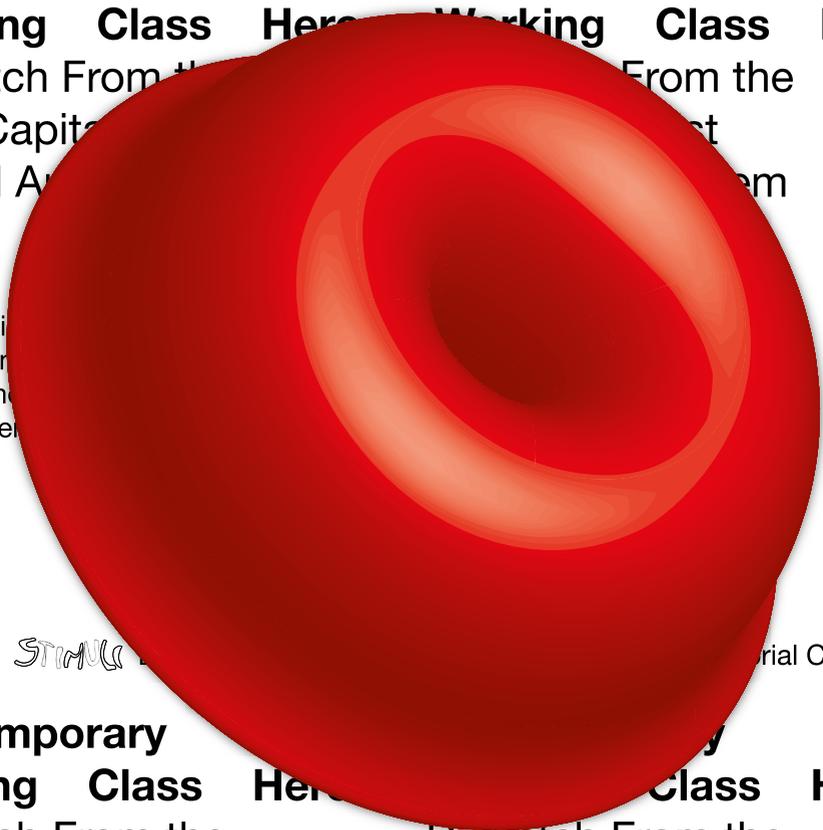


Contemporary Art Working Class Hero **Contemporary Art Working Class Hero**

Dispatch From the Late-Capitalist Global Art System

Geert Lovink
Elliott Burns
Bob Bicknell-Knight
Matilde Cerruti Quara



Edited by *STANU* Editorial Council

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Preface to:
Contemporary Art Working Class Hero

Stimuli Editorial Council

We came out as STIMULI to locate a gap within the solid, contemporary art world we are all inhabiting in this fragment of second, and that we are all projecting into reality as a celestial sum of our individualities and ambitions.

In this sense, we are all equal. Rationally, we coexist within and in terms of the contemporary art system. We are all mothers; and through the agglomeration, concentration, centralisation of individual labour we affirm ourselves as producers of this reality. We all, together, constitute the sum of contemporary art's behaviours, patterns, and so on. Then, what happens is usually that after completing the primitive creature –the world, individuals start producing strategically within the world. Logically, they start constructing the ties, forms and thoughts that shape the world into a system. This process actually re-stages the same dynamics of the original sum, where individualities,

as discussed above, project their contemporary art world-idea into contemporary art world-labour. Therefore, portions of individuality are further agglomerated and translated into labour, to form just one idea of art world. Many are the books on institutional theory, many are the words, and works, spent on capitalism and contemporary museology. (cc: M. Lind; A. Danto; etc.)

The interesting bit and the prerequisite of the entire global discourse is the fact that we all, as individuals, are quintessential for the sum to exist, for this idea to become centralised. A lovely chain of dependency is woven in iron-flash aluminum; it keeps us together. Funny. That dependency is a magic trick, it is like the whispering of a primordial secret, or like if you could look some corporate-fuelled museum/foundation's Senior Curator in the eyes and still go back for a flash second –micro spoiler of your subconscious– to the very original idea that keeps you together. We all hold the illusion, together. At the very core of the illusion thereof, is undoubtedly the hero.

This book is a natural output of STIMULI's concern around the idea of labour within the contemporary art context, and for this reason it is dedicated to the artists we have been working with, and to the readers that appreciate our weird editorial line and our memes on instagram. All of us, together, is the hero. Apply for funding, do some fundraising, think of alternative funds, work in funded projects,

and work more. Try finding the fun that you lost to the fundamental funding problems.

Capitalism's relationship with art has been no different than its hegemonic relationship with production, technology, medicine or farming. Capitalism dominates and swallows. It has the power to commodify even the most naive artistic gesture. Of course, it has a place in this game as one of the key players. Capitalism is not monstrous but often caring. It completes the circle, it is the strongest link of the chain. Private foundations funded by controversial companies and sponsored by their controversial partners invest in art, commercial galleries sell art with discrepant commission rates like the hour difference between the day and night on the longest night, art fairs manage the traveling schedules of VIPs contributing a great amount to the CO2 emission rate, auction houses require their employees to meet impossible quotas as high as the Shard, museums do not even hire well educated candidates for underpaid and undervalued positions, artists' mailboxes get full with rejection e-mails from residency programs which they need to pay participation fees as well as travel and accommodation to spend one week with like minded individuals, private museums organize exhibitions with immense budgets to ask for a ticket price in the amount of four meals all thanks to capitalism. No-one is allowed to be home alone when there is an opening going on, all personal time is networking time and being offline

can mean your absolute break from the chain, with many candidates to fill the void immediately, and no candidates to participate your farewell dinner. Capitalism makes art survive, and without its working class heros it would not possibly be able to function.

Contemporary Art Working Class Hero is dedicated to all working class heros of contemporary art. It features a narrative piece titled *And All Those Who Wish To Remain Anonymous* by Elliott Burns on the problematic nature of relationships between companies dark endeavors and art-funding, an essay by Bob Bicknell-Knight titled *Contemporary Trolls and Where to Find Them*, on the political power of trolls and meme culture, a poem titled *Looking at a White Cube* by Matilde Cerruti Quara, and a poem by Bora Akinciturk, alongside of the memes on contemporary art from STIMULI's Instagram account which functions as an experimental form of criticism. Last but not least, *Contemporary Art Working Class Hero* is a dispatch from the late-capitalist global art system.

Overcoming Internet Disillusionment: On the Principles of Meme Design

Geert Lovink

“Artificial intelligence is not the answer to organized stupidity”—Johan Sjerpstra. *“Please don’t email me unless you’re going to pay me”*—Molly Soda. *“Late capitalism is like your love life: it looks a lot less bleak through an Instagram filter”*—Laurie Penny. *“Wonder how many people going on about the necessity of free speech and rational debate have blocked and muted trolls?”*—Nick Srnicek. *“Post-truth is to digital capitalism what pollution is to fossil capitalism—a by-product of operations”*—Evgeny Morozov. *“I have seen the troll army and it is us”*—Erin Gün Sirer.

1. Internet Disillusionment

Our disenchantment with the internet is a fact. Yet again, enlightenment does not bring us liberation but depression. The once fabulous aura that surrounded our beloved apps, blogs, and social media has deflated. Swiping, sharing, and liking have begun to feel like soulless routines, empty

gestures. We've started to unfriend and unfollow, yet we can't afford to delete our accounts, as this implies social suicide. If "truth is whatever produces most eyeballs," as Evgeny Morozov states, a general click strike seems like the only option left.¹ But since this is not happening, we feel trapped and console ourselves with memes.

