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Parafictions: UBERMORGEN.COM as a case study of parafictive practice conducted between 1998 and 2018

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Abstract

This article examines and discusses the conditions that have led to parafictions becoming an important mode of practice in contemporary art. This article demonstrates how the socio-political situation during 1998–2018 has combined with the development of technological infrastructure to its current planetary-scale and affected relationships with truth. This has led to the growth of artists creating parafictions, which exploit this so-called era of post-truth and fake news. To demonstrate one model of parafictive practice, this article uses the case study of the artists UBERMORGEN.COM, who implement radical media strategies and methods of 'hallucinated consensual hallucination'.

Keywords

parafictions

contemporary art

UBERMORGEN.COM

planetary-scale computation

technological infrastructure

fake news

post-truth

This article examines and discusses the conditions that have led to parafictions becoming an important mode of practice in contemporary art. For the purpose of this article, Carrie Lambert-Beatty's definition is used that defines a parafiction as a fiction that is experienced as fact (2009). This research demonstrates how the social and political situation between 1998, the year Google opened its first office and the *International Symposium on Electronic Arts* (*ISEA98*) had the dual themes of Revolution and Terror, which appear as prescient for the technological advances that the Internet and new millennium would bring, and 2018, the year thus far of polarities, inequalities and sustained instability, has combined with the development of technological infrastructure to its current planetary scale and affected relationships with truth. This has subsequently led to the growth of artists engaging in parafictive acts, which exploit this so-called era of post-truth and fake news. As this article establishes parafictions exist precisely because of the experience of a fluctuating world, which generate the gaps in perception. This article uses the case study of UBERMORGEN.COM; the duo began collaborating in Vienna in 1995 and is comprised of Hans Bernhard and lizvlx, who have Swiss, Austrian and American heritage. Viewed as pioneers of the Net.Art movement, from the early 1990s, they have worked in the avant-garde medium, treading new ground by using experimental sets to explore new artistic and scientific possibilities. UBERMORGEN.COM's practice demonstrates one model of parafictive practice and experience of living in states of flux; augmenting this argument is new content generated from an interview with the artistic duo. The article begins by explaining the term parafiction, and it then considers the social political context and the development of technological infrastructure to its now planetary scale before applying this rationale to the case study of UBERMORGEN.COM.

Defining parafiction

The prefix para means beside, adjacent to or beyond as a distinct form, but analogous to. The prefix comes from the Greek *para* for besides. In combinations, it means amiss, irregular and denotes alternation or modification. Therefore, as with the terms paramedic, paranormal or parasite, para is to mean that that is relating to, but distinct and alternate. In this instance, fiction is that which is untrue and invented or a belief or a statement that is false. By joining these terms, a parafiction becomes that which is adjacent to fact and a distinct form of fiction. This research is indebted to Carrie Lambert-Beatty for her initial examination of parafictions in the journal article 'Make-believe: Parafiction and plausibility' (2009) and extends her definition:

> [u]nlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived. Post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less toward the disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust. Simply put, with various degrees of success, for various durations, and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact. (2009: 54)

She argues that historical fiction of the literary tradition begins with facts but creates false worlds. In this case, it is clear how the fiction diverges from fact, whereas parafictions affect and interact with reality. What is significant is the pragmatics of trust and potential disregard for proven facts, which lead to experiencing these

practices as fact. Parafictions are centrally deceptive, they aim to misconceive through their construction of truth and are both truthiness, meaning a truth that is not measured by accuracy, but by conviction, and 'bullshit' (Frankfurt 2005), which Harry Frankfurt defines as 'unconnected to a concern with the truth' (2005: 5). Parafictions are often disinterested in whether the deception is exposed or not. Through the act of viewing or experiencing an alternative reality, that reality becomes a possibility. The plausibility of a parafiction is significant, as the title of Lambert-Beatty's essay would suggest that plausibility 'discloses consensus about the way things are; but also can make a new reality sensible: accessible both to feeling and reason' (2009: 66).

