other's pockets, very publicly pouring doubt on anything approximating a free press. What also became clear was that the British press was 77.8% owned by right wing billionaires. In light of these highly compromised relations, I began an in-depth survey of how news production had changed significantly with the drift online by traditional news producers and what that meant for the news, as well as the new forms of journalism opened up by this. Several works evolved from this research entangled around the production of language and the ways that people communicate with one another, both on and offline. Within this milieu, complex new assemblages have emerged with a growing spectrum of cognitive and non-cognitive actors and actants, that necessarily include the hardware, the software, the broadband speed (for example) that includes legislation governing net neutrality and other networked protocols, as well as the very material distinctiveness of geographic regions that all contribute to very specific socio-economic and political configurations. A number of important factors that underpin the rest consist primarily of the economic impact of both the global neoliberal free market ideologies that brought about the financial crash of 2008, and the increasing financialisation of the self that occurs in the West, alongside the protocols of platform capitalism via social media platforms.

Taking its cue from the oft-mentioned loss of the referent in both language and the economy that was being speculated about wildly after the economic crash of 2008, *Low Animal Spirits* (with Richard Cochrane, 2014) was software that utilised a High Frequency Trading algorithm that 'dealt' in global news, that drew similarities across the volatile trending behaviour of neoliberal/free market dynamics of finance with online news production. The Twitter bot @LowAnimalSpirit tweeted headlines from the HFT algo's 'portfolio' as it speculated on what was about to trend, whilst *Breaking News - Flash Crash* pointed to the extraordinary extent that language and the economy conjoin in

today's hyper-networked culture, the dynamics of which point to the contributing factors that would go on to undermine democracy itself. We chose to apply HFT to the news, as it epitomized this unfettered free market ideology of neoliberalism and because, unlike poetry, news matters precisely because of its indexical link to the truth. Wikimedia's emphasis on open access to knowledge as a fundamental right, for example, acknowledges how access to reliable information and data is a key driver for social and economic development. The title *Low Animal Spirits* also spoke of the paradox that Keynes discovered during the Great Depression, of an inherently herd-like mentality to the market, that was simultaneously reliant on the concept of the heroic individual, spontaneously acting of their own 'free will'. And never more so than in a period of such *Low Animal Spirits*, post-crash of 2008.

The financial sector was of interest, also, because they really weren't shy at forging ahead with automation in ways that displaced even the most trusted wisdom of human operators. In an analysis of the flash crash, similarly the inspiration for *Breaking News: Flash Crash*, Karppi and Crawford¹ drew attention to Dataminr software that mines Twitter's 'firehose' to produce a sophisticated scoring of the relationships between words in play, to uncover grades of expressed 'emotions' as well as "importance and social meaning - in order to 'predict the present' and thus transform social media signals into economic information and value". Much like the wages for housework movement noted, it doesn't matter if you want to think of human interactions and emotional responses as quantifiable or not, it's happening anyway. Whilst finance afforded a glimpse of a highly volatile, and paradoxical model of mass-behaviour, it was also clear that the figure of homo economicus was a deeply in-debted subject "as (increasingly) the lifeworld became a system for the notation of market trend data²" within the highly quantified protocols of platform capitalism. Reminiscent of the 'dividual'³ as a bank of data, power now operates subtly as 'autonomous agents internalize their directives⁴' in a logic of constant self-modulation.

Low Animal Spirits conjoined with another work around 2015 *Error-Correction: an introduction to future diagrams* that acts somewhere between a script and a score, in which each articulation is just one of many constantly re-edited takes. It includes and references numerous openly appropriated texts, contemporary commentary, news items and anecdotal evidence; culminating in an interrelated convergence of many interwoven threads, whereby the voice (through language) is constituted between someone else's thoughts and the page. The title speaks of the development of calculus from perspectival drawing,