The multi-truth approach of identity politics, according to Slavoj Žižek, has produced a culture of relativism.² Chomsky's process of "manufacturing consent" has taken hold completely. As Žižek explains in a British TV interview, the Big Other has vanished.³ There is no BBC World Service anymore, the moderate radio voice that once provided us with balanced opinions and reliable information. Every piece of information is self-promotion, crafted by public-relations managers and spin doctors—and by us users as well (we

1 Evgeny Morozov, "Moral panic over fake news hides the real enemy – the digital giants," *The Guardian*, January 7, 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/08/blaming-fake-news-not-the-answer-democracy-crisis>.

2 Designer-researcher Silvio Lorusso, who provided valuable comments on this piece, has noted that a similar relativism has taken over visual culture. This might be the reason why trained, professional graphic designers are the least equipped to produce effective memes. Instead, memes are often associated with underground amateur culture. Meme creation is therefore often described as a mysterious process, for instance in the documentary *The Story Of Technoviking*, which is about the "first meme" and which discusses meme production in detail. See <http://documentaryheaven.com/story-of-technoviking/>.

3 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByKXcIPi7MI>.

are our own marketing interns). What's collapsing right now is the imagination of a better life. It is no longer the "wretched of the earth" who revolt, because they've got nothing left to lose, but rather the stagnating middle class and "young professionals," who face permanent precarity.

After hubris come guilt, shame, and remorse. Mass conformity didn't pay off. The question is how the current discontent will ultimately play out on the level of internet architecture. What is techno-repentance? What comes after the Exorbitant Detriment? Once the love affair with apps is over and the addiction reveals itself, the mood flips to cold turkey. What some see as a relief is experienced by many as frustration, if not hatred. The online Other cannot possibly be classified any longer as a "friend": "If people in the outside world scare you, people on the internet will downright terrify you" is a general warning applicable to all websites. The guilt is produced by the pressure to perform. Users are under constant risk of financial collapse, and once they're poor, they will be subjected to the post-money economy in which only imaginary entities circulate. After they're written off, being online is their last refuge.

"We're terroffucked." That's how Jarett Kobek sums up the general feeling in his 2016 novel *I Hate the Internet*. The guilt and frustration is both personal and political, on a global scale. Throughout the story, set in the gentrified streets of San Francisco,

computers coordinate the exploitation of “the surplus population into perpetual servants.” What happens once the realization sinks in that “all the world’s computers were built by slaves in China” and that it is you who is using those same devices? What happens when we’re personally addressed as the guilty partners, “suffering the moral outrage of a hypocritical writer who has profited from the spoils of slavery”?⁴

This is the intriguing part of Kobek’s DIY philosophy, which he presents as a science fiction of the present. What if the current internet economy of the free is the default future scenario for the 99 percent? What will happen when the concentration of power and money in the hands of the few becomes irreversible and we abandon all hope for the redistribution of revenues? For Kobek, this is already the case. Failed traditional money has been replaced by micro-fame, “the world’s last valid currency,” which is even more subject to oscillations than old-fashioned money. “Traditional money [has] ceased to be about an exchange of humiliation for food and shelter. Traditional money [has] become the equivalent of a fantasy world.”⁵

Kobek calls himself a proponent of the “bad novel,” in contrast to CIA-sponsored literary fiction from

4 Jarett Kobek, *I Hate the Internet* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2016), 25.

5 *Ibid.*, 64.

the Cold War, called the “good novel” – a category which continues to exist in the form of Jonathan Franzen, who writes “about people from the American Middle West without much eumelanin in their epidermises.”⁶ Bad novels are defined here as stories that “[mimic] the computer network in its obsession with junk media, in its irrelevant and jagged presentation of content,” filled with characters that have a “deep affection for juvenile literature” such as Heinlein, Tolkien, and Rand.⁷ This all makes you wonder in which category Dave Eggers’s novel *The Circle* – an update of Orwell’s *1984* – would fit. Can Eggers’s internet novel about *Minority Report*–style measures enforced by a fictitious company that’s a cross between Google and Facebook be classified as the *ur*-bad novel of this type? What happens when we can no longer distinguish between utopia and dystopia?

The promise of fame deluges people with images of grotesque success. Everyone is a performer and a celebrity, as long as they believe in their dreams and strive to be like Beyoncé and Rihanna, who are inspirations rather than vultures. Such celebrity cases show “how powerless people [demonstrate] their supplication before their masters.”⁸ Fans are fellow travellers on a journey through life; they are not consumers that purchase a product or service.

6 Ibid., 38.

7 Ibid., 26, 36.

8 Ibid., 66.

According to Kobek, “the poor [are] doomed to the Internet, a wonderful resource for watching shitty television, experiencing angst about other people’s salaries.”⁹ Built by “pointless men,” the net invokes nothing but trash and hate, leaving the poor empty-handed, with nothing to sell.¹⁰ The poor make money for Facebook. It will never be the other way round.

Kobek has been compared with Houellebecq because of the harshness of each writer’s characters. In *I Hate the Internet*, we wander through the cynical start-up environment of Silicon Valley, but Kobek shies away from taking us inside. Unlike the cyberpunk novel, we do not enter cyberspace; we don’t swipe through profiles or flow through Instagram pictures. This is not about an “illusion of the end” (and that’s the main difference from the 1968 generation: we have the uncanny feeling that something has barely started). In this hyperconservative era, we no longer confront ourselves with the historical duty to face the end of the welfare state, neoliberalism, globalization, the European Union, or other modern institutions. Instead, we’re lured into a perpetual state of retromania, because, as the late Mark Fisher pointed out, it is the present that has gone missing (“Make America Dank Again”).

9 Ibid., 65.

10 Ibid., 150

Pseudo-events have no chronology, no development, no beginning or middle, let alone an end. We're beyond the terminal process, beyond the postmodern patchwork. Everything accelerates. This must be the twenty-first-century-style catastrophe that so many films have introduced us to. Still, we remain encapsulated, captured inside cybernetic loops that go nowhere, in which meaningless cycles of events, series, and seasons pass by. What happens when the anxiety of information saturation flips into a profound feeling of emptiness? Once we've passed this point, the digital neither disappears nor ends. Events simply no longer turn into Roman spectacles. Instead, we experience simulacrum as prime reality. We cannot process such a sudden overproduction of reality. We no longer turn on television news thinking that we're watching a film. We've moved on. It is not life that has become cinematographic; it is film scenarios and their affects that shape the grand designs of our technological societies. Films anticipated our condition, and now we're situated in the midst of yesteryear's science fiction. *Minority Report* is now a techno-bureaucratic reality, driven by the integration of once-separate data streams. Virtual reality feels like *The Matrix*. Trump's reality TV show proved to be a rehearsal. The logic of the avant-garde is very much alive. The last industry to deal with the fake and real whirlpool is the news industry. Hyperreality becomes our everyday situation – regardless of whether we perceive it as boring or absurd.

Let's look at radical disillusionment as form and celebrate the return of its high priest, Jean Baudrillard. Our social media rage is not just a medical condition of the few; it is the human condition. Will the disenchantment turn into a revolt, as Camus once contemplated? The spiritual exhaustion is certainly there (#sleepnomore). Empty-handed, we discuss one powerless critique of the database form after another. To put it in spatial terms, cyberspace has turned out to be a room containing a house containing a city that has collapsed into a flat landscape in which created transparency turns into paranoia. We're not lost in a labyrinth but rather thrown out into the open, watched and manipulated, with no center of command in sight.

