Reality Machines:
An Art Exhibition
on Post-Truth

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Foreword

"Truth" is of no small importance to human affairs, yet it has been and remains a contested category. Its status shifts radically through time, place, religion, discipline – and today, social platform. Truth can be definite and mercurial, divine and political. As secularism, cosmopolitanism and positivism enter a moment of crisis, and as information seems to be ever more available – while also subject to algorithmic modification – anxieties about the status of truth and the transparency of information are on the rise.

"Post-truth" was the 2016 Oxford English Dictionary word of the year, denoting "circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." The crisis in objectivity that this new word unveils has been accompanied by an unprecedented proliferation of homemade images that excel the art of "remixology", the "practice of recombining preexistent content". These images result in often-fake contents that circulate both virally and ephemerally online. The "post-truth phenomenon", however, is not only fuelled by low-tech and intimate creativity, but also by technologically sophisticated and politically driven techniques of image creation, alteration, and destruction. These sustain electoral agendas, responses to catastrophe, and affective relationships to powerholders.

While fake news has a long history, its contemporary currency has been enhanced by the ways in which new biopolitical regimes, from genetic testing to big data, confront more entrenched epistemes. These regimes are potentially capable of bypassing old forms of expertise and knowledge production. The ethical and aesthetic significance of this shift in the status of "truth" is pending critical debate, as is art's response to the current wave of iconographic politicization, conspiratorial fears, and data skepticism. *Reality Machines* addresses this "knowledge controversy" while intersecting it with the work of artists from a multiplicity of countries working as activists, social critics, and human rights advocates.

Acknowledgements

Reality Machines: Speaking Objects, Fake News, A Kaleidoscopic Real

Mara Polgovsky Ezcurra

Despite rumors of its disappearance, the real remains with us. The labor of its production is "obstinate".

–Hal Foster, *Real Fictions*[1]

Fiction-in-the-real has become the characteristic mode of political humor for our time.

–Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*[2]

If reality and simulation are becoming entangled in new and profoundly disorientating ways, it is because technologies are increasingly able to simulate "the full ensemble of sense data that make up 'real' experience."[3] Post-truth, virtual reality, parafiction, fake-news, absolute fakes, reverse readymades, hyperreality, post-simulacrum, and truthiness are among the multiple notions that have emerged to name these entanglements. The "reverse readymade" is interesting for those involved in reflection upon art and aesthetics, for this concept seeks to name the possibility of inverting Duchamp's furtive conversion of an everyday object into a work of art, when he added the infamous "R. Mutt" signature to a urinal. In other words, this notion names the transformation of a work of art, understood as craft or *artificium*, into a utilitarian object."[4] Although this is not a novel act, the speed and sophistication of digital technologies that allow the "alteration of the appearance of

1   *Artforum*, April 2017, 169.
2   In *More Real?: Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Munich-London-New York: Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2012), 119–120.
3   Benjamin Woolley, *Virtual Worlds: A Journey in Hype and Hyperreality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 5.
4   Arthur C. Danto, *The Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 237.

reality" is leading to an unstoppable proliferation of fake and reverse readymades.[5] Together with what Umberto Eco describes as "absolute fakes,"[6] reverse readymades are remarkable for their spectacular facticity: they constitute the visual and material basis of the post-truth era. Bringing Duchamp's provocation full circle, these images, objects, and environments have released art from a century-long obsession with its institutional status, to return to the fundamental problem of art's relationship to the representation and experience of truth. The stakes of artistic practice are heightened anew.

The terms we attribute to an unstable sense of reality, shaped and reshaped by the workings of digital "remixology"[7] and algorithmic programming are also, however, a form of naming fear. The notion of "post-truth" – officialised by the Oxford English Dictionary's choice of this term as the 2016 word of the year – has become a terrifying symbol of the Brexit and Trump eras. However, it would no exaggeration to say that the presentism we ascribe to this phenomenon and its allegedly novel lexicon is in itself a piece of fake news. Without going too far back in history, we might recall that more than a decade ago, *The Colbert Report* suggested the notion of "truthiness" to describe a "truth that comes from the

gut, not books." As occurred with the OED entry, the term quickly found its place in decorous English language, when it became Merriam-Webster's 2006 word of the year.[8] John Morse, the president of Merriam-Webster, announced this by suggesting, like the critical press does today, that "truth has become up for grabs" and that this emotional – rather than rational – relationship to truth needed to find a place in language.[9] At that time, *The Colbert Report* and Morse were responding to pressing political phenomena, including George W. Bush's use of fabricated evidence to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003, followed that same year by a fully staged and televised presidential address aboard an aircraft carrier returning from the Persian Gulf. Against a warship banner reading "mission accomplished" and fully dressed in battle uniform, Bush declared the end of all major combat operations in Iraq, transforming war into a media spectacle that barely reflected the reality of the conflict, in which a major guerrilla insurgency was about to erupt. This was, using Naomi Klein's words, a case of "fake rationales for war, a fake President dressed as a fake soldier declaring a fake end to combat and then holding up a fake turkey."[10]

We might have gone further back and mentioned Napoleon's or Hitler's carefully staged propaganda machineries; yet the disappearance from the public imagination of all-too-

recent political phenomena, like Bush's "year of the fake," is in itself a telling indicator of our era's relationship to truth, and the contemporary place of speed in shaping our sense of reality. The rapid dissipation into oblivion of a spectacularly made-up political history should also remind us that Trump and his internet-savvy, bot-inflated, alt-right followers did not invent post-truth politics. This phenomenon is coeval to the theatre of politics and media effects. The true novelty is the growing prominence of machines, non-linguistic codes, and algorithms in the definition of political and affective realities, and the political uses of "reality machines," which may work both in favour of and against the state and capital. As the works that constitute this exhibition suggest, art may help us to shed light on some of these dynamics, for, as a technology to produce and reproduce worlds, it lies at the heart of the complex relationships between reality and fiction that sustain how we account for the real.

In this curatorial commentary, I aim to critique the presentism of media debates on fake-news and post-truth, which has fallen, all too rapidly, into the Manichean denunciation of wretched political intentions. Alongside the artists that are part of this show, I am interested in the technological bases of prevailing truth regimes, and the extent to which what we call "fake news" may be symptomatic of an ongoing epistemological transformation propelled by machine-led ways of seeing, the multiplication of codes (with the rise of digital and genetic programming), the industrialization of memory at the speed of the optical fiber, and what can be more broadly described

as a post-anthropocentric turn in the identification and analysis of (material and immaterial) memory. In 1996, long before we could have predicted Donald Trump becoming US President, or the rise of the alt-right, French thinker Bernard Stiegler described today's "inability to distinguish facts from fabricated facticality" as resulting from the speedy industrialization of memory. He writes, "when memory is produced at a speed near that of light it is no longer possible, either in law or in fact, to distinguish an 'event' from its 'input' or its 'input' form its 'reception' or reading: there three moments coincide in a single spatiotemporal reality such that all delay, all distance, between them, is eliminated".[11] In response to the real or perceived instability, or rather indiscernibility, of truth that Stigler identifies, *Reality Machines* acknowledges a kaleidoscopic and often machine-led proliferation of ways to approach, unveil, understand, and even contradict truth claims. Among these I have focused, in particular, on the new epistemological import of forensics, hyperreality, and affect. The exhibition also takes into account the extent to which access to historical and social truths entails inherent difficulties, particularly under conditions of social conflict and/or state violence, when erasure becomes a political technology too. The voids in historical documentation and absence of human lives left by histories of violence expose the failings of an entirely positivist

5   Elizabeth Armstrong, "On the Border of the Real," in *More Real?: Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Munich-London-New York: Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2012), 31.
6   Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego-NY-London: The Harvest Book-Harcourt, 1986), 31.
7   On this notion, see David J. Gunkel, *Of Remixology: Ethics and Aesthetics after Remix* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

8   James Klatell, "The Word of the Year: 'Truthiness'," *CBS News*, September 12, 2006, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-word-of-the-year-truthiness/.
9   Klatell.
10   Naomi Klein, "The Year of the Fake," *Nation*, January 26, 2004, https://www.thenation.com/article/year-fake/.