Lambert-Beatty argues that these artistic strategies emerged in the late 1990s and are encapsulated in the year 2003, which Naomi Klein dubbed 'the year of the fake' (2004: n.pag.), the number one fake being the invasion of Iraq to conduct a hunt for non-existent weapons of mass destruction. During this period, lies told had big consequences, in which the existing framework for truth altered as seemingly scientific and political authority faltered, affecting commitment to one truth. It is around 2003 that parafictions became a popular mode of practice and this article is in agreement with Lambert-Beatty's assertion that 1998 is a starting point for this trend.

The trend of parafictive artworks has been identified to exist within the period of 1998 to date; although they are not new phenomena for art history, it appears that there is a rise in these forms of practices during times of social change. These periods of political unrest and social upheaval lead to, as Claire Bishop suggests, a 'social turn'

(2006, 2012) occurring in art, during which artistic practice interrogates collaborative forms. Bishop states that historically this has happened three times: first in 1917 with the historic avant-garde in Europe, second with the so-called 'neo' avant-garde leading up to 1968 and most recently in 1989, post the fall of communism in Eastern Europe (2012: 3).

Bishop is interested in participatory art, which encompasses parafictions as 'interventionist actions in mass media' (2012: 1), defining the term participatory art as artistic engagement with participation and collaboration, which positions people as the core medium and material, in the same vein as theatre and performance. This definition interacts with the term parafiction, which also incorporates concepts traditionally associated with theatre and performance. Both types of practices can be categorized as performance, with parafictions forming a unique component of participatory art, and the similarities between these forms of practice are evident in the intended outcomes. Bishop's argument is extended here to imply that the invention of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1989, combined with this third social turn, consequently opening up the possibility for parafictions to flourish. Whilst actual, metaphorical and symbolic walls were broken down, the new unforeseen boundaries of the virtual led to gaps in perception and spaces in which the parafictional can thrive. Reflecting Dada in its response to industrialized warfare and the mechanical reproduction of images and texts we can see how new media art as Reena Jana and Mark Tribe suggests is a 'response to the informational technology revolution and the digitisation of cultural forms' (2007: 8).

As Lambert-Beatty's article was written in 2009 and included practices up until 2008, it is important to develop upon her initial investigation and incorporate the ten years since 2008. This is to consider how the conditions of technological infrastructure and the social political landscape have changed during this period.

Social and political context

The rise of opposing ideologies is concurrent to the notion that algorithms may be partially responsible for decreasing the understanding of views alternative to our own. Anti-politics coupled with divergent and, or, opposing ideologies enhanced by echo chambers has resulted in the development of an unusual and polarized political spectrum during the last ten years. The election of the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump, and the British Brexit vote, both in 2016, have come to encapsulate anti-politics and the rejection of mainstream media, with some claiming that we are living in a post-democratic era.

The frustration with the complex nature of contemporary events and their mediation has led to us either searching for alternative outcomes or avoiding complex issues all together. The documentary filmmaker and journalist Adam Curtis explains that this is due to the combining of two concepts 'oh dearism' ('Oh Dearism' 2009; 'Oh Dearism II and Non-Linear War' 2014) and 'hypernormalisation' (Curtis 2016). Oh dearism describes becoming overwhelmed and unresponsive to distressing news viewed on visual media. We feel overwhelmed because we view vast amounts of depressing content without a clear narrative; this renders us incapable of any physical action

and the only possible response is to exclaim 'Oh dear!'. Psychologists state that this type of behaviour is due to Leon Festinger's theory of 'cognitive dissonance' (1957), which is the illusionary way the brain justifies contradictory actions. Cognitive dissonance is how the brain responds when we feel uncomfortable processing two contradictory ideas at the same time. To combat this, the brain changes the conflicting behaviour by either altering the conflicting cognition, adding new cognitions, denying that the conflicting cognitions exist or stopping the behaviour altogether.