to projected geometry and further beyond the human sensorium via mathematics to calculus, leading to probability theory and being able to speculate the future. The reference to future diagrams suggests that just as Euclidean geometry was surpassed by calculus, the diagrams we rely on might also be insufficient for the task at hand in understanding a life-world dominated by statistical analysis. The first reading was recorded live on the platform at Hackney Downs in London within the architectural sound of a busy train station. I was interested in the complex ways that the body receives and processes sense data within this assemblage, and took a cue from the physician and physicist Herman von Helmholtz's research into mathematics of the eye, that led to probability theory, who suggested: "human perceptions, so prone to error, are at best, an approximation, an estimation even, that 'operate(s) within the protocols of instruments". His premise was that human eyes have: "a hard-wired, involuntary drive to minimize perceptual errors - and discovered error-correction in the nerve endings of our bodies". I was interested in the way that the body was in question in this assemblage – acting at several different scales and temporalities – denying any primacy of the voice, or identifiable subject, whilst all the while being constituted through other people's words. Within the diagram of power emerging at the time, I wondered if another strategy might be necessary, oscillating somewhere between remaining visible, whilst also hidden, with the potential of being multiple.

Over the past two years these ideas have of course become less of a conspiracy theory and more mainstream media, via the revelations regarding Cambridge Analytica amid more widespread understanding of the protocols of platform capitalism, whereby, rule of thumb, if it's 'free' you are the product, and the currency of data becomes clear. In early 2018 the exhibition 'de-leb' at Banner Repeater considered the new gradients of measure emerging within this context, with artists, writers, dancers and technologists. The exhibition became a site to interrogate these ideas through a collectively authored writing experiment that had ambitions to become a science fiction based on fact, time-stamped via smart contracts on the blockchain. It aimed to examine the kinds of measures that currently exist, recursively produced through data analytics, to go on to propose new gradients of measure, asking further what might be considered non-negotiable, what price anonymity, amid other pressing questions with respect to the re-purposing of data. It very much drew upon the critical potential of the post-human, wary of claims of a humanist sort, and mindful that human rights have only ever been afforded to some and not others, and to address the ecology of means through which the subject emerges,

snagged on the ideological and social transformations that new technologies bring about as governance is increasingly subsumed by software.

Driven by the same writing technology as the contract in the derivatives market, Benjamin Bratton comments that blockchain amounts to little more than insurance, and he is absolutely right. *Ami Clarke: Author of the Blank Swan* was a work made in response to the French Lebanese financier and philosopher Elie Ayache's book: *The Blank Swan*, in which he suggests that 'writing' has an equivalence to 'pricing' in the derivatives market. He asks if there were a technology that might be available to get inside the very process of history and do something more active than to watch passively as history unfolds, altogether different from the conceptual activity consisting in predicting and outguessing history. Ayache draws on Borges' story of Pierre Menard; Author of the *Quixote*, a fictional writer and critic who spends his time writing chapters of the 17th Don Quixote, several centuries on from when the text was published. Interpretations of this tend to focus on how 'reading' brings about difference through a Barthes like emphasis on the true locus of writing as reading. Conversely, Ayache's focus interpellates Borges' fiction with the apparatus of the derivative contract that implicitly relies on writing, bringing about a different emphasis on the act of 'writing' – of a previously existing text – as a truly contingent act. Taking him up on his challenge, with each word that I wrote of *The Blank Swan: Chapter 4, Writing and the Market* by Elie Ayache, there was simply nothing to say that any given word, would necessarily follow the next. Ayache writes "Only through the writing / trading performance and not through the realization of a theoretical stochastic process, that is framed in representational thought, can the writer / trader of contingent claims exceed the saturated context and move to the next – i.e. (s)he can trade." (my edit). I went on to find an equivalence in this capacity to write the future, shared in the blockchain, in so far as a technology that exceeds probability through the time-stamp. Altogether, a slight thing, but in actuality one with seismic effects, in so far as it now being possible to verify something has happened, within a milieu of infinite replicability.

Blockchain as a thought experiment, though, or, perhaps, as a Rorschach test, as Bratton also suggests, reveals a very broad spectrum indeed, of what might be achieved by what has been hailed as a revolutionary new technology. One such experiment opens up the possibility of thinking of new ways of working, such as creating methods to produce verifiable news. *Civil* is a project built on Ethereum, as a 'marketplace for great journalism' they write, that operates as a peer-review economy, incentivized by the CVL token used

in transactions as a means to “economically incentivize and promote good behaviour that helps the platform grow and thrive, whilst keeping bad actors off it”. They suggest that “simple visual cues that represent different elements that went into the reporting of a given story (e.g. on-the-ground reporting, stories containing original reporting, whether the reporter is a subject matter expert) will help ‘citizen readers’ to ask critical questions about how and why a given story was reported – ‘not just on Civil, but anywhere publishing news’”. What’s interesting is that it recognizes the damage to journalism by the lack of an adequate business model as advertising revenue drifted online. They write that they’re ‘committed to introducing a new funding model, that unlocks two vital business features for journalists; self-governance and permanence... to focus on journalism, not satisfying clicks-over-quality mandates from third parties like advertisers and publishers’. If nothing else, a micro-payment system might evolve.

