PROPAGANDA, THE INTERNET & NEW ACTIVISMS

CURATED BY
ELLE AVIV NEWTON
B4BEL4B GALLERY
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What is the essence of propaganda in the internet age? How do we discern truth from untruth or real news from fake news? How do we cross the echo chambers of our social media streams to make independent discoveries? Have we somehow abandoned cross-cultural dialogue - and if so to what end?

We are in the midst of a global misinformation crisis. The US president—whose very electoral victory confounds millions—decries “fake news” while rejecting recorded and documented events with his idealized version of them. The paradigm of objective journalism that might correct such assertions is rapidly dissolving into a fractured cybersphere. Post-truth is a concept that has gained traction in describing how every event produces multiple narratives that encase starkly oppositional value systems and future visions. In this acidified sea of data, something so pure and fabled as truth retreats into the depths.
Social media platforms afford humans the novel ability to radically homogenize the political content of our feeds and friendships. Blocking detractors is a customary reaction to encountering disagreement. And at the center of these systems of interaction are issues of unqualified urgency to our society and planet. And yet, if neutral information has disappeared, where can we point to as neutral ground for the sort of discussions that are necessary to proceed?

Our methods of digital communication have been rapidly developed to create efficiency, brevity and global accessibility — but those same qualities may be separating us from critical approaches to information technology. If we do not purposefully carve out spaces for thoughtful inquiry regarding our cultural tools, our minds run the risk of becoming mere supplements to digital experience and ideological conflict.

This exhibition’s work is unsettling and non-hypothetical. It explores the consequences and implications of our cultural choices. Here, artists have bravely taken on the media beast by traveling deeply into territories that are often concealed behind cultural firewalls. Believe the Hype seeks to hack those systems of concealment and to begin the serious work of knowledge-gathering, critical reflection, dialectical parsing, and fearless surrender -- to step beyond the incredulity of our present matrix in order to establish an open space of appraisal and future visions.
Trump 14K Gold-Plated and Trump 24K Gold-Plated are unauthorized presidential campaign posters we designed for Donald J. Trump as an exercise in free speech. Four gold, rotating letter Ts suggest qualities projected by Trump, among them success, wealth, and revolutionary (i.e. impolitic) speech. The counter-form suggests a conflicting narrative, however: namely, that Donald Trump’s careless and divisive rhetoric is creating negative spaces in the fabric of American society. These spaces—fracture lines, really—snake through the design’s square silhouette to reveal a swastika. And while the swastika is historically a symbol of dynamism and cyclical renewal associated with the sun, in this context it evokes hate speech and nationalist demagoguery. Since the election we have been selling our remaining posters to raise money for the ACLU and Planned Parenthood.

ABOUT

Mark Fox is a designer and educator. He specializes in the design of trademarks, icon systems, and custom typography at Design is Play. Angie Wang is a designer and educator who specializes in typography and typographic systems. Her studio, Design is Play, is a creative collaboration with Mark Fox. Wang and Fox are co-authors of Symbols: A Handbook for Seeing, published by The Monacelli Press in 2016.
Wikipedia entries are, on the surface, facially neutral. But in the name of crowd-sourced “truths,” Wikipedia obfuscates context, authorship, and power. In response, Wikipedia Was Here reveals the location and geographical context of anonymous edits to specific Wikipedia entries, as they occur in real-time. The project geocodes the IP addresses of new Wikipedia edits and shows corresponding Google Street View imagery. It aims to make the production of popular knowledge more visible and publicly accountable.

ABOUT

Justin Blinder is a Brooklyn-based artist, programmer, and researcher. His work examines how big data has shaped our claims of ownership, criteria for an object’s value, and social interactions in the built environment.
As part of Deep Lab, an ongoing collaboration of women working in post-technological topics, co-founders Maral Pourkazemi and Addie Wagenknecht’s evolving series of two dimensional works further explores the notion of non-contradictory binaries in public spaces. The series is a reaction as much as a response to the current geo-social-political climate. “Escapism vs. Extremism”, “Magic vs. Encryption” “Love vs. Empathy” “News vs Fake News”. The repetitive visual nature and starkly contrasting bold facing type faces are meant to be easily seen, read, funny and provoking from both a direct and distant point of view. The series encompasses a viewpoint on the world functioning as statement of paradoxes.

ABOUT

Maral Pourkazemi is a German/Iranian design activist living and working from London. Her work focuses mostly on issues around online privacy and security.

Addie Wagenknecht is an American artist and researcher living in New York City and Austria. Her work deals primarily with pop culture, feminist theory, new media and open source software and hardware.
The number of neurons within a typical honey bee or ant colony is within the same order of magnitude as neurons within the typical human brain. Anthropological noise pollution disturbs electromagnetic fields. Physicists suggest that virtual photons—the constituent units of an EMF—are the essential carrier units of consciousness. Mycelium has been called the “earth’s natural internet.” DROUGHT SPA’s behavior /in the/ vector looks at these claims around the communications, structures, chemicals, sounds, and complex interactions between self-organizing, intelligent units.