11   Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, trans. Stephen Barker, Richard Beardsworth, and George Collins, vol. 2: Disorientation (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 116.

approach to the real and the different ethical reasonings at the root of today's contending truth regimes – beyond the all-too-unfortunate phenomenon of Trump.

Forensics

Forensics is the mode by which the present theatre of horrors is performed by objects in front of a public.

–Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*

The inextricable relationship between forensics and art was already well-established in the sixteenth century, with Leonardo Da Vinci's engagement in the art of dissection to provide some of the finest illustrations of the human body to his day. Yet the use of advanced imagery and simulation in contemporary forensic research has given rise to a new intersection between forensics and aesthetics. Forensic Architecture (FA), a London-based collective of architects, artists, coders, investigative journalists, archaeologists, lawyers, and scientists, is key to this new articulation, as it develops innovative methodologies to expose major human rights violations. FA's aesthetic projects unfold as forensic investigations, the starting point of which is "the inherent contradiction in all accounts – not only between the claims of the state and its military and the accounts of its civilian victims, but also within each of these groups, and sometimes within a single testimony or a single bit of material or media evidence."[12] Rather than mobilizing higher forms of knowing, FA

develops strategies to assemble often-conflicting human and non-human-generated information. This then becomes the basis of a hunt for more or less plausible forms of truth, all of which are linked to varying degrees of political responsibility by state actors. The 2017 video *Forced Disappearance in Iguala* is an exemplary case of this multi-positional forensic methodology, in which topography, testimony, architectural documentation, and the available visual and digital records converge to reconstruct the forced disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, on 26th September 2014. FA's detailed and spatialized account of the events of the gruesome evening in which the students were disappeared is one of the most striking responses to the state's attempt to impose what state officials called a "historical truth," namely, an official account of the students' disappearance presented to journalists and the larger public by the Attorney General of Mexico just over a month after the events. The state speedily presented to the population an implausible narrative, grounded in a few forged interviews and a video that has turned out to be little more than a piece of fake news.[13] In their video and larger practice, FA returns the state's forensic gaze, practicing a "counterforensics" aimed at monitoring state agencies, challenging their claims, and breaking their monopoly on information in situations of violence or war.[14]

12   Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 128.

13   Gloria Leticia Díaz, "La PGR demuele la 'verdad histórica'… de la PGR," *Proceso*, November 19, 2016, http://www.proceso.com.mx/463193/la-pgr-demuele-la-verdad-historica-la-pgr.
14   Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 64.

The work of FA joins Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's interactive and digital project *Level of Confidence* (2015) in addressing not only the Ayotzinapa case – which has figured prominently in recent Mexican art and film – but also the role of technology and non-human agency in the investigative search for truth. Using biometric surveillance algorithms that have been increasingly adopted by police forces and the military to search for suspects, Lozano-Hemmer's piece is effectively an automated engine trained to search for the disappeared students. The search agent is a face recognition camera capable of estimating the degree of similarity between a face situated in front of it – in this case the face of the exhibition's spectator – and the face of the student that most resembles it. In the work of Lozano-Hemmer, FA, and in Catalan digital artist Joana Moll's bot-harvested images of CCTV cameras situated in the US-Mexico border, the inorganic animates the organic. Objects and traces not only figuratively speak as forensic and biometrical evidence but also act upon humans: they transform our self-representations,[15] transmute our relationships to space and time, and enlarge, or unsettle, the epistemic basis upon which we can discern the virtual from the real.

In forensics, a renewed primacy and multiplication of "speaking" objects and codes has brought the post-Second World War "era of the witness" to a moment of crisis, as DNA tests, machine-led ways of seeing, and other technoscientific procedures have come to take precedence over witness accounts in the identification of victims of genocide and forced disappearance. Máximo Corvalán-Pincheira's serialized grids of DNA tests in watercolour – *Navy Blue Sequencing,* 2017 – are an intimate response to this epistemic shift in the search for victims of forced disappearance during Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship in Chile (1973-1990). From a distance, their repetitive patterns evoke the precision and alleged indisputability of a genetic regime of truth. As one approaches the works, however, the liquid vacillations of the artist's brush and the uneven spills of the pigments gain visibility and texture. The wavering of truth and the significance of perspective in its social rooting thus emerge from the experience of seeing. Art positions itself at a distance from forensic positivism, allowing for the possibility of a non-human rendering of truth, in which witness accounts, and the ritual and mourning processes which they constitute in situations of major human rights violations, would become obsolete. Heightening yet again this critical distance, in *A Dyptich, A Chronicle* (2016) Virginia Colwell asks, in turn, "can you make sense of all this?" Her bifurcated video dwells upon the status of truth in the accounts of a dreamed revolution, its covert surveillance by an FBI agent, the people who died and disappeared in the process, and the transformation of intimate lives into fragmentary evidence, indexed as real by half-erased marks of dynamite's expiry dates.

Hyperreality

Beyond the theatre of Trump's presidency, the actuality of the post-truth phenomenon lies in a redistribution of past conceptions about authenticity and falsification, as transformations in visual technologies offer a vision of the world that can be rapidly improved or diminished with only a few clicks or taps. This vision can be experienced as more (or at least as) real as the real thing, thus shaping a reality subject not only to visual but also to moral design. As Umberto Eco writes in "Travels in Hyperreality," hyperreal representations of the past and the present may not only feel more complete and real, but can also provide a more inspiring version of the original.[16] Fake news transforms this "inspiration" into a provocation.

The "production" of the real, to return to Hal Foster's words in the epigraph, has remained an obstinate preoccupation in artistic practice, which, according to Carrie Lambert-Beatty, has reached a post-simulacral condition, less concerned with the "disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust."[17] The ease with which one can play with authenticity in the medium of photography lies at the core of Ângelo Ferreira de Sousa's *Constructions* (2016-2018), a series of war photographs which combines altered and unaltered images, the distinction between them indiscernible to the viewer. In this series, Ferreira de Sousa explores the role of the real in war and politics and the extent to which war photography has often been ascribed a more authentic or trustworthy status than design and/or fashion photography. The artist poses the question of whether the motivation for forgery is not almost inevitably greater when one is dealing not with beauty and commerce, but with the representation of death on a mass scale.[18]

Today's media is closer to a battlefield than to a sphere for the rational debate of public matters; this is vividly felt both in the widespread circulation of forged or staged images of war and in the anonymized treatment of personal suffering within journalistic imagery. In the 1990s, Mark Seltzer described the "pathological public sphere" as a "sociality premised on the wound": "a sociality that gathers, and a public that meets, in the spectacle of the untoward accident and in an identification with the world insofar as it is a hostile place."[19] The search for economic and political profit among media outlets motivates the mobilization of the affective powers of a "wound culture"; meanwhile, those faces, bodies, and figures gaining prominence in the public eye are often little more than proxies, anonymous pieces in a negotiating table in search for spectacular viscera. Alejandro Luperca confronts Mexico's often asphyxiating everyday violence

15   Camila Moreiras develops this theme in her video *Not for Medical Use* (2017).

16   Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*, 56.
17   Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," 118.

18   It is particularly interesting to contrast Ferreira de Sousa's photographic series with the story of Brazilian fake photojournalist Eduardo Martins, who spent years stealing, subtly altering, and selling pictures taken by professional photographers in conflict zones. See n.a., "Brazil 'Surfing War Photographer' Eduardo Martins Exposed as Fake," *BBC News*, June 8, 2017, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-41174069.
19   Mark Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," *October* 80 (1997): 24.

against anonymized bodies with an artistic gesture searching for subtraction and erasure. His *PM Archive* (2010-) could be described as a series of reverse collages, in which images are not transformed by way of addition and juxtaposition, but by removal. His act involves the simple and delicate gesture of erasing the bodies of victims of violence from what are mostly stock tabloid images. Luperca's intervened newspapers bear ghostlike traces of those bodies that have been erased from public exposure through his deliberate act of expunction; he understands this as a way of restoring dignity to those whose privacy is sacrificed to fuel the narco-accumulative aesthetics of media capitalism. Crucially, Luperca's stagings of uncanny disappearances in the press are as inauthentic as the original images, yet they leave the eye ungrasped, motivating us to un-see the fetishisised wound and to un-learn a way of experiencing the real. Moreover, the truth of the image erupts with and alongside the reality of death: as an absence, a sudden disappearance, and an interruption in the possibilities of representation.