Curtis's concept of oh dearism culminated in his documentary *HyperNormalisation* (2016), which considers how we now choose to live in a simplistic version of the world due to a lack of substantial change and the fake or corrupt actions by those in power. Due to this feeling of helplessness, we consequently retreat from the real world and accept a sanitized version of truth. The term hypernormalization first appears in Alexei Yurchak's book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (2005), which examines how many Russian citizens did not see the end of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) coming due to the USSR's use of perception management in the 1970s and the 1980s. Many Russians explain that when the collapse of the USSR became evident if felt like a 'break of consciousness' or a 'stunning shock' (Yurchak 2005: 2). The use of perception management was key to the USSR's success as it distracted people from the complexities of the real world, rendering reality as unimportant. As Mikhail Epstein explains in late-Soviet society and culture 'any reality that differed from the ideology simply ceased to exist – it was replaced with hyperreality, which trumpeted

its existence by newspaper and loudspeaker and was more tangible and reliable than anything else' (2000: 6).

The strategies of hypernormalization act at a number of levels. In perception managed events hypernormalized versions of reality entrench ideologies, which do not necessary reflect actualities. When this converges with algorithmic bias, hypernormalization becomes its most potent and dangerous. Fake news is a less threatening form of parafiction as it is not necessarily concerned with reproducing truth and often it is easy to identify as a form of lying. What is dangerous about fake news is its employment as a tactic of hypernormalization to rally support for corporate, governmental and personal agendas and as a way to undermine accepted scientific facts.

Denial and deceit are a part of human nature, which enable us to live in a complex world in which we have to navigate a multitude of human interactions. However, when denial is used as a strategy to avoid truth it becomes dangerous. Conventionally denialists offer alternative truths to deny established facts or events such as the denial of climate change and the Holocaust. Denialists also offer alternative theories to support their denials, such as those known as 'flat Earthers', who believe that the world is flat and provide unscientific nonsense to support their claims or those who subscribe to the discredited belief that the Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccination causes autism.

The denial of climate change has real-world affect as does preventing children from receiving the MMR vaccination, both potentially resulting in the loss of lives. The

strange suggestion that the Earth is flat appears as less potent and somewhat silly; however, 'flat Earthers' use this theory as a way to discredit the American National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Coincidently NASA provide much of the data that reinforce the fact that climate change is real, and therefore ultimately by stating that the Earth is flat they begin to undermine NASA's credibility, aiding climate change deniers and having real-world affect. What all these claims have in common is their ability to detach the world from its established narrative and create a culture of distrust. As with suggesting that the Holocaust did not happen, this has the potential to alter perceptions of both people of Jewish faith or descent and Nazis, seeking to reinstate racist points of view into the mainstream.

To echo Kahn-Harris, self-deception becomes dangerous when it becomes public dogma and therefore, denialism (2018b), which has become all the more frightening as Kahn-Harris suggests we have entered a new phase of denialism that functions alongside the post-truthers there is now a progression to post-denialism. The views expressed by Donald Trump are often 'post-denialist' (2018a); he defines post-denialist discourse as assertive, instinctive and anarchic as opposed to denialist discourse that is explanatory, considered and disciplined (2018a). Trump is post-denialist in that his claims diverge from usual and, or, existing denials; his tweets are often dismissive, rash and lacking research. On day 558 of his presidency, Trump had made 4229 statements, which were false or misleading; this is an average of nearly 7.6 claims a day according to the Washington Post's Fact Checker (Kelly et al. 2018). He denies both empirical evidence and aspects of his own behaviour. In 2012, he tweeted '[t]he concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive' (Trump 2012) and he

frequently tweets denial of climate change during spells of cold weather; here is one example: '[r]ecord low temperatures and massive amounts of snow. Where the hell is Global Warming?' (Trump 2016a). He also retracts and flat-out denies evidence of past behaviour presented to him. A recorded conversation from 2005 released to the public in 2016 documents Trump boasting that he could do anything he wanted to women (Jacobs et al. 2016). In a statement (Trump 2016c) he did not fully apologize for his comment and continues to make inappropriate and controversial comments about women, be subject to numerous sexual misconduct allegations, all the while removing women's rights, whilst claiming that '[n]obody has more respect for women than Donald Trump!' (Trump 2016b).