The *mille plateaux* of tweets, blogs, and Instagram and Facebook postings have created a culture of deep confusion. Fragmentation was supposed to enrich us, so why are we now paying the bill for all its unforeseen consequences? This was not supposed to happen. Is this the "difference" we once aimed for? Mainstream media play a crucial role in this process of decay. While their legitimacy has faded, their influence is still believed to be significant. This creates an atmosphere of permanent ambivalence. Why bother? Their role as "clearinghouses" of facts and opinion has been undermined for decades by growing centrifugal forces in society that no longer accept particular

baby-boomer sentiments (and interests) as the legitimate consensus. The stunning inability of “the press” to deal with recent changes in society has led to a widespread form of indifference. The theoretical blind spots of successive postmodern generations are too numerous to list. The elephant in the room here is Jürgen Habermas. Many of us still subscribe to his notion of the bourgeois public sphere as an arena where different opinions compete in a rational dialogue – even if we do not believe in the core values of Western society, such as democracy. And who’s the “counterpublic” in this context? The “user-generated content” of 4Chan, Reddit, and YouTube? What’s the organized answer to all this? What would a contemporary version of Indymedia look like? And if such a federated model of “independent media” is so 1999, then why is it so hard to put together a 2017 upgrade?

There is a crisis of “participatory culture.” Let’s look at the example of danah boyd and how she’s deconstructing the “media literacy” discourse for which so many had such high hopes. The cynical reading of the news has overshadowed critical capacities. In the aftermath of Donald Trump’s election, boyd asked if media literacy had backfired.¹¹ Have trolling, clickbait, and fake news undermined the classic belief in the democratization of news

11 Dana Boyd, “Did Media Literacy Backfire?” *DML Central*, January 12, 2017 <http://dmlcentral.net/media-literacy-backfire/>.

production? Whereas for the pre-internet baby-boom generation media literacy was synonymous with the ability to question sources, deconstruct opinions, and decode ideology, media literacy has now turned into the ability to produce one's own content in the form of responses, blog postings, and social media updates. The shift from critical consumer to critical producer has come with a price: namely, information inflation. (The well-meaning "prosumer" synthesis never materialized.) According to boyd, media literacy has become synonymous with distrusting media sources rather than engaging in fact-based critique. Instead of examining the evidence of experts, it is now enough to cite one's own personal experience. This has led to a doubt-centric culture that can only ever be outraged, a culture incapable of reasonable debate—a polarized culture that favors tribalism and self-segregation.

The current situation demands a rethink of the usual demands of activists and civil-society players regarding media literacy. How can the general audience be better informed? Is this an accurate diagnosis of the current problem in the first place? How do we poke holes in the filter bubbles? How can "do-it-yourself" be a viable alternative when social media is already experienced in those terms? And can we still rely on the emancipatory potential of "talking back to the media" via the familiar social networking apps? How does manipulation work today? Is it

still productive to deconstruct the *New York Times* (and its equivalents)? How would we explain the workings of the Facebook News Feed to its user base? If we want to blame the algorithms, how do we translate their hidden complexity so that large audiences can understand them?

An effort at such translation is Cathy O’Neil’s *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*, in which she describes how “ill-conceived mathematical models now micromanage the economy, from advertising to prisons.”¹² Her question is how to tame, and disarm, dangerous algorithms. These mathematical models are not neutral tools. However, in everyday life we increasingly experience ranking as destiny. Coining the term “Weapons of Math Destruction,” or “WMDs,” O’Neil writes: “Promising efficiency and fairness, [WMDs] distort higher education, drive-up debt, spur mass incarceration, pummel the poor at nearly every juncture, and undermine democracy.”¹³ In her account of the jobs she has had in numerous algorithm-focused industries, she shows that this software is “not just constructed from data but from the choices we make about which data to pay attention to – and which to leave out. Those choices are not just about logistics, profits, and efficiency. They are fundamentally

12 Cathy O’Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown, 2016), 12.

13 Ibid., 199.

moral.”¹⁴ And class-biased, she adds: “The privileged are processed by people, the masses by machines.”¹⁵ Once installed and running for a while, these WMDs create their own reality and justify their own results, a model which O’Neil calls self-perpetuating and highly destructive.

Techniques such as leaks, fake news, socialbots, *kompromat*, and agitprop confuse the political climate. Disorientation is sufficient; it is not longer necessary to, for instance, manipulate election outcomes. In this “post-factual era,” we’re left with the instant beliefs of celebrity commentators and media experts. Look at Donald Trump’s tweets, an ultimate form of media literacy and a perverse flood of self-expression. His personal tweets have become indistinguishable from policy, state propaganda, and info warfare. In this case, power no longer operates through the pornographic overexposure of the hi-res 3-D image. This is not big data, but singular data. Tiny messages with a “tremendous” fallout. At this level, we leave behind the realm of both Hollywood glamour and reality TV and enter the real-time realm of communication-with-consequences, a next-level hybrid in which sovereign executive power and marketing become inseparable.

14 Ibid., 218.

15 Ibid., 8.

What does contemporary psychoanalysis have to offer? As evidenced in Kristin Dombek's *The Selfishness of Others: An Essay on the Fear of Narcissism*, there is a renaissance of narcissism as cultural diagnosis. While Dombek avoids referencing internet cultures and refrains from selfie and social media complaints, she does point to a crucial change in psychoanalytic practice: from therapeutic to quantitative methods. Today's narcissism is social and contagious in nature; it consists of traits that "can be measured across large groups of people."¹⁶ Generation Me spans the planet. We need to move beyond the illness metaphors when discussing Trump, the alt-right, and social media at large. It could be a fatal mistake to attempt to marginalize (as both diagnostics and tactics) the self-absorbed populist right as "sick patients." In a review of *The Selfishness of Others*, Jennifer Schuessler writes that "Ms. Dombek's own view echoes that of the philosopher René Girard, who argued that our tendency to see narcissism in parents and partners is an effort to reassure ourselves that if those we desire are less than ideally responsive to us it's because they are sick, not because we are uninteresting."¹⁷

16 Kristin Dombek, *The Selfishness of Others: An Essay on the Fear of Narcissism* (New York: FSG Originals, 2016), 75.

17 Jennifer Schuessler, "'The Selfishness of Others,' or I'm O.K. – You're a Narcissist," *New York Times*, July 31, 2016 https://www.ny-times.com/2016/08/01/books/review-the-selfishness-of-others-or-im-ok-youre-a-narcissist.html?_r=0.

Beyond the fear of narcissism, let's look at Trump again, a man who “seems supremely cognizant of the fact that he is always acting. He moves through life like a man who knows he is always being observed.” This quote is taken from “The Mind of Donald Trump,” a June 2016 piece in *The Atlantic* written by Dan P. McAdams.¹⁸ Here, Trump is described as a “flummoxing” figure, exhibiting sky-high extroversion combined with off-the-charts low agreeableness. He's portrayed as a dynamo – driven, restless, unable to sit still, getting by with very little sleep. A cardinal feature of Trump's acute extroversion is his relentless reward-seeking. Prompted by the activity of dopamine circuits in the brain, highly extroverted people are driven to pursue positive emotional experiences. As McAdams writes,

Anger can fuel malice, but it can also motivate social dominance, stoking a desire to win the adoration of others. Anger lies at the heart of Trump's charisma, dominated by ebullient extroversion, the relentless showmanship, and the larger-than-life celebrity, who never thinks twice about the collateral damage he will leave behind.

18 Dan P. McAdams, “The Mind of Donald Trump,” *The Atlantic*, June 2016 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/the-mind-of-donald-trump/480771/>.