Affective Truths

Affective truths are the obverse of forensic truths; their sources are not speaking objects but immaterial, supernatural, and affective forces. Affective truths are felt, not investigated; increasingly, they can be algorithmically programmed to feature as fact in social media platforms. Affective truths belong to a social landscape in which people have had #enough-experts, as we can read in Charles Ogilvie's majolica pots, which revisit the satirical

tradition in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pottery to critique contemporary clichés circulating in social media and politics. In the history of media, this affective approach to reality and its representation is well rooted in the tradition of the tabloid or "yellow press," a form of news reporting that disregards evidence, constructs "documented facts," and appeals to emotion for financial or political benefit. Making a critical return to this tradition, Alejandra España's *The Mystery* (2017) reappropriates a tabloid's account of the "possible disappearance" or murder of a woman in Mexico City in the 1950s. The artist creates a formal parallel between the bitty presentation of evidence in the yellow press and her use of collage. Continuing and exacerbating this tradition, today's use of social media provides fertile ground for the hasty circulation of unverified stories with great capacity to harm, expose, exclude, and dispossess. For Byung-Chul Han, social media and what he calls digital vicinity offer users "only sectors of the world that please them," thus privatizing the world and dismantling "public, critical consciousness."[20] Under these conditions, the re-collectivization of criticality will rely on the possibility of both making visible and contesting the *effects* of onanistic media platforms on those who have become (digitally) transformed into objects of mockery, humiliation, and hatred. As Sara Ahmed suggests, to approach this task we must consider how hate and other emotions work as an "affective economy," where affects do not reside positively in signs, but circulate and

move between signs and bodies. Tracking affective truths and their effects on subjects like Trump's "Mexicans" will therefore involve "listening to those who have been shaped by this history" and learning to perceive how their/our bodies have been shaped by this affective economy.[21] A new battle for an embodied, and perhaps also humanist and testimonial truth is already in the horizon.

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20   Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford, CA: Standford University Press, 2015), 35.

21   Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 60.

Joana Moll
AZ: Move and Get Shot
2011-2013

AZ: Move and Get Shot is a net-based piece which shows the landscape of the US-Mexico border in the state of Arizona through the eyes of six surveillance cameras, themselves linked to an online platform. The platform was created by a group of landowners with properties on the US border, whose main purpose was to provide the public with raw images of immigrants crossing the border illegally through their lands. Each camera incorporates a motion sensor, which triggers an image capture when it detects the slightest vibration in the landscape. These pictures were then sent to a server and displayed directly on the web page.

While the main goal of the landowners was to disseminate photographs of illegal immigrants, the camera is programmed to detect and record any kind of movement. By delegating the surveillance to a machine, the original human intention is lost, and the original purpose takes shape as a collection of images revealing not only immigrants but all kinds of human, animal, and natural activity.

The images in the piece were automatically harvested by a bot, programmed by the artist.

Forensic Architecture
Forced Disappearance in Iguala
2017

Forensic Architecture worked in collaboration with the Equipo Argentino de Antropologia Forense (EAAF) and Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez (Centro Prodh) to conceive of an interactive cartographic platform. This platform maps out and examines the different narratives of the events of 26-27th September 2014, when 43 students from the Rural Normal School of Ayotzinapa were forcibly disappeared in the town of Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. The project aims to reconstruct, for the first time, the entirety of the known events that took place that night in and around Iguala and to provide a forensic tool for researchers to further the investigation.

Digital video with Spanish audio and English subtitles, 18:24 min.
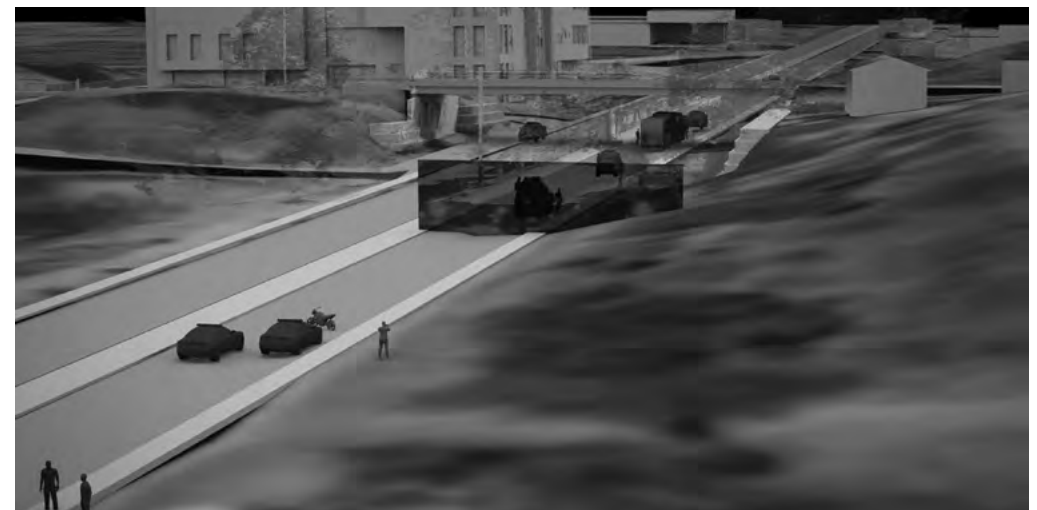
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer
Level of Confidence
2015

Level of Confidence is an art project that commemorates the mass kidnapping of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa teacher-training school in Guerrero, Mexico. It was released on 26th March 2015, exactly six months after the kidnapping took place. The project consists of a face-recognition camera that has been trained to tirelessly look for the faces of the disappeared students. As you stand in front of the camera, the system uses algorithms to find which student's facial features look most like yours and gives a "level of confidence" on how accurate the match is, as a percentage.