ABOUT

DROUGHT SPA is the performative project of Kevin CK Lo and alex cruse, two Oakland-based interdisciplinary artists. Their work (a combination of iterative, computer-generated visuals, poetry, and stochastic synthesis) primarily concerns posthumanism and radical politics. DROUGHT SPA has performed nationally and abroad.
“Alternative facts” far predate Kellyanne Conway; they are woven into the fabric of the American identity. To truly understand current events and see past the simplified mainstream narrative takes a wealth of historical knowledge and differing perspectives. While the internet allows access to this, information oversaturation often acts as a barrier. With the looming potential abandonment of net neutrality, we may find ourselves racing against the clock to glean the information necessary to fight current and future atrocities.

ABOUT

Lucia Goodbag is an artist based in Oakland, California working primarily in fiber arts. Having worked as a professional seamstress, leatherworker, and jeweler after studying painting and printmaking in school, she combines all these practices in her current work. Her work is primarily conceptual and addresses content that is contrarian to the medium of fibers. She spends her free time learning about surveillance and rewatching Buffy the Vampire Slayer.
The opposite of up is down, of forward is backward, but what are the opposites of the states of Left and Right? Politics are complicated and language is nuanced. With the emergence and establishment of the ‘alt-right’ in American politics and institutions, digital spaces and conservations have even more complexity now. Things Are Rarely Binary is a series of protest posters, observations, and provocations that come from the six months of digital ethnographic research I’ve down on the ‘alt-right.’ These participatory posters, which are snapshots into this subculture, serve as maps and questions on violent data and politics. Like digital spaces, these posters are designed to create conversations and observations from the audience with the artist, ones as complex as the conservations we already have, that attempt to address and dismantle the covert and overt violence created by white supremacy.

ABOUT

Caroline Sinders is a machine learning designer/user researcher and artist. For the past few years, she has been focusing on the intersections of natural language processing, artificial intelligence, abuse, online harassment and politics in digital, conversational spaces. Caroline is a designer and researcher at Wikimedia and a BuzzFeed/Eyebeam Open Lab Fellow. She holds a masters from New York University’s Interactive Telecommunications Program from New York University.
Black transparency is an involuntary disclosure of secrets against a backdrop of systematic online surveillance, as large parts of contemporary life move into the digital realm. Black transparency, as a radical form of information democracy, has brought forward a new sense of unpredictability to international relations, and raises questions about the conscience of the whistleblower, whose personal politics are now instantly geopolitical. Empowered by networks of planetary-scale computation, disclosures today take on an unprecedented scale and immediacy. Difficult to contain and even harder to prevent, black transparency does not merely create openness, order, and clarity; rather, it triggers chaos, stirring the currents of a darker and more mercurial world.

ABOUT

Metahaven was founded in 2007 by Vinca Kruk and Daniel van der Velden. In Black Transparency—part essay, part fanzine—Metahaven embark on a journey of subversion, while examining transparency’s intersections with design, architecture, and pop culture, as well as its ability to unravel the circuitry of modern power.
21st century propaganda appears less as jingoistic spectacle than as rapid dissemination of contradictory data points, irreconcilable with any grand narrative.

#FakeNewsBot imagines a future where public discourse is no longer a function of argument as such—where all rhetoric is reduced to volume. At the same time, it suggests effective resistance tactics against trolls, whose main resources are time and anonymity. Machines have these qualities in droves.

ABOUT

Ben Lerchin is an artist/technologist working with experimental photography, maps and language. Concerned with the power imbalances encoded by digital platforms, Ben develops interventions that position humans as empowered actors within the totality of global hyperspace. The resulting works assimilate a multitude of perspectives to produce aggregate renderings, both optically through the use of capture devices and linguistically through the programmatic collection of textual data.
toward a 2020 internet armistice
ELLE AVIV NEWTON AND TIARE RIBEAUX

This triple-screen installation highlights the criticality of web accessibility under shifting political powers while serving as an altar for digital news browsing. Placed behind a red velvet rope in the VIP section of the gallery, viewers are invited to consume a range of highly-trafficked internet news media. It is a comment on the recently-passed Net Neutrality Laws which are currently under threat by Trump’s freshly-appointed administration.

ABOUT

Tiare Ribeaux is a Hawaiian-American new media artist, curator and community organizer whose work explores materiality, infrastructures, and environment. Her work seeks to provoke conversation and uncover hidden truths around opaque global industrial and socio-economic systems that are omnipresent yet often invisible in our day-to-day lives. She has been a Bay Area based curator and producer of visual arts, performance arts, and community events focused on innovation and radical inclusivity for over 5 years.

Elle Aviv Newton biography at end of curatorial guide.
Dear CNN, Jeff Zucker, Brianna Keilar, & DON LEMON,

I sincerely hope you didn’t think anyone forgot that FAKE NEWS STUNT you all pulled back in 2014 in St.Louis. Don’t get mad when you get called FAKE NEWS, because you are, 200% You are an absolute disgrace.

Sincerely,
Black Child

ABOUT

“Lifting The Veil” any chance I can.
ABOUT THE CURATOR

Elle Aviv Newton is a fourth-generation Oakland-American writer, curator, editor, activist and art historian. She is co-creator and editor of the literary news journal Poets Reading The News and is Writer in Residence at B4BEL4B Gallery. Her work is presently concerned with the intersection of digital culture and psychosomatics. She has lived abroad extensively, including in Malaysia, Israel, Los Angeles and Italy. She has degrees in contemporary art criticism and history from Mills College.

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www.b4bel4b.com
Art Director: Tiare Ribeaux