Highly narcissistic people draw attention to themselves. Repeated and inordinate self-reference is a distinguishing feature of their personality. Over time, people become annoyed, if not infuriated, by their self-centeredness. When narcissists begin to disappoint those whom they once dazzled, their descent can be especially precipitous. There is still truth today in the ancient proverb “Pride goeth before the fall.” The world is saturated with a sense of danger and a need for toughness: the world cannot be trusted. It is a ferocious combatant who fights to win. Are you preoccupied with fantasies that the world is ending because of the selfishness of others?
McAdams:

Who, really, is Donald Trump? What’s behind the actor’s mask? I can discern little more than narcissistic motivations and a complementary personal narrative about winning at any cost. It is as if Trump has invested so much of himself in developing and refining his socially dominant role that he has nothing left over to create a meaningful story for his life, or for the nation. It is always Donald Trump playing Donald Trump, fighting to win, but never knowing why.

What would a philosophy of disbelief look like today? Let’s seek out a secular follow-up to the critique of religion. What is atheism in the information context? The multiplicity of sources and points of view, once celebrated as a “diversity of opinion,” has now reach a nihilistic “zero point” in

which the accumulation of possible meanings can either lead to critical insights (or even knowledge), or implode into a pool of indifference (possibly resulting in the disappearance of networks such as Twitter, which thrive on individual expressions, judgements, and preferences).

These days, institutional dogmas are hidden inside media folklore, hardwired into network architectures, steered by algorithms. The mental rejection of authority is now so widespread, and has sunken so far into daily routines and mentalities, that it's now irrelevant whether we deny, endorse, or deconstruct a particular piece of information. That's the tricky aspect of the current social media disposition.

Meme producers have become immune to the criticism of third-way liberal moralists. Their firewall of indifference has not yet been hacked. Ironic deconstruction isn't doing the job either. Says Tara Burton: "Given the ideological anarchy inherent in shitposting, it tends to defy analysis. Shitposters, who are bound by nothing, set a rhetorical trap for their enemies, who tend to be bound by having an actual point." Burton concludes that "shitposting can't be refuted; it can only be repeated."¹⁹ This is simply not the age

19 Tara Burton, "Apocalypse Whatever," *Real Life*, December 13, 2016 <http://reallifemag.com/apocalypse-whatever/>.

of the Renaissance (Wo)Man. The disillusionment is overwhelming.

2. Defining the Rules of Meme Design

We're overwhelmed by media events that unfold in real time. Is this spectacle a smoke screen for more drastic, long-term measures? What's our own plan? The politically correct strategies of "civil society" are all well-meaning and target important issues, but they seem to operate in a parallel universe, unable to respond to the cynical meme design that is rapidly taking over key sites of power. Are there ways to not just hit back but also be one step ahead? What's on our minds? How can we move from data to Dada and become a twenty-first-century avant-garde, one that truly understands the technological imperative and shows that "we are the social in social media"? How do we develop, and then scale up, critical concepts and bring together politics and aesthetics in a way that speaks to the online millions? Let's identify the hurdles, knowing that it's time to act. We know that making fun of the petty world of xenophobes isn't working. What can we do other than coming together? Can we expect anything from the designer as lone wolf? How do we organize this type of political labor? Do we need even more tools that bring us together? Have you already used Meetup, Diaspora, DemocracyOS, and Loomio?

Do we perhaps need a collective dating site for political activism? How can we design, and then mobilize, a collective networked desire that unites us in a “deep diversity”? Is the promise of open, distributed networks going to do the job, or are you look for strong ties – with consequences?

Generations have studied the fatal mistakes made in the interbellum years, but what are the conclusions, now that we’re entering similar territory? It’s time to reread Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (in which we find David Rousset’s famous quote: “Normal men do not know that everything is possible”). We should also revisit Wilhelm Reich’s *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Adorno and Horkheimer, Elias Canetti’s *Crowd and Power*, and the opus that defined my own intellectual destiny, Klaus Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies*. This is a subjective list; there are so many other classics in this genre.²⁰ Will these authors assist us in discovering the defining factors of our age? How can we identify these key issues and then act upon this knowledge? Crucial are alternative narratives, which, once they have been developed and tested, can be condensed into memes. As we know, memes can and must be mutated. This means that the overall narrative will have to be robust (while “agile”). Memes are designed to be

20 It’s important to also mention here the work of New York psychohistorian Lloyd de Mause, whose 1984 study Reagan’s America can be an important source of inspiration for us today.

jammed, yet the core message stays the same no matter how radically the meme is altered. We can also call this condensed semiotic unit a symbol, although the symbolic aspect of a meme often remains invisible.

As soon as we understand resistance as organized interference, we can start doing counter-mapping, monitoring the silence and bringing out the hysterical realism that has been hidden for so long. We need to blast lasting holes in the self-evident infrastructure of the everyday. As we have learned from Silicon Valley business gurus, disruption is enough to bring down vast systems, which really just consist of meaningless routines. It's much easier than we think. This also brings closer the possibility of revolution – an event that even the most dogmatic critics of the neoliberal regime ruled out ages ago.

In preparation for things to come, I asked a few people the perennial question: what is to be done? I started off with Nick Srnicek, coauthor of *Inventing the Future*, who just published a treatise called *Platform Capitalism*. According to him, we should start getting into the habit of blocking users on social media. “The basic idea on social media also holds for broader issues of public debate: how to refuse voices that are purposefully

attacking the basis of reasonable debate?”²¹ Eva Illouz, author of *Why Love Hurts* and *Cold Intimacies*, argues that we need to start with the question of how to design truth:

The problem is that they fight with lies. They have no moral limits. Immoral fighters have an advantage because they are not constrained. We would have to counteract with truth, but truth is binding and constraining, so the question is, how do you make truth as powerful or more powerful than lies, which have the advantage of being invented quickly and tailored to meet your needs?

A possible answer lies in the refusal to deal with memes as isolated digital objects that can be reassembled randomly. We should not start at the very end and get stuck on the Know Your Meme pages. Srnicek:

We need new stories, and that’s different from just thinking about counter-memes or stopping the flow of information. It’s a different temporality effectively, but a new narrative then provides the basis for more immediate responses via social media, memes, etc. There is a narrative to Trump and the rising far right, for instance. And it’s a seductive narrative for some people, which then gets expressed in various forms. The left is, mostly, missing that narrative. We need to get to the

21 All quotes from email interviews conducted February 13–15, 2017

heart of the matter, rather than attempting to deal with symptoms. There is all this effort to block “fake news,” but no one questions why the public has a new demand for these stories, or why they don’t have the critical capacity to spot them. Just changing some newsfeed algorithms doesn’t seem adequate.

Mememes are the perfect way to enter a story – but which story? The cry for new narratives coincides with calls to go “beyond the fragments,” as expressed by Jodi Dean in her 2016 book *Crowds and Party*. Can mememes play a role in the centripetal social forces that bring us together? Dean:

It will be a good experiment to see if meme wars can be effective in undermining the right (that is, making them appear unappealing and undesirable to potential supporters). The challenge is creating bubble-breaking mememes since most mememes tend to circulate within bubbles of people who already agree. But even if your mememes don’t break bubbles they can still be effective if they inspire the left. Bernie Sanders’ Dank Meme Stash was a fantastic source of fun and inspiration during the US election.