Denialism has paved the way for post-denialism, acting as an incubator of doubt. Instead of offering new theories or opposing existing accepted truths, this arena of doubt has enabled the New Wave of post-denialists to do away with existing narratives all together and remake the world to fit their own view or agenda. As Kahn-Harris explains:

> [w]hile it is still based on the denial of an established truth, its methods liberate a deeper kind of desire: to remake truth itself, to remake the world, to unleash power to reorder reality itself and stamp one's mark on the planet. (2018a)

Perhaps we can conceive this as a customization of the truth. This is where parafictional practices in art become useful as they teach us ways of recognizing

these tactics; this is reinforced by Lambert-Beatty, who comments '[p]arafictions train us in scepticism and doubt, but also, oddly belief' (2009: 78).

Technological infrastructure

The accelerated development of technology or what is referred to as technological infrastructure, which is wider than just technological devices or computation, can be theorized using the concept of planetary-scale computation because it describes the current experience of technology. This article uses the overarching term technological infrastructure and argues that this is now at a planetary scale. Here this means that technological infrastructure today affects all aspects of the planet, both its physical geography and its human residents.

Evidently, the relationship to computation has altered significantly since the Internet and WWW's inception and widespread implementation during the early 1990s. Tim Berners-Lee invented the WWW and built it upon egalitarian principles, such as providing free access to the WWW; however, in 2018 on the 29th anniversary of its inception Berners-Lee expressed his fears for how the Internet is being used (2018). He is concerned that although half the world's population is now online, this is not enough and that the inability to access the Internet is enforcing poverty (2018). Yet Berners-Lee's main concerns lie with the Internet's uses; as a small number of dominant platforms control the space they cement existing boundaries. This concentrates power among the few, which results in the Internet being more readily weaponized (2018). This reinforces biases, is undemocratic and as conditions of

technological infrastructure have changed since 1998, this has been significant to the presence of parafictive practices.

Following this line of enquiry, this article employs Benjamin Bratton's concept of 'the stack' (2015), which is an accidental megastructure that has developed due to the rapid advancement of digital technology and is a proposal for a new geopolitical structure attuned to the anthropocentric present. The stack comprises six layers, *User, Interface, Address, City, Cloud* and *Earth* (Bratton 2015), which each have a distinct function but are not discreet. At the base of the stack is the Earth layer, which powers the stack by providing the physical material and is conceptual in framing the Earth's planetary scale. The cloud layer is the data centres and wireless networks, where information is stored and where new geopolitical actors such as Google and Amazon gather power. The city layer is where the stack employs existing networks and expanding them whilst separating and controlling space through architectural, social and informational partitions. The address layer is essentially how the stack archives and accesses information as all communication, both human and non human, must be identifiable by an address. The interface layer is how users access and interact with the stack through software such as apps and the WWW. The user layer is where all other layers converge and where the stack is mobilized for and by its users and where information is reflected through reflections of reflections as it passes through the layers of the stack.

The stack shows how software and hardware merge to affect contemporary culture and society; this model is a way to rationalize the infrastructure of the Internet and its physical presence to demonstrate the space where parafictions exist. It is also useful

to consider that as technological infrastructure continues to expand, new geopolitical boundaries are potentially drawn; for instance, as fibre-optic cables transport communications under the sea, these cables physically cross existing borders. This blurring of physical and virtual results in existing sovereignties becoming more complex as computation reshapes the planet. As the distinction between these two spaces becomes harder to determine, the actual becomes altered and relationships with truth are affected.

Applying this structure takes into account the potential for information to be lost, transformed or rendered irrelevant. As content is constantly transformed by the material and immaterial interactions of human and non human users a mass amount of metadata are generated. Hito Steyerl refers to this as 'digital debris' (2011), which is comprised of the digital waste content generated for spam e-mails and fake profiles largely by the non human uses of computation, such as algorithmic bots. With all this waste and layers of seemingly immaterial data within the structure of the stack, it becomes hard to navigate and gives dominance to false content and information.