The biometric surveillance algorithms used – Eigen, Fisher and LBPH – are typically used by military and police forces to look for suspicious individuals. In this project they relentlessly search for victims instead and map relationships between them and the spectators.
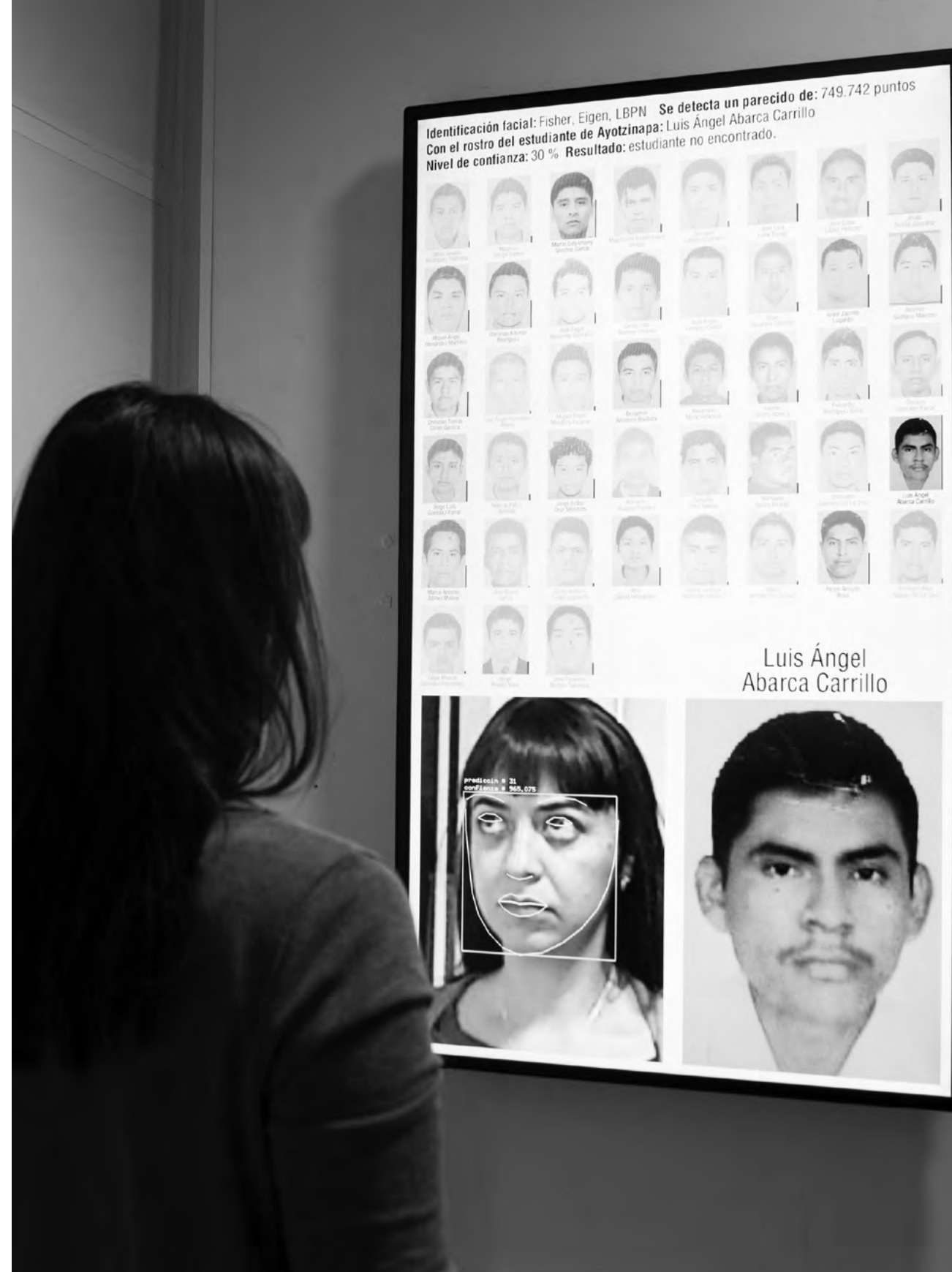
Camila Moreiras
Not For Medical Use
2017

Inscription as document and inscription as documentation. Evidence and testimony. Diagnosis and reaction. The forensic puts in play a retelling of events, a (re)construction of time always already from an historicizing perspective. Its images are the images of remains and remainders, and of questions left unanswered. Broadly speaking, *Not For Medical Use* gives an experiential account of what it is to be medically imaged. More precisely, it seeks to blur the lines between evidence and testimony; between lived experience and an experience given over to the image proper.

Digital video with English audio, 3:52 min.
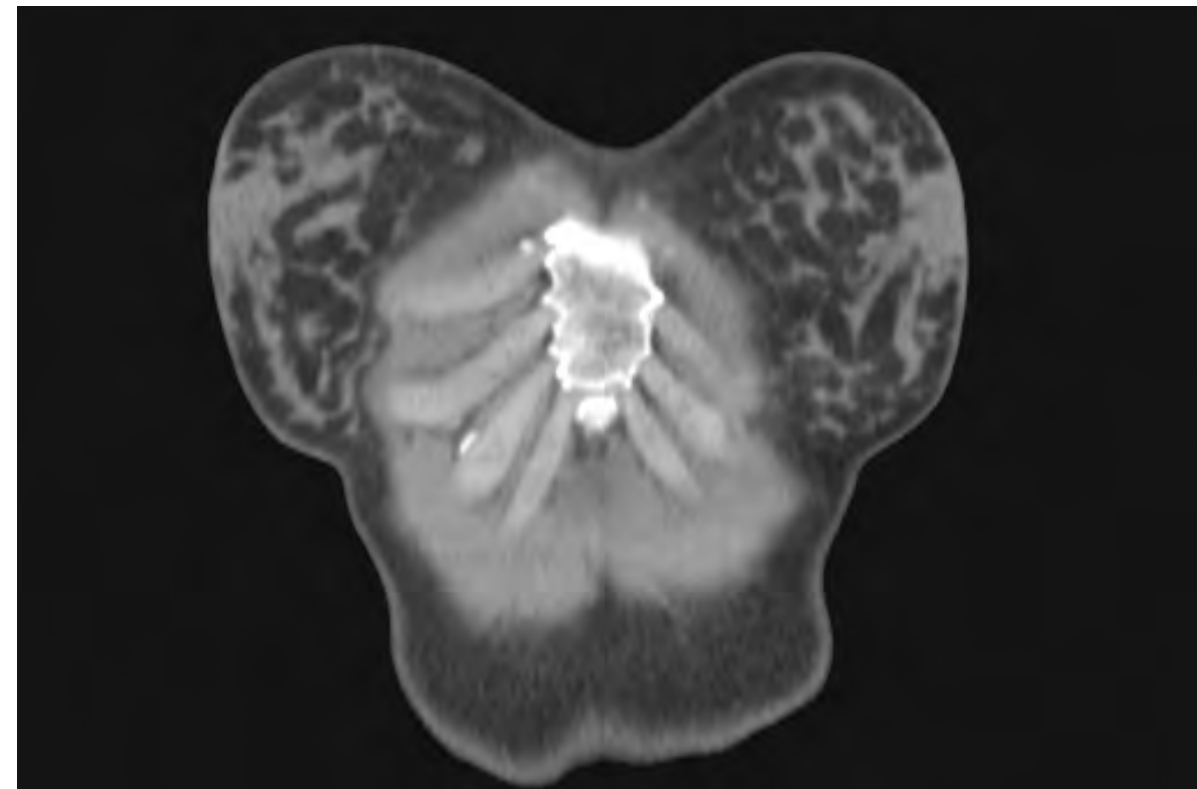
Virginia Colwell
A Diptych, A Chronicle
2016

This video presents a simple diptych of dual perspectives: how an island looks from the water and how the water looks from the island. On the right side of the screen are images of Caribbean islands filmed by Colwell's father from a sailboat, on the left, her filming of the ocean from her travels around the shoreline of Puerto Rico. The voice over pushes these opposing vantage points beyond their literal signification, using them as metaphors for the conflicting official and unofficial histories of the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña (FALN), a Puerto Rican revolutionary anticolonial group active in the 1970s and 1980s.

Colwell knew of the FALN from her father's work as an FBI agent investigating the island's independence movement. In her own research on the FALN, she became interested in the sharp contrast between the organization's presentation of itself thorough its actions, manifestos, and internal documents and the government's perspective. The history of FALN is almost as clandestine as the group itself, creating a deep sense of doubt concerning all sides of the story and the potential for understanding a past enveloped in secrecy and rumour.

Digital video with English audio and Spanish subtitles, 10:12 min.

Sophie Seita
Making Light: In the Temple of Formidable Hypotheses
2018

This is an experimental performance piece that responds to Sophie Seita's imaginary dinner guests Margaret Cavendish, Denis Diderot, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, Gottfried Lessing, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Adam Smith, and other Enlightenment thinkers. In it, she reflects on (poetic) truths and licences, the metaphoric appeal of anachronistic science, (ir)rationality, and the transformative potential of language and formal experiments. The performance emerges from Seita's *My Little Enlightenment Plays*, an ongoing and sprawling project that is marked by a criss-cross of genres, media, and approaches to knowledge production and distribution: historical research, performances, lecture-performances, collaboration, publication, installation, sculptural objects, and video work. It playfully investigates the Enlightenment's obsession with truth, rationality, and empiricism and our inheritance of these forms of knowledge and their dissemination. It is motivated by a politics of attention and hospitality and a curiosity of how to make historical material contemporary in a way that acknowledges its specific problematics along the axes of gender, sexuality, race, and class.