Alex Galloway isn’t sure “culture jamming” is as successful a tactic today as it was in the 1990s. “Mememes seem to be operating almost entirely under what we used to call ideology. The power and interest that mememes have is entirely due to their status as ideological machines, which doesn’t mean they are useless, debased, etc. – on the contrary, it demonstrates how complex and

powerful they are.” Johannes Grenzfurthner from the Viennese art collective Monochrom adds: “You need a lot of user/follower/creator-power to really create outreach. 4Chan only became the breeding ground of super-memes because of their sheer endless pool of Darwinian non-archival users, some of them online for almost the entire day – and that for years.” Grenzfurthner also reminds us that creating political memes is a PR approach to internet culture:

People sniff out PR very fast. And in the end it can turn against you and your campaign. I understand the need to create easily shareable counter-info-memes, but that’s pretty much already happening. A ton of good images are already circulating in the specific bubbles. But how to get out of the bubble? You can’t penetrate conservative bubbles with liberal content. Your content has to be so obscure and mysterious that it’s not working as a propaganda tool anymore. Or will just be used for ridicule.

According to free software thinker and Anonymous historian Gabriele Coleman, we simply cannot afford not to use memes:

When the alt-right was gaining ground and various journalists were horrified that images and emotions could “tug” at people and sway them politically, I was equally horrified that they were so naive and negative about emotions and visual culture. Yes, progressives and leftists must include memes and humor in their arsenal

to fight back at some quarters of the right and to steer some portion of the Internet-crazed youth toward the left. Without it, we will lose a huge base of people. Whether this can be designed through a group effort or must bubble up from below is a whole other question. My sense is that it would be more effective coming from a subcultural base rather than an elite art vanguard.

I also asked Matt Goerzen, who's doing meme research with Coleman, about the sought-after recipe for a successful meme:

The alt-right memes are so successful due to their bottom up, populist nature. I've come to understand image board memes as a toolset that can be put to different uses, but only where they fit the job at hand. Memes can be effectively weaponized, as in shitposting on Twitter, a form of cognitive denial-of-service attack, to use Rand Waltzman's term. But they're most powerful as a site of identification, coalescing the values of the individuals who identify with them through thematic sentiment.

According to Goerzen, a significant portion of alt-righters devoted their memetic labors to Bernie while he was still in the running. Goerzen noticed that there was almost no attempt to meme for Hillary:

It's worth wondering why that is. My understanding is that memes are sort of a vessel or coordinating point for organization, but without themes they are largely lacking

in ideological value. They are like a vocabulary, and need to be animated and organized by an imperative or narrative. The trajectory of Pepe is very instructive in this regard, and I believe it is telling that the Bernie memes that were getting going utilized Wojak. Pepe and Wojak are like yin and yang—where Pepe is rash, manic, provocative, devious, extroverted, Wojak is deliberative, depressive, reserved, empathetic, and introverted. When Bernie was eliminated the positive identifications enabled through Wojak were stalled, while the positive identifications enabled through Pepe to Trump gained extra momentum, as many of the chan Bernie supporters were enraged by the foul play they deemed responsible for his disqualification—essentially Pepifying them. This is just one example, but the point is this: I believe the effective way to weaponize memes for ideological purposes is to steer ones already popular and meaningful for a contested demographic. This aligns with the “redirect method” that attempts to counter violent extremism circles. The idea of designing or topdowning memes (or “forcememing” in the parlance of imageboard culture) is a pretty challenging task. Many of the government types I’ve spoken with in elucidating these questions over the past months have ideas about how this can be done, but it involves pretty vast resources, and more resembles the sort of work done by Cambridge Analytica than anyone in the imageboard or alt-right cultural orbit.²²

22 Cambridge Analytica is the UK- based big data firm that worked for the Trump campaign. See Hannes Grassegger and Mikael Krogerus,

Apart from the need for a narrative, there's the issue of acceleration. Should alternative memes circulate at the same speed as the overall internet? Are we running out of time? How about slow memes? What if "real time" is itself part of the problem? According to Franco Berardi, we need a new rhythm of elaboration; we need to slow down sequentiality, heal from acceleration, and find a new tempo of movement. This cannot be realized through further acceleration. Real-time communication already ruins our bodies, our minds. According to Berardi, the digital realm is leading to "decorpetization," creating a "bodiless brain." The infosphere is one giant nervous stimulation. What we need, before we can even start telling the New Narrative, is a "reconfiguration of mental elaboration."²³

The essay was originally published in *e-flux journal* no. 83 (June 2017).

"The Data That Turned the World Upside Down," *Motherboard*, January 28, 2017 https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/how-our-likes-helped-trump-win.

²³ All Berardi quotes are taken from a lecture he delivered at Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, February 8, 2017, as part of the lecture series "What Is Happening to Our Brain?" organized by Studium Generale Rietveld Academie.

*And All Those Who Wish to
Remain Anonymous*

Elliott Burns

“All those in favour?”

“|” “|” “|” “|” “|” “|” “|” “|” “|.”

“The motion carries. Thank you ladies, thank you gentlemen, I believe that concludes today’s business. As usual Evelyn will contact your secretaries with information in advance of the next board meeting. I hope to see you all at the summer party on the 26th.”

Everyone stood, shook hands, picked up their leather bound folios and made the normal pleasantries that people of their status make when concluding one of these long, tiresome, civil ordeals. The motion had carried unanimously, and with it the final portion of the museum had been given a name: *The Frederick and Nancy Lehmann Foundation Staircase*. Julian was pleased with the arrangement, a steady income of £1,000,000 per annum over the succeeding five years, a very nice sum for the last piece of available real-estate. That, and that frankly no one was likely to notice

the Lehmann's names in such a discreet, out of the way, location. Best, considering where their wealth had come from.

Down the ornate service stairwell, at the back of the museum, Julian made his way along a plush carpeted corridor to a door marked with a golden sign: *Department of Grants, Trusts and Foundations*. Rapping gently he entered and asked to see James Everton and was quickly shown through to his office.

“Julian, I trust we had some luck.”

“Of course, of course, was there ever a doubt,” said Julian taking a seat on the corner of James's desk and picking up a Tuscan leather stress ball.

The two men shared a great deal of affection for one another; whilst they wouldn't socialise outside the office and company events, they shared a way of thinking and a trust for one another. In the past six years they had slowly portioned off parts of the museum that others would have never dreamt of. There were big ticket items such as The Koth Brothers' Pavilion in the garden, The J.L. Bunt Memorial East Wing and The Dr. Morris and Tabitha Suckler Courtyard, which involving large sums for renovation or construction work.

Then there were smaller items: a room of Eastern antiquities had gone to the Graths, Leonida Mikaelson had taken the fountain and the escalator

was paid for by the Rineharts; they'd even convinced an ageing Lord and Lady to sponsor a set of ornate door knockers.

Waling through the museum was an assault of wealth patrons' plaques, engraved arches and marbled initials, tastefully concealed in every possible place.

It was Julian's charm, intellect and access as Director, partnered with James' ability to assess how much might be leveraged from whom and for what, that made them such a good pairing. At galas Julian would butter up potential sponsors and then introduce James, who whilst making pleasantries would be calculating the figures. A bit of digging later that evening, in financial and charity records, and they'd have a proposal ready to present.

All of this had, of course, been achieved with considerable backhanders coming their way. Julian and James offered their donors a moral money laundering service, no matter where your dollars, euros, pounds, pesos, kronas, rupees, rubles, dinars, kyats, bahts, wons or yens came from. Not to say that any of their partners were unsavoury; they were all perfectly respectful and knew the difference between a cake and an oyster fork. It was more the case that none had squeaky clean business dealings, be it land clearances in the Congo, or oil spills, or emitting toxic chemicals

into the atmosphere during a hurricane. Some had mis-advertised their pharmaceuticals to doctors, others helped with the finances of other less pharmaceutical pharmaceutical suppliers. Those blemishes to a good family name could easily be scoured clean with a carefully placed donation.