This text attempts to address some of the complex problems that contributes to what has been reductively called the ‘post-truth’ landscape, but not all. A seam of cruel jouissance has developed, or perhaps been given expression, alongside the emphasis on the individual as consumer par excellence, drenched in narcissism and resentment through the mechanisms of social media, the dynamics of a meme economy, and a trickledown theory of economics that does anything but. High on animal spirits it seeps through the retreat from empiricism and into the post-truth political landscape of truthiness that describes “the belief in what you feel to be true rather than what the facts will support”⁵.

ENDNOTES

¹ Karppi, Tero and Crawford, Kate. Social Media, Financial Algorithms and the Hack Crash. State University of New York at Buffalo. Microsoft Research and MIT Center for Civic Media.

² Philipp Ekardt, In the Pull of Time - a conversation between Joseph Vogl and Philipp Ekardt on speculation. 108 Texte Zur Kunst Verlag GmbH & Co. KG. 2014.

³ Deleuze, Gilles. Postscript on the Societies of Control October, Vol. 59. (Winter, 1992), pp. 3-7.

⁴ Chamberlain. Colby. The Binder and the Server. Art Journal Vol. 70, NO. 4

(Winter 2011): 40-57

5 Stephen Colbert coined 'truthiness' 2005, for an episode of Comedy Central's "Colbert Report".

This is an excerpt from the upcoming book 'covfefe: language in a meme economy' by Ami Clarke.

Ami Clarke is an artist, curator, writer, and educator, working within the emergent behaviours that come of the complex protocols of platform capitalism, with a focus on the inter-dependencies between code and language in hyper-networked culture. She is also founder of Banner Repeater; a reading room with a public Archive of Artists' Publishing and project space, opening up an experimental space for others on a working train station platform at Hackney Downs station, London. Ideas that come of publishing, distribution, and dissemination, that lead to a critical analysis of post-digital art production are shared in her practice as an artist and inform the working remit of Banner Repeater.

She has recently exhibited and performed work at AWP Symposium (2018) The Tetley Leeds, ODD catalyst, Bucharest (2018), ORGASMIC STREAMING; LUX / Chelsea Space (2018), HereNow art/tech res SPACE (2018), Xero Kline and Coma (2017), NEW WORLD ORDER, Gallery, Filodrammatica, Rijeka (2017) and Aksioma, Ljubljana (2017), Furtherfield gallery (2017), StudioRCA Riverlight (2016), Centrespace Dundee (2016), ICA (2016), Wysing Arts Centre (2016), Hayward Gallery (2015), Museo Del Chopo, Mexico City (2015), David Roberts Arts Foundation (2015) and Camden Arts Centre (2015).

Credits

Front cover

AES+F // aesf.art

New Liberty, 1996. Digital collage, c-print. Courtesy of the artists. © AES+F | ARS New York.

Back cover

Benjamin Grosser // bengrosser.com

Safebook, 2018. Web browser plugin, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

pp. 46 – 47

Eva and Franco Mattes // 0100101110101101.org

United We Stand, 2005. Installation, dimensions variable, Berlin. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 47

Eva and Franco Mattes // 0100101110101101.org

United We Stand, 2005. Installation, dimensions variable, Vienna. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 47

Eva and Franco Mattes // 0100101110101101.org

Franco Mattes posting in Berlin, 2005. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 48

Botond Keresztesi // botondkeresztesi.com

Lost in highway, 2018. Acrylic and airbrush on canvas, 180 x 180 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 48

Sandrine Deumier // sandrinedeumier.com

Pink Party, 2017. Computer animation, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 49

