Man Bartlett, Angela Washko and Ben Grosser / Curated by Filippo Lorenzin

BLINDING PLEASURES

(Group Show)

10th Feb - 18th March

arebyte PRESENTS

BLINDING

PLEASURES

CURATED BY FILIPPO LORENZIN

WITH

ANGELA WASHKO

BEN GROSSER

MAN BARTLETT

10 FEBRUARY–18 MARCH

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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

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arebyte Gallery is pleased to present Blinding Pleasures, the first show launching its 2017 programme focusing on the theme of Control. The group exhibition Blinding Pleasures, curated by Filippo Lorenzin, will study the dangers and potentials of a conscious use of the mechanisms behind the False Consensus effect and its marketing-driven son, the so-called "Filter Bubble". This project will be an occasion to reflect and question these issues with the involvement of artists, psychologists, lawyers, sociologists and communication experts.

The mornings after both the Brexit vote and the 2016 U.S Presidential Election, social media was used more than ever for sharing sadness, fear and even desperation; people felt cheated, asking how it was possible that Brexit and Donald Trump won even though they saw on their social media feeds in the previous months that everyone was going to vote against them. The reality the social media channels perceived and the real and final outcome were too wide and deep.

Blinding Pleasures will explore the reasons and the ways in which the False Consensus effect takes place on a daily basis, online and offline, due to the construction of environments only allowing persons to connect with people who share a similar opinion. Not paying attention to signs that confound expectations is one of the most important and subtle functioning of human psyche; more oVen than not, it is an involuntary mechanism triggering out selfdefense. Marketing agencies and centres of power learnt how to master this bias for their interests. Shaping a public opinion doesn't necessarily mean to filter the information needed to control the extremely partisan communities blind to other opinions but rather, and foremost, to sharpen the differences among opposite groups giving birth to extreme partly blinded communities. Blinding Pleasures is an exhibition that reflects on how people can critically take control over their inner psychological biases, disrupting the attempts of being misled by those who detain power on the platforms they use.

Ultimately, the exhibition questions the means in which one retains control over these systems. Starting from a non social media related point of view, the exhibition explores the perks and troubles of behaving in an environment designed to keep people locked in it by exploiting their need to be socially accepted and reassured. Given the complexity of the topic, inquiry won't be Ultimately, the exhibition questions the means in which one retains control over these systems. Starting from a non social media related point of view, the exhibition explores the perks and troubles of behaving in an environment designed to keep people locked in it by exploiting their need to be socially accepted and reassured. Given the complexity of the topic, inquiry won't be from a wholly negative or positive presumption; it'll be an opportunity to start a conversation aimed to collectively address subtle and influential psychological functioning.
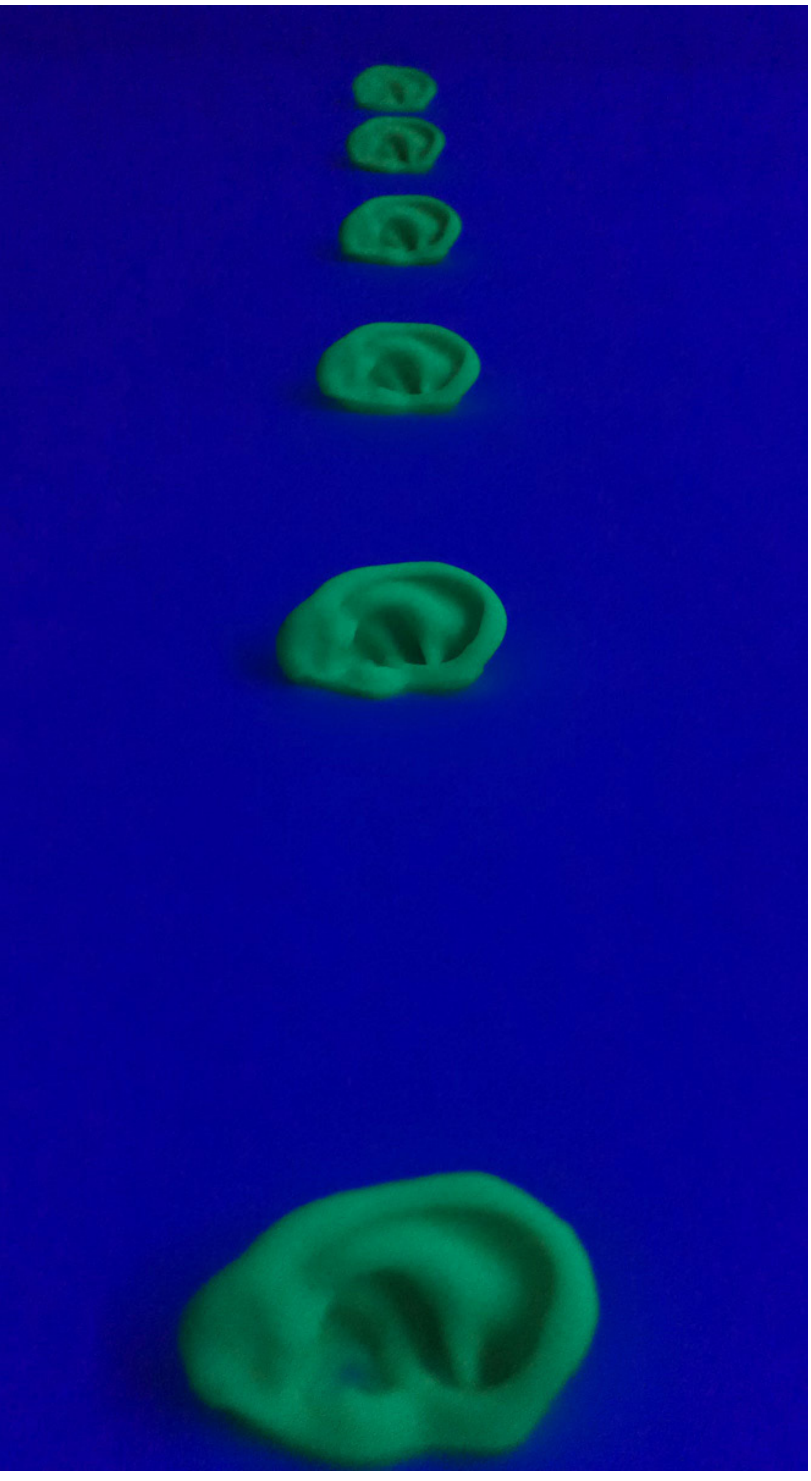
about