However, now with the museum sold off, Julian and James would have to move to new pastures. Luckily a plan was already in place; stepping down from their roles they would form a discreet lobbying firm which would broker deals between wealthy patrons and the galleries and museums which so desperately needed their money to keep international cultural development moving forward. Soon enough they'd be taking a rather reasonable commission for selling off culture left, right and centre.

From: [REDACTED] [mailto:[REDACTED]@gmail.com]
Sent: 01 November 2017 16:54
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@serpentinegalleries.org>
Subject: Sackler Funding Inquiry

Dear [REDACTED]

I am writing to ask whether you could provide me with the exact figure of funding that The Dr Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation gave for the construction of The Serpentine Sackler Gallery, and whether The Serpentine Galleries and its Board has a position of the recent media coverage regarding the origin of the Sackler family wealth?

Obviously, as someone who has attended exhibitions at The Serpentine Sackler Gallery regularly since 2013, I am concerned about the affiliation between the galleries and a family who's wealth has primarily been made through the sale and false marketing of a highly addictive opioid.

Of course, I understand that this issue is by no means limited to The Serpentine Gallery, and that the gallery and its Board may have not known of the origin of the Sackler Foundation's finance until recently.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] [mailto:[REDACTED]@serpentinegalleries.org]
Sent: 02 November 2017 12:03
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@gmail.com>
Subject: Sackler Funding Inquiry

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email to [REDACTED]. The Serpentine, along with many cultural and educational institutions across the world, has benefitted from the philanthropy of the Sackler Foundation, whose major gift – amongst a range of other support – made possible our second gallery space, designed by Zaha Hadid Architects. The Foundation is also a long-term funder of the Serpentine's Education Programme, which pioneers embedded, community-centred projects, challenging where art can be encountered and by whom.

We do not have any further comment at this time.

With kind regards,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] [mailto:[REDACTED]@gmail.com]
Sent: 02 November 2017 12:26
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@serpentinegalleries.org>
Subject: Sackler Funding Inquiry

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your reply.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

“Do you have any unfinished
or unrealized projects?”
#miraclamarathon
#dearhansulrich

when you've already interviewed the
whole art universe but still trying to
expand your range of interlocutors



is the museum in which you
spend 8 underpaid hrs per
day designed by libeskind,
gehry, hadid etc?
No? Sorry not sorry
#letmetellyou
#privatematter
#whitecollar

public museum vs. private foundation



first steps into unpaid museum internships



the right candidate will have a Phd in art theory, or at least 5 solo shows and 4+ years working for an institution, museum or gallery. A strong passion towards contemporary art is requested. Unfortunately, we cannot provide any stipend, but the intern will gain a considerable experience in moving boxes, painting walls and stuff like that.

#letmetellyou

#passion

#positivity

Contemporary Trolls and Where to Find Them

Bob Bicknell-Knight

“Trolling is a art” (Anonymous, 2010) is perhaps the definitive statement to sum up the act of trolling. Trolling is, at the basest level, defined as the intentional disruption of another’s emotional well-being, often through a feigned promotion of an unpopular belief, or political position, usually on the internet. In this example, the deliberate use of “a” where “an” should be is likely to arouse a negative reaction among those concerned with correct English usage. The fact that the statement is itself directly referring to trolling and the art thereof gives further power to its effect; if you’re effected by this statement, its author has succeeded, and its veracity has been confirmed. This contemporary definition of trolling has been used effectively in this way within the online sphere for decades, promoting hate and causing widespread frustration for many, only recently moving into the offline realm when Donald Trump was elected to be the 45th president of the United States of America, purportedly ‘the world’s

greatest troll' (Silver, 2015).

Within this essay I am going to examine the origin of the internet troll, how and why its transitioned into the AFK¹ environment, away from the 'murky depths' of internet forums such as 4chan and Reddit, and its use as a political and social tool for change, regarding the rise of Donald Trump, the fall of LD50 gallery and the artwork 'He Will Not Divide Us', which has become an increasingly interesting collaborative art project between the artists involved and the internet.

FROM LOL TO LULZ

The use of the word 'troll' as internet slang is said to have first appeared in Usenet² in the early 1990s with the phrase 'trolling for newbies' whereby a veteran user would introduce a question or topic that had been so overdone that only a new user would respond to them earnestly. This was seen as a positive contribution, used to identify new users of the platform, a far cry from today's attributions of the term. As the 90s continued, and the internet became more widely used, trolling began to be seen in a negative light due to the rise in internet

1. Away From Keyboard

2. A worldwide distributed discussion system available on computers since 1980

traffic, resulting in the sort of general confusion that occurs when a ‘cacophony of voices are all speaking simultaneously’ (Stoll, 1995). In 2003 the hacktivist group Anonymous was created on the online imageboard 4chan³, the cultural meme⁴ machine of our time, and became synonymous with the trolling community after a series of publicity stunts and coordinated DDoS⁵ attacks on various groups and individuals. Although the media dubs the majority of Anonymous’ online events as ‘attacks’, these are in-fact unlicensed protests that occur when a group of Anons⁶ are unhappy with an aspect of society (Coleman, 2014). The first major protest occurred on July 6, 2006 after moderators on the online social networking site Habbo Hotel were rumoured to be racially profiling against dark-skinned avatars, abusing their powers and banning users from the site. The protest involved swarms of Anons logging into the site with their avatars dressed in afros and business suits, forming a virtual blockade around the games pool, disallowing anyone from entering the environment (fig 1). Although the event, forever dubbed ‘Pool’s Closed’, didn’t change

3. www.4chan.org/

4. An image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations.

5. Distributed Denial-of-Service

6. Anonymous members

Habbo's problematic moderators (a rumour that was never officially confirmed by Habbo), it did bring widespread media attention to the group, leading to more impactful protests (labelled as 'operations') and a larger community of Anons contributing to massive social change in the years that followed Pool's Closed.

TROLLING FOR CHANGE

On June 16, 2015 Donald Trump announced his candidacy to be the next president of the United States with a campaign rally and speech at Trump Tower in New York City. In March of 2009 Trump had created a Twitter account, which would serve as a unique campaign tool leading up to his election on November 8, 2016, utilising the application as a vehicle for connecting to his followers and the world, spreading 'alternative facts' and for some hate on a mass scale (Swaine, 2017). One could argue that one of the most atrocious examples of this was when Trump retweeted an image, which was said to have originated from a neo-Nazi Twitter account (fig 2), containing wildly inaccurate crime data between black and white people (Trump, 2015). The use of Twitter in this way, spreading fake news and blurting out misogynistic comments, could be genius, simply because of the throwaway aspect of the social media feed, and the mass of content that's continually being generated. If a reader sees a statistic that seems

like it might be true, they may well assume it is, without considering the source, or even enlarging the image to see it clearly. This could be for several reasons; the perceived lack of time that's afforded to people in the age of the internet (Goldsmith, 2016), or simply due to people taking a few minutes to like and re-tweet articles whilst sitting on the toilet, only skim-reading the titles to consume as much tertiary data as possible. Either way, many people won't be looking back whilst surfing this information highway, and even if they did, what would be the point? Yesterday's Trump tweet has already been forgotten, replaced by another, equally divisive addition to the pile of 3am tweeting misdemeanours that will be attributed to a lack of sleep (McGill, 2016), continuing to reinforce the alt-right movement and its ideals.