In the context of this article, what is lost is the significance and value of truth. The technological infrastructure of the stack and planetary-scale computation combined with hypernormalization and perception management have provided ample potential for artists to develop their own parafictional strategies, which exploit the contemporary experience.

UBERMORGEN.COM

UBERMORGEN.COM as a case study represents one model of parafictions, provisionally entitled 'Net.Art and Activism'. Practices that fit into this model include artists such as Eva and Franco Mattes or 01.ORG and The Yes Men, who predominantly use the Internet as their medium and implement traditional strategies of subversion to manipulate the media. In this article three pieces will be discussed *[V]ote-auction* (2000), *Foriginal Media Hacks* (Bernhard, 2006–07) and *Binary Primitivism* (2016–present), which includes what is referred to here as the *Press Release Series* (2016–present). UBERMORGEN.COM's practice is often defined as a form of activism or as actionist and is inherently political. However, it does not attempt to affect change. Hans Bernhard and lizvlx see themselves as performers or entertainers and perhaps artist is just an additional role that they have adopted since their work has been accepted and understood in this way. They define their work as 'hallucinated consensual hallucination' (2018), which the duo developed from William Gibson's definition of cyberspace as a form of 'consensual hallucination' (1984). Hallucinated consensual hallucination alludes first to consent in prescribing to accepted linear narratives; the additional hallucination that UBERMORGEN.COM have added takes into account the levels of perception that the development of technological infrastructure to its planetary scale has enabled.

[V]ote-auction (2000)

Perhaps their most famous project, *[V]ote-auction* (2000) aimed to bring 'democracy and capitalism closer together' (UBERMORGEN.COM 2000a). The website, which was active during the 2000 Presidential election between Al Gore and George W. Bush, offered American citizens the opportunity to sell their votes to the highest bidder and was deemed an act of illegal voter trading. Eight states passed short-term restraining orders and injunctions against the two vote-auction websites for alleged illegal voter trading, which consequently led to all websites associated with the project being shut down and taken offline. The case was investigated by the FBI, the NSA and Federal Attorney Janet Reno to prevent corruption of the voter process and ensure that no votes had been brought or sold.

[V]ote-auction culminated in numerous news reports at both a national and a global scale; this includes Hans Bernhard's interview on CNN's *Burden of Proof* (UBERMORGEN.COM 2000c) alongside lawyers, politicians and professors. On the programme Internet Law Professor, Stuart Biegal, was more aware of the project's fictive nature, raising the important point that, 'this wants to call attention to the fact that, on some larger level votes are bought and sold in this country even as we speak' (UBERMORGEN.COM 2000c). The media attention received by the project illustrates that this parafictive act was experienced as fact and leading to debates on free-market exchange, exploring the murky differences between bribery, donations and the actual act of selling votes.

The website was clearly false but because an Austrian company was attempting to interfere with the American voting process, openly selling votes, the American media, police and justice departments chose to accept this website as true and as a

potential threat to the democratic process. The reaction to *[V]ote-auction* is a form of fake news, where content's provenance becomes unimportant because it supports a specific narrative. lizvlx finds it hard to comprehend how UBERMORGEN.COM's parody websites are accepted as real and that *[V]ote-auction.com* was considered to be a threat to democracy. As lizvlx comments,

> [w]hen you make a fake website, in a way, when you are producing it, you would never think that people would take this for real and its always very absurd when you figure that there is really people out there that take that as a given. Especially for me, it's always extra weird because it is not even reality, it's just pixels on a screen, so it's not even existing. (Hans Bernhard and lizvlx 2018, n.pag.)