Venue: CRASSH
Duration: 15-20 min.

Dada Data, the Alt-Right and the Sacrifice of Scepticism

Vid Simoniti

My understanding of postmodernism does not extend to the idea of a world with no coherent explanation of differential social power or advocacy of ways to right the imbalance.

–Martha Rosler, *Post-Documentary, Post-Photography?*

Dada Data and Digital Collage

Of all the new forms of digital art, the digital collage demands the least from the viewer. I have in mind work that specializes in remixing the debris of online culture. It splices together snippets of computer games, glitchy graphics, online memes and status updates. Often, these collages are videos that can be shown on YouTube, but they work equally well on a high-definition screen in a biennale setting. Their significant differences notwithstanding, the works of Ryan Trecartin, Jennifer Chan, Jon Rafman, the DIS Collective, Helen Marten, and Cory Arcangel all fall into this category.

These frenzied works mimic the bombardment with "content", which seems typical of the life we inhabit in that spectral space between the laptop, the phone and the tablet. Jennifer Chan's videos combine anime clips with comments from 4chan and Reddit; Jon Rafman's displays are engorged with gamified sex and violence; Helen Marten's installations present a slick but incomprehensible jumble of catchphrases and images. The egregiously high-paced, high-pitched videos of Ryan Trecartin were probably the first to define this discombobulating aesthetic, the technical term for which should probably be "mindfuck". This kind of art has sometimes been described as "post-Internet art", but I find the

prefix "post" confusing here, so I will stick to "digital collage."

As I said, these works are cerebrally undemanding. In their collaging mode, they replicate that addictive mania of scrolling through Facebook, playing Candy Crush, swiping on Tinder, fast-forwarding on YouTube, or clicking through tabs containing news, emails, clickbait and pornography. On some rather basic, dopamine-based level, such rapid perceptual and affective change is mesmerizing.

While the digital collage style of art is now ubiquitous (the 9th Berlin Biennale in 2016 was perhaps the most comprehensive overview of such work), it is hard to say what its critical potential might be. Perhaps it is that by disintegrating our online experience into an even less coherent mess, these works show us the price we pay for our entertainment. To make this argument, we may borrow from the title of one recent digital collage, Jake Elwes' work *Dadada Ta* (2017).

Elwes' video, which can be seen on YouTube, edits together footage of mega-entrepreneurs like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos. In the video, each of them is simply saying a string of very large numbers ("one trillion", "two billion", "billions and billions"). To allude to Dada in the title is to point, presumably, to the similar collage and photomontage techniques that Berlin Dadaists like Hannah Höch and Georg Grosz utilized to lampoon the decaying society of the Weimar Republic. Dada bitterly mocked the corrupt culture of its time by literally cutting it up (as in Höch's collage *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*). And similarly, we might say, the digital collagists

of today show us the mindlessness of our own time.

The worry, of course, is twofold. Firstly, that our online lives are mindless is something that by now we all already know. But secondly, the challenges that were facing the original Dadaists are quite different from those facing the would-be Digital Dadaists today. The original Dadaists created acerbic nonsense at a time when a nationalistic Europe flattered itself with delusions of coherence and with grand narratives of imperialist expansion. By contrast, the most powerful servant of the political forces that we should fear today, as I am about to suggest, is precisely the *incoherence* of our online lives. Our online lives are *already*, if not quite Dada, then certainly gaga.

The Sacrifice of Scepticism

Artists like the ones discussed above have not been the only content producers to utilize the mind-scrambling power of digital collaging.

In 2015, a video called "With Open Gates: The Forced Collective Suicide of European Nations" was uploaded onto YouTube. It soon got taken down due to copyright infringement (it used a copyrighted music track), but not before it amassed half a million views and got endorsed by the far-right blog Breitbart. Copied to other servers, it then went viral, spurred by the panic following the November 2015 Paris attacks. The video is a collage of different scenes of public unrest. The openly racist voiceover describes these scenes as an "invasion" of Europe by non-Europeans. It also contains anti-Semitic suggestions, and airs the view that the refugee crisis was a Jewish

conspiracy.

This harrowing video (unsurprisingly) relies heavily on irrelevant footage and false data. It shows, for instance, footage of Islamists chanting on a train in Paris in 2010, and an altercation between ISIS supporters and Kurds in Hamburg in 2014. It then misleadingly associates such clips with the 2015 migrant crisis. Indeed, writers at Vice media and on Reddit forums have traced each clip to debunk the video. As important as such efforts are, however, attempts to disprove such neo-fascist propaganda ultimately also show how the truth, in such digital collages, ultimately does not matter.

The unimportance of facticity in such content can be even more clearly seen on another example of neo-fascist digital collage, the alt-right meme. This aesthetic form is the strange spawn of anonymous, geeky forums like 4chan and Reddit, as these became increasingly infiltrated by the alt-right and other reactionary ideologies. (The genealogy of this form has recently been brilliantly expounded in Angela Nagle's book *Kill All Normies*. The Data & Society Research Institute in New York has also recently published a concise report about such memes.)

Pepe the Frog is a typical example. This cartoon character initially stood for an expression of that jokey randomness, typical of online communication. It then became increasingly used to assert some political allegiance, ranging from support of American President Donald Trump to brutal endorsements of KKK and the Holocaust. The cornerstone of this rhetoric was, of course, ironic ambiguity. Is the anonymous maker who decorates Pepe with a swastika really supporting murderous racism, or are they

joking, playing it for lulz? One cannot argue with a joke on the toilet wall.

This ambiguous relationship to truth in alt-right discourse is by now well-known, and often described by that buzzword "post-truth politics". Yet, "post-truth" is a broad term, and encompasses phenomena as diverse as Trump's tweets, Facebook echo chambers, prevarications in the Brexit campaign, and a video like "With Open Gates". Some important academic work is now disentangling these phenomena, including in political theory (Cass Sunstein), philosophy (Rae Langton), and social psychology (Sander van der Linden).

Here I offer, in a much more modest way, a few observations on the role that truth might play in just *one* of these phenomena: in the specific rhetoric of alt-right digital collages, like Pepe the Frog memes and the "With Open Gates" video. To do so, we may begin by distinguishing between three types of disinformation which have been accorded some philosophical attention in recent decades. These are: lies, bullshit, and simulacra.

Back in 2005, Harry Frankfurt usefully distinguished the term "bullshit" from lies. The lie wears the mask of truth: the liar attempts to *convince you* of something. Someone who bulls, however, speaks without any regard to truth. Their aim is instead to simply impress or win allegiance; and they do so by talking freely about something on which they have no expertise. The liar is a conniver who carefully weighs her words; someone who bulls is just a cynic, and she will say whatever rubbish will get her ahead. In that sense, Nixon lied about Watergate and Clinton lied about the Lewinsky affair. Trump's ramblings on China, Mexico, or climate change,

by contrast, are bullshit rather than merely lies. To point out that he is wrong does not damage his credibility, because the point was not to convince anyone in the first place.

"Simulacrum" is Jean Baudrillard's preferred term for disinformation, and simulacra can also be contrasted with lies. Simulacra are copies without originals. These are the fantastic mirages of advanced capitalism—Santa Claus, Disneyland, music videos, adverts—images, which correspond to nothing in particular. Baudrillard's key claim, of course, is that "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real." As we flick through television channels, or as we today scroll through online media, the images supplied by the CNN or by the Disney Channel all coalesce within the same, hazy, irrelevant dream. We can no longer properly distinguish between these; everything becomes infotainment. When Baudrillard provocatively claimed that the Gulf War did not take place, his message was (in part) that in an age when simulacra dominate, claims about what *really* happened no longer make sense to us.

These terms might be useful in describing various bits of the "post-truth" political landscape. Distinct kinds of disinformation lurk within it. Where the rhetoric of alt-right digital collages is especially interesting (and worrying), however, is that none of these terms quite describe what is going on.