AES+F // aesf.art

New York City, 1996. Digital collage, c-print. Courtesy of the artists. © AES+F | ARS New York.

p. 49

Botond Keresztesi // botondkeresztesi.com

The delivery knight, 2018. Acrylic and airbrush on canvas, 180 x 180 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 50

Hun Kyu Kim // www.instagram.com/hunkyu.kim

Grand Mackerel Octopus (Autumn Day), 2018. Traditional oriental pigment on silk, 85 x 70 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 51

Tomasz Kobialka // www.tomkobialka.com

Finsbury Park, 2018. Screenshot from Finsbury Park, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Interstate Projects.

p. 51

Tomasz Kobialka // www.tomkobialka.com

Finsbury Park, 2018. Screenshot from Finsbury Park, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Interstate Projects.

p. 51

Tomasz Kobialka // www.tomkobialka.com

Finsbury Park, 2018. Installation view. LED Panels, LED Controller, Apple Mac Pro 3.1 (modified), custom C++

Openframeworks software, custom PHP scripts, Mac Mini, 5" monitor, birchwood. Courtesy of the artist and Interstate Projects.

p. 52

IMT Gallery // www.imagemusictext.com

Snow Crash, 2019. Installation view. Curated by Kirsten Cooke, featuring (from Left to right) Ayesha Tan Jones, Amanda Beech, Melanie Jackson, Lynton Talbot and Tai Shani, 2019 at IMT Gallery, London. Courtesy of the Artists and IMT Gallery London. Photo by Marta Esteban Riba.

p. 52

IMT Gallery // www.imagemusictext.com

Snow Crash, 2019. Installation detail. Curated by Kirsten Cooke, featuring Ayesha Tan Jones at IMT Gallery, London. Courtesy of the Artists and IMT Gallery London. Photo by Charlotte Osborne.

p. 52

IMT Gallery // www.imagemusictext.com

Snow Crash, 2019. Installation detail. Curated by Kirsten Cooke, featuring Ayesha Tan Jones at IMT Gallery, London. Courtesy of the Artists and IMT Gallery London. Photo by Charlotte Osborne.

p. 53

IMT Gallery // www.imagemusictext.com

Snow Crash, 2019. Installation detail. Curated by Kirsten Cooke, featuring (from Left to right) Ayesha Tan Jones, Melanie Jackson and Amanda Beech at IMT Gallery, London. Courtesy of the Artists and IMT Gallery London. Photo by Marta Esteban Riba.

p. 53

IMT Gallery // www.imagemusictext.com

Snow Crash, 2019. Installation detail. Curated by Kirsten Cooke, featuring (from Left to right) Tai Shani, Lynda Stupart and Ayesha Tan Jones at IMT Gallery, London. Courtesy of the Artists and IMT Gallery London. Photo by Charlotte Osborne.

p. 54

Tom Galle // tomgalle.online

Revolting Macbook Air, 2018. Macbook Air, acrylic paint, graffiti paint markers, 23.2 x 32.1 x 2.3 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

pp. 54 - 55

Raphaël Fabre // www.raphaelfabre.com

Beside the Golden Door, 2018. Digital image, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 55

Tom Galle // tomgalle.online

Revolting Macbook Air, 2018. Macbook Air, acrylic paint, graffiti paint markers, 23.2 x 32.1 x 2.3 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 55

Tom Galle // tomgalle.online

Revolting Macbook Air, 2018. Macbook Air, acrylic paint, graffiti paint markers, 23.2 x 32.1 x 2.3 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 55

Tom Galle // tomgalle.online

Revolting Macbook Air, 2018. Macbook Air, acrylic paint, graffiti paint markers, 23.2 x 32.1 x 2.3 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 56

AES+F // aesf.art

London, 1996. Digital collage, c-print. Courtesy of the artists. © AES+F | ARS New York.

p. 57

Frank Wasser // www.frankwasser.info

2.11.2020, 2018. Mixed Media, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Anna Nolda Nagele.

p. 57

Frank Wasser // www.frankwasser.info

2.11.2020, 2018. Mixed Media, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Anna Nolda Nagele.

p. 58

Thomas Grogan // thomas-grogan.com

YouKnow, 2018. Performance, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and FACT Liverpool. Photo by Amina Bihi.