Angela Washko will show Survival Rates In Captivity (Free Will Mode #5) (2017), a new unedited work of her ongoing project Free Will Mode. This is a series of videos in which the artist uses The Sims to place human Artificial Intelligence into architectural situations to test the constraints of their ability to rethink the environments they've been placed in.

Benjamin Grosser will present Go Rando (2016), a browser extension that obfuscates feelings on Facebook. Every Mme users click "Like", Go Rando randomly chooses one of the six Facebook "reactions" for them. Want to see what Facebook feels like when your emotions are obscured? Go Rando.

Man Bartlett will present an installation titled Browsing the Blues (2017) created in part from the electromagnet output of his iPhone recorded while browsing his social media feeds, as well as a takeaway print that represents the score of the audio piece overlaid on a depiction of the circuitry of the iPhone model he used. In concert, this act as a sort of signature of his digital consumption.

Accompanying the show is a **series of events** involving both experts and the general public in the conversation. The first panel discussion will be held on Friday 25th February with Professor of Sociology Amparo Lasén and Social Studies expert Ebru Yemskin who will explain what is the False Consensus effects in terms of daily offline life. At the end of the event, Ebru Yemskin will lead a workshop that will show the audience how easy it is to fall within these functions.

In the second talk, taking place on Saturday 18th March, lawyer Kevin Poulter and NBC journalist Catherine Chapman will discuss how being trapped in a comfort zone influences our behaviours at work and the consequences of relying on our habits when we think about politics.