Like lies, "With Open Gates" deceives its viewers; unlike lies, however, it does not pretend to be reasoned inquiry. Like bullshit, alt-right collages are devoid of argument, but they are not cynically indifferent to what its audience ends up believing. The author of "With Open

Gates" cares deeply about his twisted, xenophobic worldview. Like simulacra, the alt-right videos and memes correspond to nothing in reality. But, unlike simulacra, they do not seek to make their audiences into passive, entertained spectators. Indeed, they demand something from them: a belief, an allegiance, an action.

In other words, what is curious about this new rhetoric is that it is *both* very serious *and* clearly violates the standard rules of truth-seeking political discourse. "With Open Gates" is a *blatant* lie; the Pepe memes endorsing the Holocaust *blatantly* break a political taboo. These new forms of disinformation are therefore not simulating truth (lies), avoiding truth (bullshit), or rendering truth unintelligible (simulacra). What it is that they do to truth, then? It seems to me that they ask the viewer to *sacrifice* any pursuit of truth. Or, to put the point more precisely, the proper meaning of these images is ritualistic. In accepting such images, the viewers proclaim that they have surrendered their right to sceptical inquiry. Their loyalty to the political cause is so great that they sacrifice this one right to their cause, which belongs to them as members of the political system and as individuals capable of critical thought.

This dynamic is reflected in the comments section of the websites that host such content. As we have all come to expect, the conversations around such divisive content hardly ever consist of patient arguments and mutual rebuttals. Instead, they consist of outpourings of vitriol in both directions, and threats of violence directed at those who want to enter the debate too earnestly.

Much more remains to be said, of course. But I would argue that a similar sacrificial

attitude towards sceptical inquiry exists across the political spectrum, not just on the alt-right. This may be a controversial remark (a similar claim is made by Nagle in her book). True, this rhetoric is seen at its most ruthless in the extremist, alt-right digital collages such as I described above. But a similar logic can also be detected in the recent phenomena of no-platforming and twitter-shaming, dear to some agents who describe themselves (to my mind mistakenly) as belonging to the political Left. Here, too, one is asked to declare one's allegiance to the cause, by giving up one's capacity to inhabit critical public discourse. Of course, there are real limits to free speech in a democratic society and there is a substantial debate to be had as to where those limits are. What I do think is a new, pernicious development, however, is something more specific: the culture of emphatically expressing one's allegiance to a political option by publicly sacrificing the right to sceptical inquiry. The memes are not just a case of passions running high, they are a deliberate attempt to brutalize public discourse in the name of a (corrupt) higher aim. While this rhetoric currently characterizes the alt-right movement above all, we should be deeply worried about it engulfing the entire political culture.

Digital Art and Scepticism

In the light of these developments, the "digital collage" approach to digital art, which I described above, are inadequate. While the collages of Trecartin, Rafman, Marten, and others might have (critically) reflected the stupidity of our online lives, it is time to stop ironically

luxuriating in that experience. Stupidity is no longer the only problem with online culture. The new, strange, alt-right rhetoric is calculating, not just stupid.

It is an open question whether, and how, politically minded digital art today should offer a counterweight to these developments. My thought for now is merely that blithe, infantilizing, anything-goes relativism of the digital collage is not up to the task. More clever, more patient, more sceptical forms of art are needed.

In the present exhibition, each artist speaks eloquently of their own work, and it is not my intention to impose such a reading upon them. But it strikes me that there is a different, quieter sensibility at work in this exhibition, one that is a far shot from the bombastic digital collages of recent years.

Ferreira's war photographs, imperceptibly modified, call on us to doubt rather than affirm what we see. Lozano-Hammer's work untiringly scans the visitors' faces, searching for the students kidnapped in the Guerrero state in Mexico. Ogilvie punishes online memes for their virality, casting them into the old-fashioned medium of pottery. Forensic Architecture scrupulously reconstruct scenes of violence to achieve a more factual picture.

Slowly, dispassionately, assiduously ruminating on facts and principles may be the most counter-cultural position that one can occupy in the digital world today.

Ângelo Ferreira de Sousa
Constructions
2016-2018

Where and how can one determine the veracity of a news story? This is a matter of survival in times of war. "In wartime – as a famous quote says – truth is the first victim." A brief search on the internet will leave us with many doubts about the very source of this quotation, which nevertheless states an important truth. Often attributed to Aeschylus (c. 425 BC – c. 456 BC) or to the US Senator Hiram Johnson (1866-1945), this statement is by neither of them. The first time it was used, it was already a quotation. Its authorship continues to incite debate.

What leads us to believe more easily in the veracity of an image (allegedly) taken by a war photojournalist than in an image coming out of a fashion catalogue? The interest in manipulation, the choice of a certain angle, the use of a certain light with the aim of orienting opinion – aren't these aspects more pressing in the case of war?

Architectures of destruction, devoid of bodies, of blood; constructions that stand implausibly, where does their truth lie?

Alejandro Luperca
PM Archive
2010-2018

PM (Post Meridiem/Post Mortem) Archive forms a comprehensive visual record of Luperca's manual manipulation of *PM*, a local newspaper from Ciudad Juarez. The raw and brutal images of dismembered bodies often published in the paper have been delicately removed with rubber. The absence of the victims of violence in the images produces uncanny effects. It also reveals journalistic formats and strategies used in the "yellow press." Corpses – invisible others – become visible through their absence; they make us reflect on what can and cannot be photographed and how one may become habituated to images of extreme violence.

Máximo Corvalán-Pincheira
Navy Blue Sequencing
2017

Navy Blue Sequencing is a series of watercolour paintings made on telephone book sheets from the city of Santiago, Chile. They evoke the difficulty of identifying the victims of dictatorial repression thrown by the military into the Pacific Ocean during Augusto Pinochet's regime (1973-1990), and the many men and women who are still missing and/or have not been identified. The pieces reference DNA sequencing identity tests and their growing prevalence as a forensic investigative technique.
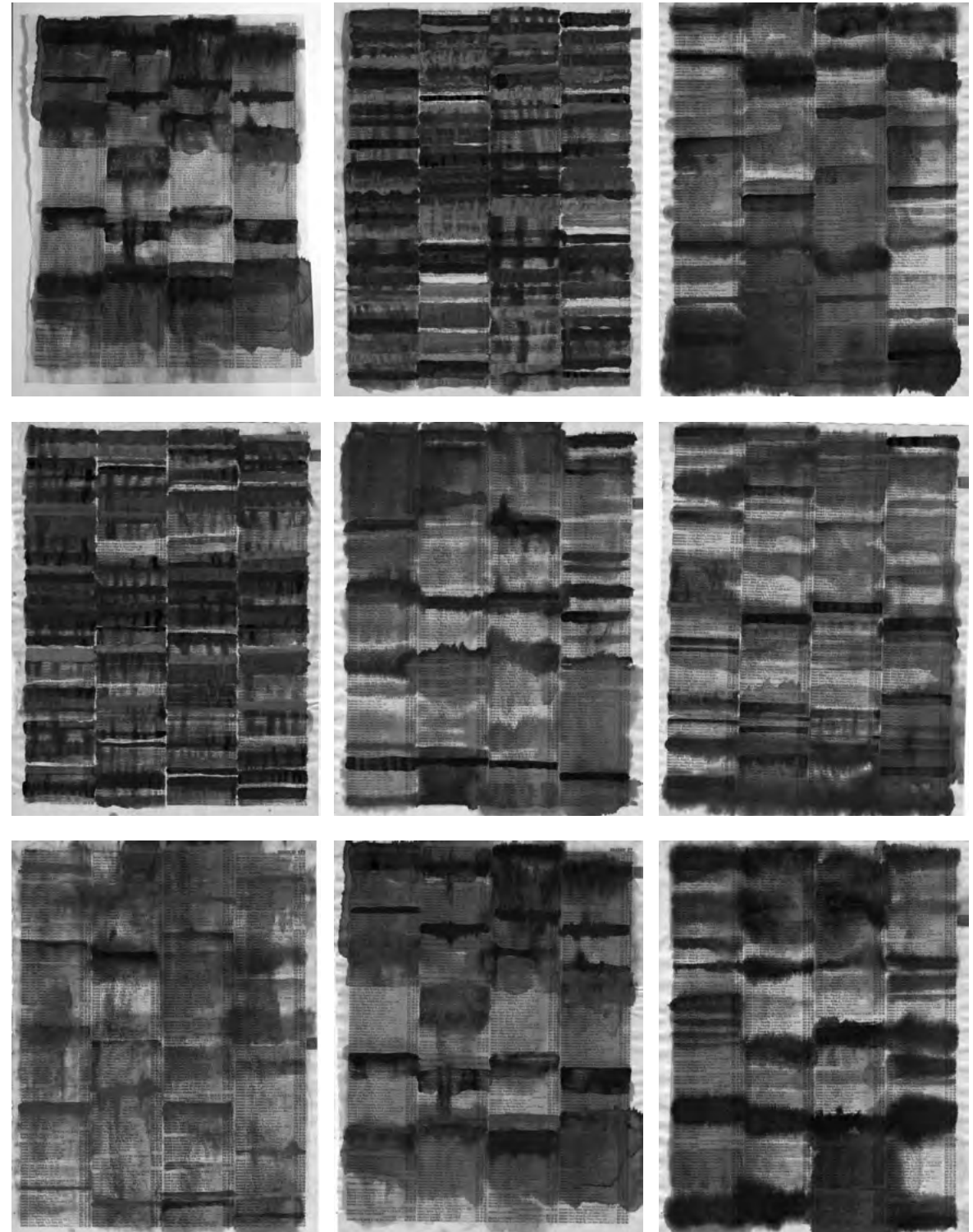
Alejandra España
The Mystery
2017