'WE MEMED HIM INTO THE PRESIDENCY'

Alongside the tweets, another tactic to keep Trump in the public eye, eventually bringing him to power, was to continually circulate memes across the internet. The meme is a form of visual media that, in the present day, is made for and by the internet. The term was originally coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* as “an idea, behaviour, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture” (Dawkins, 1989). Various groups of people saw it as their part time job to create memes focused on Trump, especially in

the lead up to important debates and rally's. After Hilary Clinton dubbed half of Trump's supporters as a 'basket of deplorables' (Tatum, 2016) during a campaign speech, supporters adopted this name and continue to wear it as a badge of honour. 'The Donald', an incredibly active subreddit, has been described as a 24/7 Trump rally, and this is where most Deplorable's create and share the memes that they have created. The content of the memes ranged from Trump as Pepe the Frog (fig3), originally a cartoon green frog that was popular in the late 2000s and is now appropriated as a symbol for the alt-right, to utilising emails leaked by WikiLeaks to circulate conspiracy theories like #pizzagate (All, 2016), a theory concerning pedophilia that spiralled out of control, eventually resulting in somebody going into a pizza parlour with a gun. After the Access Hollywood tape was discovered, a recording of Trump discussing his incredibly misogynistic approach to women, the hashtag MAGA3X⁷ began to circulate on Twitter. The idea, created by Mike Cernovich, was to do something Trump related at least three times a day, from bringing 3 other Trump voters with you on election day to retweeting 3 pro-Trump stories daily on your social media account. This surge in Trump related content overwhelmed social media and made the transition to AFK events like flash mobs and rallies (Johnson, 2016). At

7. www.reddit.com/r/AskThe_Donald/comments/5b433c/what_is_maga3x

the DeploraBall, an unofficial inaugural ball to celebrate the victory and inauguration of Trump, participants exclaimed ‘we memed him into the presidency’ (This American Life, 2017), which seems fitting due to the huge amount of young naïve support that was thrown towards him by users of 4chan and Reddit (Beran, 2017).

HEWILLNOTDIVIDE.US

On the date of the presidential inauguration on 20 January 2017, the collaborative artist trio made up of Luke Turner, Nastja Rönkkö and Shia LaBeouf, began an art project that was said to be ‘open to all, 24 hours a day, seven days a week’ and ‘continuing for four years, or the duration of the presidency’ (He Will Not Divide Us, 2017). The piece was a video being live streamed from a camera mounted on a wall outside of the Museum of the Moving Image in New York City. Participants were invited to deliver the words “HE WILL NOT DIVIDE US” into the camera, repeating the phrase as many times, and for as long as they wish. In the days that followed the inauguration, people would log on to hewillnotdivide.us, usually being greeted by the sight of a group of smiling individuals of all ages and ethnicities, repeating the phrase in a (usually) calm and considered manner (fig 4). The artwork became incredibly popular, garnering mainstream media attention due to Turner and Rönkkö capitalising on LaBeouf’s fame once

again⁸, alongside the piece's relevance to Trump, protest culture and the possibility of becoming internet famous by 'performing' in front of the camera. The liberal nature of the project drew out the trolls of 4chan and members of the alt-right, enticing them to crawl from their nests within their computer screens and disrupt the peaceful, cult-like, nature of the installation. These disruptions varied from holding up photos of Pepe to more elaborate occurrences, a prime example being two individuals wearing skull masks cutting open a toy rabbit with a large steak knife in front of the camera. The first major incident occurred when a man, pretending to take a selfie with LaBeouf (who frequented the live stream to show solidarity to the participants) said 'Hitler did nothing wrong'⁹, causing LaBeouf to shove him away. Later in the day LaBeouf was arrested at the scene and charged with misdemeanour assault. After this event, crude pranks kept occurring, eventually resulting in the live stream being taken down, with the museum stating that it was creating 'an ongoing public safety hazard'. This occurred on the 10 February, less than a month after the video was installed. The trio challenged the museum for its 'lack of commitment to the project' and the stream was quickly relocated to a wall in Albuquerque outside the El Rey Theatre. Within five days it was stated that 'shots were reported

8. www.luketurner.com/labeouf-ronkko-turner

9. www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWwlzeb6E_M

in the area' (LaBeouf, 2017) and the live stream was shut down yet again.

CAPTURE THE FLAG

The project had become too successful in creating a dialogue between the left and the right, drifting away from its original intention of unity to that of violence, hate and kek¹⁰. Even though arguably everything that had happened at the different locations, alongside the dialogues occurring online, had been an incredibly thought-provoking reaction to the piece, it was obvious that the project was too triggering to replicate yet again in a different location. On the 8 March it was announced that the installation had transformed into a live stream in an unknown location, with the camera pointing up to the sky showing a flag emblazoned with the now well-known statement 'HE WILL NOT DIVIDE US'. The trolls obviously saw this as a challenge, and within a day the flag's location had been discovered by a group of 4chan users after analysing flight contrails and celestial navigation, with one user driving around honking the horn of his car so that it could be heard on the video stream, allowing others to triangulate where the flag was based on the driver's location. The flag was taken down and replaced by a *Make*

10. A translation of the acronym "LOL" that's widely used on 4chan

America Great Again t-shirt and hat. Fields were set alight and the stream was offline once again (fig 5). At this point the group protesting the protest, (who had admittedly only been undertaking this exercise for ‘the lulz’ (Rusch, 2017) alongside having an issue with PC culture¹¹) effectively attempting to silence the voice of the left, had become as much a part of the piece as the flag itself, throwing away their online anonymity with no fear for the repercussions. After this the trio stated that ‘America is simply not safe enough for this artwork to exist’ (FACT, 2017), so it was decided that it’s new home would be on top of the Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT) in Liverpool, supposedly safe from the American political system that inspired the piece. Unsurprisingly, on the 23 March, within a day of the stream going live once again, the five-storey building was climbed and a masked individual appeared on the live stream, attempting to remove the flag. In the next hour FACT tweeted that on police advice the artists and the institution had removed the installation due to ‘dangerous, illegal trespassing’. As of writing, the art piece has yet to be reconfigured, although it’s safe to assume that when it does eventually appear the 4chan community will be called to action yet again. Are these ‘internet pranksters’ alt- right activists or simply bored people delighting in messing with

11. Political Correctness

a celebrity who's known for his high-octane outbursts? Either way the artwork has, and will continue to, unite the troll community. What if this type of community could be utilised against something that's supposedly inherently bad?

IS IT OK TO PUNCH A NAZI (ART GALLERY)?

This was the title of an article published by Mute magazine on the 16 February 2017 concerning a small art gallery in Dalston called LD50 who had, 6 months previously, organised an exhibition called '71822666', named after a thread on 4chan that predicted Trump's victory. The exhibition explored visual strategies adopted by the so-called 'alt-right', as well as a related symposium with authors such as Peter Brimelow, Nick Land and Brett Stevens. The article accused the gallery of giving platform to fascists, as well as actively promoting the alt-right. This led to a campaign that was originally created on Facebook, for the gallery to close. Called *Shut Down LD50*, the group organised a demonstration outside the gallery on 25 February (fig 6), and the gallery subsequently has had to close for an unknowable amount of time due to vandalism and violent threats. When interviewed during the demonstration, many of the protestors admitted to having never even been inside the gallery, remarking that 'art is shit' (Gelder, 2017). Surely, even if the gallery was giving a platform to neo-Nazis, to simply jump on