Along these events, we will screen Facebookistan (2016) directed by Jakob Gottschau, a documentary taking a close look at Facebook, its laws, powers and its influence on privacy and freedom of expression. The screening will take place on Saturday 11th March.
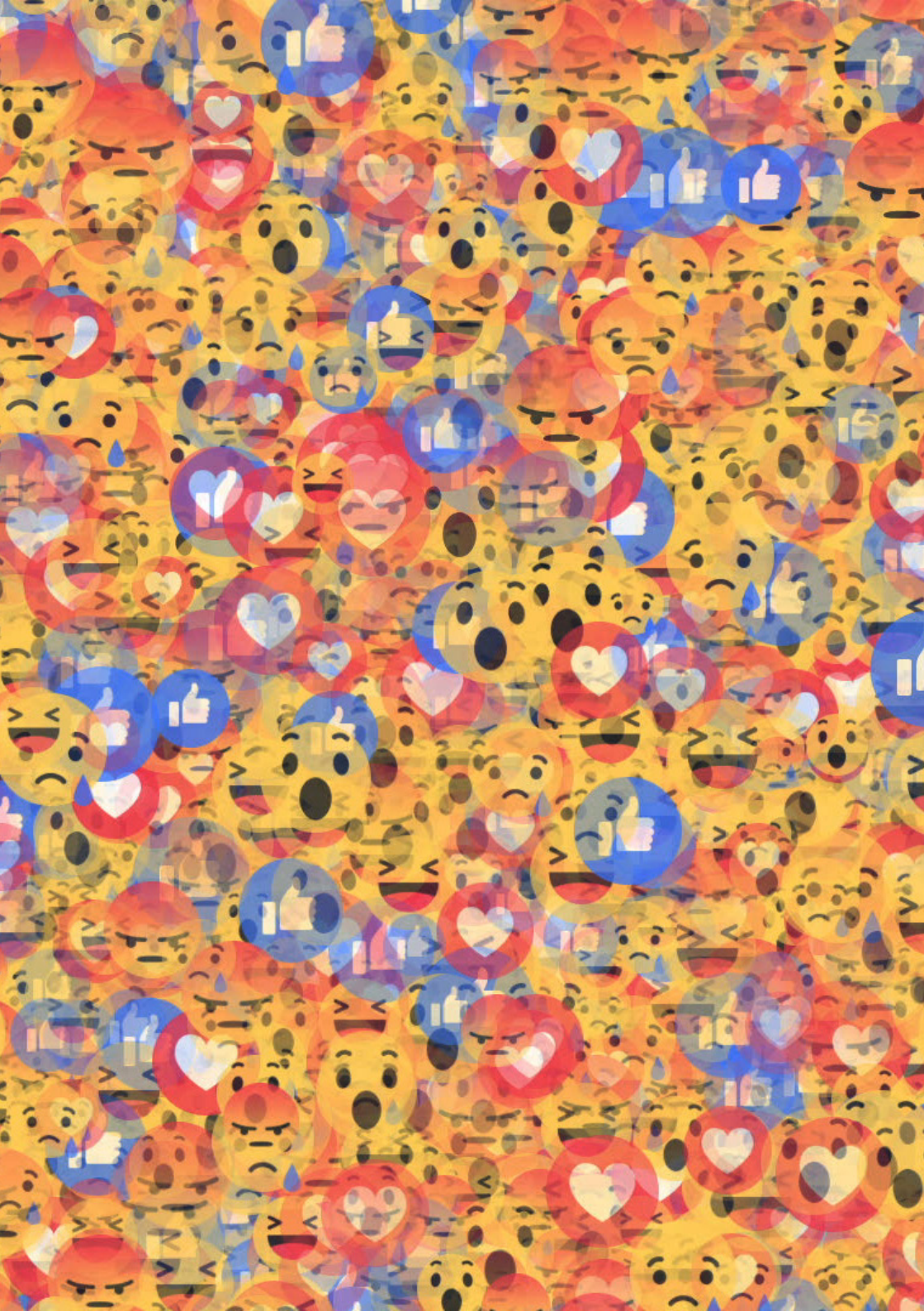
Notes on Control
by Patrick Lichty

"WHAT IS THE MATRIX? CO

As the new year of 2017 turns, eyes raise from our Facebook pages to consider the changes happening in the past few years. The expansion of global authoritarianism, in Singapore, China, Russia, Turkey, the Phillipines, much of the Arab world, the US with the election of Trump, and traditional areas like much of Subsaharan Africa have led to the notion that capital and democracy are diverging. The irony of this is that the current flavor is a populist authoritarianism, driven by populaces fearful of changing demographics, crime, global politics, and by neoliberal capitalism. For example, as of late, my interactions with Filipinos in my home city-state of Dubai invariably leads to their asking about my opinion of their president Duterte, and how happy they are with the extrajudicial killings as it has made their home so much safer, and they look forward to his re-engaging with China for economic talks. Add this to various locales like Singapore where the public reports high levels of happiness despite high degrees of micromanagement and surveillance. And these are the countries which I can easily talk about.