The Mystery is an artist's book that narrates, in non-linear fashion, the enigmatic case of the possible disappearance of a woman in the Mexico of the 1950's. The artist creates a formal parallel between the bitty presentation of evidence in the "yellow press" and her use of collage. This story is entwined with a similarly spectacular account of a "set up" boxing match.

Collage, paper, photocopy
and a newspaper from the 1950's
8 pages in accordion fold 36 x 27 cm.
Unique piece

Charles Ogilvie
Vernacular Ware
2017-2018

Before the discovery of porcelain and its mass production in the West, majolica – terracotta clay ware fired to low temperatures with a white tin glaze – was the cheap, practical solution for mass market crockery, storage vessels, and other household wares. Decoration ranged from simple bold designs in cobalt (blue) to complex schemes encompassing pictorial panels and grotesque ornamentation at the peak of its development in the late Renaissance. In the 17th and 18th centuries, makers in the UK embraced its low cost and the ease of applying a painted mark to mass produce commemorative political products, often rich in satire.

The works shown here are from a developing set of contemporary vernacular ware, echoing the rapidly applied decorative style of the earlier satirists and using contemporary clichés, quotations, and found text, often from social media or politics. When fired into a glaze, a message often gains weight in its newfound permanence.

Contemporary Oracles: Towards a New Art of the Media

Carlos Fonseca Suárez

Ricardo Piglia's 1992 novel, *The Absent City*, describes a journalist's relationship to a storytelling machine so powerful that it tells of news events that have not yet happened: "By the time they realized it, he controlled all the news about the Machine. At first they thought that he worked for the police because he would publish articles before the events occurred. All he had to do was lift the telephone and he would get the stories two hours before they happened."[1] In opposition to traditional chains of causality linking events to news as causes to effects, Piglia's machine foretells a future in which news is no longer the faithful representation of a preceding phenomenal reality, but rather instigates the collective fictions upon which such reality-effects are built. That time seems to have finally arrived. In today's media-driven society, prophecy is the preferred mode of historicity for a society that has become incapable of telling experience from information, reality from fiction. The image of the Greek citizen in front of the oracle at Delphi has been replaced by the image of billions of people seated in front of their computers, listening to the news with the same attentiveness with which Oedipus heard the words of the Pythia. Our tragedy lies in the fact that, just as Oedipus's destiny is determined by the

1   Ricardo Piglia, *The Absent City*, trans. Sergio Weisman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 14.

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ambiguity of the oracle's words, we seem condemned to live history as a twenty-four hour chain of self-fulfilling breaking news. Media has become the modern mythical temple upon which a society incapable of imagining a historical horizon naturalizes its future. Like Piglia's journalist, every night at dawn we turn on the machine to learn about tomorrow's events. The next day we wake up and continue with our lives as if they were a mere rehearsal of old news.

Three years ago, halfway through writing a novel that was eventually published as *Museo animal*, I became entangled in *déjà-vu*. My novel was ostensibly about camouflage and animal mimesis, anonymity and identity, but had proven to really be a novel about repetition and difference. I began to think of news as a displaced and deferred repetition of reality, and became fascinated by an artwork produced in August 1966 by a group of three Argentine artists. This work has been given many titles – among them *Happening de Participación Total*, *Happening para un jabalí difunto*, *Happening que no existió*, and even *Antihappening* – and was conceived by Roberto Jacoby, Raúl Escari, and Eduardo Costa as a way of illustrating many of the ideas that they sketched out in a manifesto written a couple of months before, in July, suggestively entitled *Un arte de los medios de comunicación*. Departing from the thesis that in today's "mass society, the public is not in direct contact with cultural activities but is informed of them through the media" and that "ultimately, information consumers are not interested in whether or not an exhibition occurs; it is only the image the mass media constructs of the artistic event that

matters,"[2] they decided to give the press a fake report of a happening that had not occurred, allowing the press to "realize" the nonexistent event. The fake happening was reproduced in dozens of newspapers, and thus entered the regime of public truth that hovers over the world of media. I was fascinated by this event, by the game of repetitions and differences it sketched. I also thought about how this artwork was later quoted or mimicked by works such as Francis Alÿs *El Rumor* or Ulises Carrión's *Chismes, escándalos y buenos modales*, and decided that my novel would revolve around a protagonist whose conceptual art piece consisted in spreading fake news through newspapers as part of a plan to disturb global markets. Guided by Alÿs' quote – "If the story is right, if it hits a nerve, it can propagate like a *rumor*" – the central character of the novel emerged as a way of thinking through what an art of the media might mean today. Little did I know that, like Piglia's journalist living through reality with a constant sense of *déjà-vu*, that precise concept of *fake news* would become Donald Trump's preferred strategy of media war. By then, the novel had been written and, in a move of appropriation that mimicked the logic of rumor to perfection, Trump seemed to have proven the central thesis of Jacoby, Escari, and Costa: that media can turn even the worst of our prophecies into a reality.

2   Eduardo Costa, Raúl Escari, and Roberto Jacoby, "A Media Art (Manifesto)," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Albero and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.-London: MIT Press, 1999), 3.