p. 58

Thomas Grogan // thomas-grogan.com

YouKnow, 2018. Performance, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and FACT Liverpool. Photo by Amina Bihi.

pp. 58 - 59

Thomas Grogan // thomas-grogan.com

YouKnow, 2018. Performance, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and FACT Liverpool. Photo by Amina Bihi.

p. 60

Thomas Yeomans // www.thomasyeomans.com

Flat Earth, 2018. Digital image, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 60

Thomas Yeomans // www.thomasyeomans.com

Crisis Actor, 2018. Digital image, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 61

Charlie Godet Thomas // www.charliegodetthomas.com

High Friends in Places, 2018. Acrylic paint and pencil on acid free paper, map pins and masking tape, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and VITRINE, Basel / London.

pp. 62

Bob Bicknell-Knight // www.bobbicknell-knight.com

Unattended Bag, 2018. Custom printed zip top handbag, 3D printed ABS plastic, USB drive, downloaded Facebook data, shredded newspapers, 31 x 47 x 14.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

pp. 63

Bob Bicknell-Knight // www.bobbicknell-knight.com

Unattended Bag, 2018. Custom printed zip top handbag, 3D printed ABS plastic, USB drive, downloaded Facebook data, shredded newspapers, 31 x 47 x 14.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 63

AES+F // aesf.art

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1996. Digital collage, c-print. Courtesy of the artists. © AES+F | ARS New York.

p. 64

Ollie Dook // olliedook.com

The Monkey Selfie, 2018. Hd Video Single Channel, Stereo Sound, 2'24". Courtesy of the artist, part of *Animal Stories*, Commissioned by daata Editions.

p. 65

Ollie Dook // olliedook.com

The Monkey Selfie, 2018. Hd Video Single Channel, Stereo Sound, 2'24". Courtesy of the artist, part of *Animal Stories*, Commissioned by daata Editions.

p. 65

Ollie Dook // olliedook.com

The Monkey Selfie, 2018. Hd Video Single Channel, Stereo Sound, 2'24". Courtesy of the artist, part of *Animal Stories*, Commissioned by daata Editions.

p. 66

Paula Morison // www.paulamorison.com

Wildfire (01.05.14 - 20.03.18), 2018. Newspaper, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

pp. 66 - 67

Paula Morison // www.paulamorison.com

Wildfire (01.05.14 - 20.03.18), 2018. Newspaper, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 67

Trystan Williams // trystanwilliams.com

Wildfire (01.05.14 - 20.03.18), 2018. Newspaper, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 67

Paula Morison // www.paulamorison.com

Wildfire (01.05.14 - 20.03.18), 2018. Newspaper, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 67

Paula Morison // www.paulamorison.com

Wildfire (01.05.14 - 20.03.18), 2018. Newspaper, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 68

Raphaël Fabre // www.raphaelfabre.com

CNI, 2017. Various scanned documents, 21 x 29.7 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 68

Raphaël Fabre // www.raphaelfabre.com

CNI, 2017. French ID card, 10 x 15 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 69

Raphaël Fabre // www.raphaelfabre.com

CNI, 2017. Portrait made with 3D and 2D softwares, from a photographic texture Photo board, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 70 - 71

Jonas Lund // jonaslund.biz

<https://pessimism-of-the-intellect-optimism-of-the-will.online> – 18th August 2017, 2017. Website, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 70 - 71

Jonas Lund // jonaslund.biz

<https://pessimism-of-the-intellect-optimism-of-the-will.online> – 18th August 2017, 2017. Website, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

p. 70 - 71

Jonas Lund // jonaslund.biz

<https://pessimism-of-the-intellect-optimism-of-the-will.online> – 18th August 2017, 2017. Website, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

isthisit? is a platform for contemporary art, exhibiting over 700 artists since its creation in May 2016, founded by its current director, artist and curator Bob Bicknell-Knight. Online, it operates as a gallery producing monthly exhibitions showcasing emerging to mid-career artists, hosting a roster of guest curators who experimenting with the medium of the internet to interrogate a variety of concepts. The website also hosts monthly residencies, where artists are given a web page to create new work that exists on the internet as a piece of net art. Offline, it has held exhibitions nationally and internationally and is the publisher of *isthisit?*, a book series released on a triannual basis.