the bandwagon makes you as ill-informed as the 4chan trolls making fun of Labeouf and therefore not understanding that they had themselves become a part of the artwork that they were so intent on removing. Members of the SDLD50 group were also prone to confronting people online who had 'liked' LD50's Instagram posts, and in some cases 'no platforming' them ahead of AFK talks and discussions (Larios, 2017). The Instagram, like any other art gallery in the age of the internet, had photographs of previous shows, including the meme filled exhibition '71822666'. A question one might ask is when did a virtual 'like' count as an endorsement of an alt-right ideology? Especially when associated with the throwaway aspect of social media, where you may 'like' upwards of 100 posts a day.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Since Donald Trump was inaugurated, rising to a position of power and influence, we've seen an outbreak of trolls and peoples supposed true selves, originally imprisoned within the confines of their own home or on anonymous online message boards. Having a troll as the president of the United States sets a precedent, with many assuming that it's now acceptable to be outwardly racist and misogynistic, cuck calling and proclaiming that 'Hitler did nothing wrong'. Turner, Rönkkö and LaBeouf's most

recent project #ALONETOGETHER, where the artists are confined to wood cabins in unknown locations within Lapland with the only source of communication to the outside world being a live stream from within Kiasma museum, has already attracted the attention of anons, with various videos on YouTube showing individuals entering the exhibition and harassing LaBeouf. 4chan is already attempting to find the cabins (fig 7). How does the art community combat these obscure pockets of the online community entering the 'sacred' space of an art gallery, simply to mock a celebrity? How can we, dubbed 'normies' by the 4chan community, hope to understand the trolls and the alt-right without taking the same red pill¹² that they've been taking? Daniel Keller says you should 'inoculate yourself against it while fighting back' (Keller, 2017), although many trolls are outwardly normal people living normal lives who aren't abusive AFK, the most prominent example being in a recent South Park episode where Gerald Broflovski spends his days as a hard working lawyer and his evenings photoshopping social media photographs and harassing others on message boards, stating that 'it's fun to stir the pot and watch everyone freak out' (Parker, 2016). Should the liberal left allow themselves to be made fun of, to go with the jokes, similar to

12. A metaphorical term used to describe the epiphany of the unpleasant truth of reality in a wide range of contexts, usually seen on 4chan, and originating from *The Matrix*

an American opossum pretending to be dead to reduce the possibility of being eaten, or should we adopt Trump's philosophy of rolling with the memes and bonding with the younger generation that enjoy anarchy and conspiracy theories? Either way, staying in your own liberal filter bubble, no platforming speakers at universities and protesting because of ill-informed facts, is no longer an option now that the king troll is at the head of the table, we all need to become investigative reporters, fact checking as we go.



1. www.knowyourmeme.com/memes/pools-closed
2. www.edition.cnn.com/2015/11/22/politics/donald-trump-black-crime-police-retweet/
3. [www.twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/653856168402681856](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/653856168402681856)
4. www.rt.com/usa/377007-shia-labeouf-protest-camera/
5. www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeXEWsobJRE
6. www.hackneygazette.co.uk/news/politics/1d50-gallery-anti-fascist-protesters-march-through-dalston-1-4907083
7. www.boards.4chan.org/pol/thread/120858402/any-finnish-people-near-shia-labeouf-in-his-cabin

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Looking at a White Cube

Matilde Cerruti Quara

Silently
Somewhat reminiscent
Of a sinuous magpie
A figure
Enveloped
In silky black waves
Soundlessly slides Pacing the volumes
Of a white palace

The marble floors
The translucent
Polished glassware
Humans lined up like crops
Standing outside
In the winter breeze

The glorious splendour
Of a simple shape
A condensation
Of lightness, whiteness
Reds, greens and blues

A tingling glass of champagne
To burst the bubble
Of the monotone monochrome

May you enter
The shiny doors
Be illuminated
By the blinding lights
Four perfect sides
Of western magnificence
They call this spotless palace
A white cube

learning from athens



double tap if you re learnin

your use of benjamin's aura in all
your web magazine writings



such a sneaky one I even
feel guilty to drop

#walterbenjamin #aura
#aestheticsfordummies

hito steyerl the writer:



hito steyerl the artist:



@hitosteyerl we love you
but your practice it's a bit
dichotomic when it comes
to its physical manifestation
(lately) #letmetellyou

such a sneaky one I even
feel guilty to drop

#walterbenjamin #aura
#aestheticsfordummies

you vs. the guy she tells you not to
worry about



ok lets get this fucking research residency done bitch



when you have a phd from yale school of art but still lecturing BA students on "white-cube-bullshits"



"my bed" vs. "my bad"



when your inbox is full of rejected grant applications and e-flux newsletters. but you're stronger.



research-based residencies are a parallel universe created by the Art Basel committee to distract and corrupt our crypto-marxist analytical ability

Sorry not sorry
#artschool
#teaching

This one is dedicated to every Young British Artist we have ever slept with on IKEA beds..
#yba
#traceyemin

I am stronger than wind.
I am stronger than fire.
I am a concrete, earth-quake-proof gallery booth at frieze new york.

Just got a Venice Biennial-
flavoured Yankee Candle
#venicebiennale
#smellofart
#iloveart
#howmanylikes

"contemporary art makes me feel
good" starter pack



solving all dana schutz's problems



we never, never forget
#letmetellyou

we can hold your hand, and
bring you from Kassel to
Munster, from Basel straight
to the moon
#letmetellyou
#artgroupie
#beingsafeisscary
#banucennetoglu

999likes postcard from kassel



i can feel the venice biennale press
accreditation vibe



checking your spam folder
every minute? Maybe you
are not invited
#letmetellyou
#wishyouwerehere

lemme just snap this motherfucking
rachel rose's video and fly straight to
kassel



got no time to fight against
pigeons and non-preview
peasants around Giardini

german pavilion starter pack



get the #FAUST look to be
accepted in every social
occasion, refusing the
imperatives of queuing and
door-policy examinations

.
#letmetellyou
#dresscodepolicy
#21+

steal the look !!



make new friends in the art world !!



gain social and professional value !!



follow the crazy art microcosm everywhere !!!



Get the "Art Groupie" look
and quit your day job to
follow the beautiful, inspir-
ing, crazy art world across
Europe this summer
#letmetellyou
#biennialsummercamp
#straighttokassel

Geert Lovink is a Dutch media theorist, internet critic, author of *Uncanny Networks* (2002), *Dark Fiber* (2002), *My First Recession* (2003), *Zero Comments* (2007), *Networks Without a Cause* (2012), and *Social Media Abyss* (2016), and founder of the Institute of Network Cultures at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. Recent projects deal with digital publishing and the future of art criticism. He also teaches at the European Graduate School (Saas-Fee/Malta), where he supervises PhD students.

Elliott Burns is an independent curator and writer, the co-founder of Off Site Project and occasionally an artist. Since graduating Central Saint Martins he has worked with UAL organising exhibitions and teaching. He currently lives between London and Mexico City.

Bob Bicknell-Knight is a London based artist and curator working in installation, sculpture, moving image, net art and other digital mediums. Online and offline surveillance accompanied by the consumer capitalist culture within today's society are the main issues surrounding his work.

Matilde Cerruti Quara is a poet, artist and creative director, whose often performative practice is finalised to escape categorisations. Poetry performances and exhibitions include: SELADOR by Anna Franceschini featuring Matilde Cerruti Quara, presented by Momentum Journal at Sprint Milano; CAMPerVAN presents: The Sci-Fi Powerverse, curated by Zoe Marden, London; and CAMPerVAN at Club Q21, QLab, Milan (all 2017).

STIMULI is a publishing endeavour co-founded by Federico Sargentone and Ulya Soley, mainly focused on internet-dependent files, languages, objects and subjects. Sometimes it manifests into physical forms, and sporadically adopts a curatorial practice.

<http://stimulistimuli.com>

Contemporary Art Working Class Hero