This is not, however, to say that Jacoby, Escari, and Costa made the Trump phenomenon possible; to the contrary. Today, perhaps more than ever, we need to rethink what an art of the media might be and how it might allow us to critique the discursive mechanisms that placed Trump in power. What we need is an art capable of illuminating the ways in which collective truths are constructed out of information, in a world where – as Walter Benjamin had already prophesized – the gap between information and experience seems to grow exponentially. Just like the confused Greek in front of the oracle, today we consume information whose phenomenological meaning we can barely glimpse. Instead of living through it, we disseminate it, we copy it and alter it, we misplace it and rewrite it: that is to say, we construct fictions that allow us to grant information a place in our lives. The first intuition, then, to be gained from a study of the art of the media as it was conceived in the 1960s is that the phenomenon of fake news is not merely opposed to a more primal, faithful version of journalistic truth. On the contrary, the first step a critique of media must perform is to bracket the regime of truth itself. Instead of falling within the opposition between truth and falsehood, as Trump would have it, the phenomenon of fakeness calls for a mode of fiction that allows us to understand the construction of passionate public beliefs out of the mute indifference of information. As Ricardo Piglia himself would say in *Homenaje a Roberto Arlt* – a short story in which the author fakes discovering an unedited work by the late Arlt – fiction is what arises after truth

has been bracketed: "People search for the truth and instead we give them fake coins." These fake coins stand, in Piglia's world, for the economy of meaning produced by the circulating fictions that, like weeds through asphalt cracks, appear in the gap separating information from experience. What emerges then is a critique of value that attempts to understand how fictions produce "reality effects". In the works of Piglia, like those of Don DeLillo or J.G. Ballard, these "reality effects" form of a world of paranoid fictions battling against each other and against the official histories produced by the State. What is at stake then is not only a critique of private property, but also the construction of an enlarged concept of fiction capable of exploring the world of belief beyond the scope of truth. Following the work of Michael Taussig, we could say that what is needed is a contemporary critique of mimesis and alterity that would allow us to understand the fictions through which modernity has ended up enthroning media in the seat of the old oracle. This critique, however, can only happen within the precincts of media itself. It must be a coup.

In May 2014, word spread that the iconic Subcomandante Marcos – leader and spokesman of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, the self-defense group in charge of protecting Mayan people from land evictions in the southern Mexican territory of Chiapas – had declared his own self-effacement, proposing instead that his existence was always a mere hologram, constructed *for and by* the media. Marcos, known for the playful anonymity granted by his famous ski mask,

would go on to deliver an impressive speech highlighting how his own persona had only been a media construct from which to stage a visible coup against government power:

> Our leaders then said: They only see things at their own narrow scale, therefore let's give them someone as small as them, and let him be seen and let us be seen through him. And so a complex scheme of distraction began, a marvelous and sublime magic trick, a mischievous move from our indigenous heart. We were defying modernity at one of its strongholds: the media. And so began the construction of that character named "Marcos".[3]

Subcomandante Marcos – soon to become Subcomandante Galeano – understood the game of visibilities and invisibilities, of fugitive identities and anonymities proposed by the world of media. As such, the Zapatistas proposed their fiction: a media hologram called Marcos. Using the logic of rumor and dissemination so heavily entrenched in mass media, they came up with a homeopathic cure that aided them in their fight against globalization. They understood that in the world of media, what is at stake is not the truth but rather the truth-effects produced by fictions. The Mexican government would be the first to prove this. On February 1995, one year after the Zapatista uprising, the government attempted to dismantle the uprising by un-

masking Marcos, disclosing his allegedly true identity. Superposing the slide of an oversized ski mask over the picture of an average looking white Mexican male, the government unveiled what they had discovered through forensic analysis: that the eyes behind the famous mask belonged to Rafael Guillén, a simple mestizo man from Tamaulipas. With such an act of unmasking, as Taussig has pointed out, the state attempted to eradicate the magical allure of the uprising by fixing the identity of the movement within a stable regime of truth. Little could they know that four days later, thousands of people wearing the same ski masks would march throughout the country chanting "We all are Marcos". Defeating the State at its own game, the Zapatistas understood the elusive logic of media, that which ultimately defies any stable regime of truth and instead points to Roger Caillois's idea of a pure mimetic force structuring social reality: a force that is "not similar to something, but just similar."[4] The ski mask of Marcos, as well as his farewell speech, with its references to magic, disappearance and disguises, offers a political critique of this mimetic force that traverses modernity in the form of mass media.

In Ricardo Piglia's aforementioned *The Absent City*, he describes an imperfection in the storytelling machine that leads it to produce alternative stories that the State would like to censor or classify as false. The Zapatista movement could clearly be one of these histories, a fictional intervention in the official media narrative. Today, perhaps more than ever,

we must learn to feed the machine our own fictions, to stage from within its own system a possible coup. In this way we could reclaim power over our own epistemic condition, and confuse those modern oracles that – disguised as computers, cellphones or televisions – aim to tell us in advance what shall happen tomorrow. We must never forget that what was at stake in Greek tragedies, beyond the dramatic fates of their protagonists, was the fate of the State and its power.

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3   Subcomandante Marcos, "Entre la luz y la sombra," *Enlace Zapatista*, May 2014, http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2014/05/25/entre-la-luz-y-la-sombra/.

4   Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychaesthenia," *October*, no. 31 (1984): 31.

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List of Images

Biographies

Artists

Virginia Colwell's (Nebraska, USA, 1980) work examines the space between official and unofficial histories and the poetic ambiguities of truth and fiction in historical narratives.

Máximo Corvalán-Pincheira (Santiago, Chile, 1973) has developed his artistic work as a series of reflections on collective memory and trauma.

Alejandra España's (Mexico City, MX, 1982) poetic narratives oscillate between the visible and the invisible. Through the appropriation and redefinition of images, intertextuality, and the symbolic use of quotations, she explores the origins and different notions of learning we use to make sense of the world. Her quest combines drawing, ceramics, collage, artist's books, painting, and installation.

In an often subtle and ironic way, the work of **Ângelo Ferreira de Sousa** (Oporto, Portugal, 1975) manipulates symbols, images, and codes as a means to devise games of reading and perception.

Forensic Architecture is an independent research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London. The team includes architects, scholars, artists, filmmakers, coders, investigative journalists, archaeologists, lawyers and scientists. Their research has been presented in political and legal forums, while they also undertake historical and theoretical examinations of the status of forensic practices in articulating notions of public truth.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (Mexico City, MX, 1967) is an electronic artist who develops interactive installations situated at the intersection of architecture and performance art. His main interest is in creating platforms for public participation, by perverting the technologies of robotics, computerized surveillance, and telematic networks.

Joana Moll (Barcelona, Spain, 1982) is a Barcelona/Berlin-based artist and researcher. Her work critically explores the way post-capitalist narratives affect the alphabetization of machines, humans, and ecosystems.

Alejandro Luperca Morales' (Ciudad Juárez, MX, 1990) curatorial and artistic work focuses on narcoviolence, territory and, porno-misery specially through the analysis of mass media in the age of gore capitalism.

Camila Moreiras (Georgia, USA, 1986) is a visual artist and scholar whose work focuses on the state of the image

at a time of saturating surveillance and compulsive documentation. She received her PhD from New York University and is currently pursuing a Masters in the Creative Documentary program at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona.

The work of **Charles Ogilvie** (London, UK, 1982) explores how individuals relate to the systems which underpin our intellectual and political institutions. He is interested in how readily we fill the gaps in our comprehension with stories, pictures and metaphors and how problematic these can be when relied upon to make decisions or form opinions. Having read Chemistry at Oxford, he has developed work investigating complex physics and its confused echoes in the media, how alchemists used diagrams and crafted a new syntax to decipher nature, and how the contemporary outsider-cosmologist rages against the 'Einstein-centric' certainties of science.

Sophie Seita (Germany, 1987) works with language on the page, in performance, in translation, and through research; often responding to and writing through older literary, archival, and philosophical materials and ideas, with a commitment to collaboration, formal difficulty, and queer politics.

Authors

Carlos Fonseca is a Costa Rican writer. He is the author of the novels *Coronel Lágrimas* (Anagrama, 2015), published in English as *Colonel Lagrimas* (Restless Books, 2016), and *Museo animal* (Anagrama, 2017), which will be published in English next year by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. He is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Cambridge.

Mara Polgovsky Ezcurra is a Junior Research Fellow at Queens' College, Cambridge, focusing on the visual culture and intellectual history of Latin America. She is also an independent curator and writer. Her books *Touched Bodies: The Performance Turn in Latin American Art* (Rutgers University Press, 2019) and *Marcos Kurtycz: Corporeality Unbound* (Fauna, 2018), are forthcoming.

Vid Simoniti is a Jeffrey Rubinoff Junior Research Fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge. At Cambridge he teaches at the Departments of Philosophy and History of Art. www.vidsimoniti.com