Achille Mbembe's recent article, "The age of humanism is ending" marks the collision of capitalism and populist authoritarianism as threatening the Enlightenment model of democracy. Systems of compassion, care, and welfare are being replaced by Neo-Darwinist notions of speed, efficiency and control. What is important now is not processes but outcomes. In Gilles Deleuze's 1992 essay, Postscript on Control Societies, he presciently predicts the expansion of Foucault's notion of the Clinic and Prison as spatial enclosures to the notion of control as the assignment of codes to bodies, spaces, indices, as systems of control. We have moved from spaces of control, Deleuze says, to systems. These systems, as Deleuze notes,

create substitutions of the space for the practice of the space – prison for house arrest, school for eternal on-line learning, clinics for diagnostics, the distribution of content for the creation of art. In terms of art, this is also the hyperprofessionalization of practice through creating work that is centered on commodification, likes, etc. generated from the numerous art/business incubator programs, and so on. We can see this through Titanic Sinclair's "That Poppy" project, which acts as a vehicle and a critique of these systems. This, in my opinion, follows with the subsumation of everything into the capitalist control regime. As Deleuze mentions, we are no longer individuals, but dividuals, typified by the control of the body/material, and by control of the password, or data body. This dividuated regime of control is double problematic as it enforces constraints not only on the material, but the informatics, and even processes of same.

Michel Foucault, in Discipline and Punish, wrote of the Jeremy Bentham prison design called the Panopticon, in which no one would know at any time who was viewing or being viewed between the jailors and the jailed. This, of course, has been a critical staple in talking about the emerging surveillance state foreseen in his own way by George Orwell in his book, 1984. However, the rise of the selfie surveillance state, on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat create an ironic state in which surveillance in the form of sous-veillance (self-surveillance) are ubiquitous. However, this practice plays into the same regime of effects, as the conduits for this sous-veillance is still in the hands of global capital. However artists like Hasan Elahi, Steve Mann, and Wafaa Bilial seek to short circuit the regime of surveillance through radical transparency and the sous-.

However, the rise of the selfie sur-veillance state, on Facebook, Insta-gram, Snapchat create an ironic state in which surveillance in the form of sous-veillance (self-surveillance) are ubiquitous. However, this practice plays into the same regime of effects, as the conduits for this sous-veillance is still in the hands of global capi-tal. However artists like Hasan Elahi, Steve Mann, and Wafaa Bilial seek to short circuit the regime of surveillance through radical transparency and the sous-.

However, these artists beg the ques-tion that when the information and physical constraints surround us, how do we think in alterior ways? How can we, as Eugene Thacker states about philosophy in In the Dust of this Earth, "think the unthinkable", or push our thought into ways either out of the box or in a Bateillean way, unthinkable. There is a term that was an aside in a novel that has shaped my notions of alterior thinking. In William Gibson's Bridge Trilogy novel, All Tomorrow's Parties, he mentions that the manager of a nanofax center (sort of a 3D printing replication shop) was "going lateral", and mentions someone who is a "lateral character with a 9 (mm pistol)". This relates to a non-linear, unexpected approach to a situation or matter, In terms of systems of control, this means that it can be as simple as circumventing the simple trajectory of cause and effect or the semiotics of the surveilling gaze. Other irruptions to authoritarian regimes of control might be to step askance into the Dark Web, like Dina Karadsic's PiVilion project or the Aram Bartholl-sponsored Router Gallery project, both of which either make

lateral moves in terms of the Inter-net, or still use the technology while disconnecting it entirely. Bartholl's USB Dead Drops also employ circum-ventions to the aesthetics of control, taking the occult physical repository of data as point of alterity.

However, Deleuze makes one last point that is of great interest, saying that the "man (sic) of control is un-dulatory, in a continuous network. Everywhere surfing has replaced the earlier sports." If I interpret "sports" as being a metaphor for terms of engage-ment with regimes of control in artistic terms, we can go several ways. One might be the notion of shifting from modes of production of online art to surfing and aggregation as an art practice as canonized by Olson et al and the "Internet surfing clubs" of the late 2000's. Another could be rapid shifts in production, as typified by Allahyari and Rourke's Additivism project. What Deleuze suggests are sets of unstable practices, and per-haps unstable media.

Creating strategies of criticism or re-sistance in control societies, must be fluid and variable, both to resist the will to codification and classification agendas of control demand, and the frameworks that authoritarian re-gimes demand. As capitalism's reach become ubiquitous, artists must also be careful of their use of objects and codes in order to critique or circum-vent the cycle of capital and con-sumption. As we move into 2017, what appears clear is that Adorno's theories of commitment arise under the frame-work of oppression, and it is the po-tential of the artist reroute the circuits of power in times of repression.

Ben Grosser, Go Rando, 2016

Angela Washko, Survival Rates In Captivity (Free Will Mode #5), 2017

Tell me who you interact with and I will tell you who you are:
How Psychology can help us to understand the Contemporary World
by Catarina Telo

Psychology has explained human development and behaviour over centuries. General and social psychology theories are paramount to understand the evolution of human behaviour and how individuals adapt to changes including technology, political environment and culture.

To start I would like to highlight William James' work, a philosopher and a psychologist from the 19th and 20th century, who focused on understanding how individuals respond to the environment. Although William James's philosophy is essentially individualistic in that it does not allow for a robust theory of community, it still offers an interesting insight. William James' work "Great Men and Their Environment" highlights one's society as not only a context in which great individuals emerge, but even as playing a selective role in allowing their greatness to develop. In turn, that social environment is affected by the individuals. Whether or not an individual will be able to have an impact is, to some extent, determined by society. Thus, socially significant individuals and their communities have a dynamic, that can be understood as a correlative relationship; both parties influence each other.

If in the 19th and 20th century communities had a great impact on individuals but in the present 21st century, with technology developments, individuals and communities face other challenges. These challenges question social norms and the impact of free information in the way that individuals and groups acquire strong conceptions about the world.

In recent years social media has adopted a central role in how we access information and express ourselves. Almost

everyone has a smartphone, a tablet or some form of accessing social media platforms. With the social media phenomenon, marketing strategists started to use the internet and data to target potential clients. The social media platforms that are usually free of charge would survive by the amount of adverts that they publish and following this perspective, one may think that this strategy helps the users to filter information that is relevant to them. This phenomenon has been called "filter bubbles". The question is, should "filter bubbles" apply to political and civic content shared online? Does it pose a danger for humanity and its development?
After Donald Trump's victory New York counsellors reported an increased demand for therapy. This phenomenon was called Donald Trump's anxiety and it can be seen in the light of people feeling fear of the future.

The internet has also been a place where all theories can be right and wrong at the same time - every individual select the information that is meaningful according with its ethos and beliefs. For example, if an individual was taught as a child that fish can fly and his or her life experiences confirmed that fish fly, the likelihood of he or she believes that fish fly is greater. However, if a reliable source tells me the opposite it can create an internal conflict. Then, the individual will choose to change or reorder their thinking or beliefs.
In 1997, after the spring equinox in the city of San Diego, California, police found 17 men and 21 women who committed collective suicide by poisoning and asphyxiation. Each of them had documentation and some money in a bag carefully organised. Some of the male bodies had genital mutilation marks. Besides of the emotions of

disgust and anger provoked by this event, it had the effect of amplifying the message of the cult called "Do". This event spread the cult message to a higher number of people and after the event was reported on the news the website had around 900,000 visits.

What happens to people who refuse their previous beliefs, and when they do adopt new ways of thinking and adopt a different view of the world? Social influence can be catastrophic for society and to the individuals if the influence mechanisms are exacerbated. In particular, the ideas, attitudes and actions of the people around us have great influence upon our own actions. The interaction with others create regular patterns that influence our behaviours. Social norms are crucial to understand this; they broaden a set of rules and guide how to understand, think, feel and act. They define the level of behaviours, action trends and opinions that are accepted or rejected (Sheriff, 1965).
Social norms not only help us to guide our behaviour, but they also create stability and structure that allow us to predict events. Social norms are seen as core for social functioning because they can reduce confusion and uncertainty. This can also allude to the illusion of control - by following social norms individuals can control the contexts that they are part of. Indeed, the quality of our interactions depends directly of the correct use of social norms. Some authors in the 1980's considered that individuals are very sensitive to people who don't comply with the social norms. This can explain the tendency to interact with people who share the same social norms as most of the people that we interact with behave in a very similar way to us.

Bandura (1971) in his research of social learning theory distinguishes two major phases: the observation and performance. The social learning theory defends that people learn by observation of an exemplar behaviour and then acquire and reproduce the behaviour. This does not apply to all events but can explain, to some extent, acquired tasks and behaviours that are easily learnt and do not require specialised knowledge or much training. The value of similarity also can explain how most of our social media feeds select similar information and how we tend to form friendships with people that are similar to us. Marketing uses the value of similarity as a strategy to reach potential clients. The fact that marketing strategists prefer popular people rather than TV stars to sell products rely on the premise that people are more likely to acquire behaviours of people that are similar to them.

Angela Washko, Womanhouse (Or How To Be A Virtuous Woman), 2014

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