Foriginal Media Hacks (2006–07)

UBERMORGEN.COM use the term foriginal broadly to refer to legal documents that are machine generated, a practice that they developed during *[V]ote-auction* and can be seen in the *Generator Tetralogy* (2000–09). The word is a portmanteau of 'to forge' and 'original' (Quaranta 2015: 27); therefore a foriginal is the forged original produced by a machine to replicate the original. The videos *Foriginal Media Hack No.1* (2006) and *Foriginal Media Hack No.2* (2007) are both presumed documentary material shot on mobile phones and digital cameras and uploaded onto Google Video and YouTube. The aim is to document 'non-existent yet credible events' (Quaranta 2015: 27), which are highly plausible and can be understood as a reality

belonging to someone else. lizvlx states that she uses existing stories from 'a reality that is hidden' (Hans Bernhard and lizvlx 2018: n.pag.).

In *Foriginal Media Hack No.1* (2006) a group of unknown individuals beat up a policeman during riots in Berlin, Kreuzberg, on 1 May 2006 and in *Foriginal Media Hack No.2* (2007) a group of policemen attacked a protestor in a wheelchair in Rostock, Germany, on 2 June 2007 during the G8 Summit. The duo controlled the distributions through adopted identities and employed actors and stunt men to create these scenes of violence. The low-resolution appearance of the videos suggests illicit filming, especially in the case of Hack No. 2. For both videos, the viewer is orientated towards authenticity because of the use of mobile phones and digital cameras, which reflect how this event would have been experienced in real life, again rendering it plausible enough. In a statement on the pair's website, they claim that this was an exercise in 'how to infiltrate mass media with low-tech instruments […] and ambiguous data. This action is an experiment within this conceptual setting. It is a [*sic*] amalgamation of fact and fiction' (UBERMORGEN.COM n.d.: n.pag.).

These tactics directly engage with methods used by the alt-right. The video *With Open Gates: The Forced Collective Suicide of European Nations* (JeffreyM 2017) went viral in November 2015 after its upload to YouTube by the user Death of Nations and was endorsed by the far right-wing online news outlet Breitbart. This video was a response to the Paris terrorist attacks in November 2015. The video presented itself as fact and took the form of a collage of distressing and disturbing scenes of unrest. The voice-over suggests that these scenes are instances of the so-called invasion of Europe by non-Europeans. However, sources such as Vice and

forums on Reddit have traced the source of the original videos. Although the videos clearly depict horrifying acts of violence, not one video is of refugees rebelling. It is evidently a form of racist propaganda in which existing videos have been remixed to present an alternate reality that supports the views of 'Death of Nations' and the far-right agenda. As the video is plausible enough people who viewed and shared the video did not view this as a factually unsound piece of propaganda. It was experienced as real or real enough to support their views. However, with UBERMORGEN.COM's *Foriginal Media Hacks* (2006–07) there was no intent or specific political comment or action; the videos acted as a demonstration of how to subvert the media.

Binary Primitivism and Press Release Series (2016–present)

In the ongoing project *Binary Primitivism* (2016–present) the duo target specific social groups via the largely anonymous image-sharing site or imageboard, 4chan. Comprising of different message boards or microsites, each of 4chan's boards has its own agendas and moderation guidelines. The most famous is the /b/ or random board and the /pol/ or politically incorrect board with these boards associated with the group known as the alt-right. Inserting images onto selected 4chan boards or self-help forums on message board websites, such as Mumsnet or Reddit, is returning UBERMORGEN.COM's work to the site specificity of the Internet by creating pieces that only exist within this remit. This situates their practice within technological-infrastructure for the audience of online forums and boards rather than museums or galleries. They are also developing what this article refers to as the

Press Release Series (2016–present); as the title suggests the series of seven press

releases to date are narrative in nature, but are also nonsensical because they are

collated using the tactic of text mining. The mined text is then combined with

irrelevant images often selected in reference to online culture. The e-mail becomes

reflective of the online experience of text and image misaligned or as fractious

fluctuating forms of digital debris that become parafictive in nature. One text

discusses transhumanism from which the image is completely disconnected and the

image captions are random and obscure; one caption reads 'Speed Seduction. Was

Prince Murdered?' (UBERMORGEN.COM 2017: n.pag.). The series is the duo

repositioning themselves beyond their all so familiar actions, remixing existing

content to portray a new or potential truth or perhaps a truth belonging to someone

else. As Hans Bernhard suggests:

> beyond the action that there is truth and the truth is pure and simple,
>
> repeatable verifiable patterns. It is just a statement yeah? […] But it is […] a
>
> repositioning of UBERMORGEN.COM, these truths are like laws. They are
>
> rules, but that at the same time they are completely delusional, they are
>
> completely illusion, we know that, they are broken up. (Hans Bernhard and
>
> lizvlx 2018: n.pag.)

With these new truths what we as viewers are receiving is information removed from

its original context and only loosely based on fact. With *Binary Primitivism* and *Press*

Release Series (2016–present) and in works such as Rachel Maclean's *Spite Your*

Face (2017) and Ian Cheng's *Emissaries* (2015–16) parafictions have shifted,

becoming less plausible and less real, a shift that is reflected in politics, now they

have become unconcerned with replicating truth. This lack of plausibility reflects the fractious nature of the real world and the dark affects and aspects of the Internet and technological infrastructure.

UBERMORGEN.COM's actions and pieces exist within a time paradox where UBERMORGEN.COM and Trump are inherently linked. As lizvlx says

> it is kind of a weird correlation because it spans over time and so of course if you look at it now, there is not really any connection but if you just get rid of the timeline then of course any of the things that he does, any techniques we would have used in the late 90s, early 2000s. (Hans Bernhard and lizvlx 2018: .n.pag.)

In this instance Hans Bernhard agrees, 'we have acted in different fields but with exactly the same strategies and I really really appreciate Donald Trump on this level' (Hans Bernhard and lizvlx 2018: n.pag.). He confirms the connection:

> [t]he parallel to UBERMORGEN and Donald Trump is that it is basically an experimental set driven by personal curiosity or personal needs that's why I talked about the psychopathologies […] because Trump is experimenting, he is real time experimenting. And, he is working with narcissistic filters, feedback loops, he needs constant gratification, instant gratification and constant affirmation and he decides based on that and that sometimes he makes basically seemingly random decisions but they are not they are just strategies that we don't understand. (Hans Bernhard and lizvlx 2018 n.pag.)

This connection has resulted in UBERMORGEN.COM changing their strategies and techniques so that they are not associated with fascism or the right wing. They have repositioned themselves in a space between methods of communication, within the layers of the stack to alter existing information and engineer alternative results.

Conclusion

This article has used the concept of the stack to provide a framework for how technological infrastructure operates at its now planetary scale and discussed how the implementation of hypernormalization has combined to create a space where parafictions exist. The application of the stack in an art historical context is unique to this research and to my Ph.D. research as a whole. This article is formed from an aspect of my Ph.D., which is provisionally titled 'Parafictions: A typology of artistic engagement with the construction of truth 1998–2018'. The research provides distinct typologies of parafictions and modern art historical precedents of parafictions in times of political unrest, social change and technological advancement.

By intrinsically linking parafictions, politics and technology, this article has examined the conditions that have led to parafictions becoming a significant mode of practice in contemporary art between 1998 and 2018. The socio-political and technological shifts evidenced qualify the renewed investigation into parafictions, specifically those occurring post 2008 that have occurred after Lambert-Beatty's initial article. During this time, there has been ten years of austerity in Europe and the United States after the global financial crisis and the use of social media has become ubiquitous. This

has opened up polarizing chasms of opinion and separated users into self-reflective silos in which truth is harder to establish. Replicating this, artists have begun to break with the real and parafictions have lost plausibility as a key aspect in the construction of truth. UBERMORGEN.COM are significant as a case study as their practice mirrors this shift with the believable *[V]ote-auction* (2000) to the surreal *Binary Primitivism* and *Press Release Series* (2016–present). This article demonstrates how politicians, through Twitter and artists via websites, e-mails, imageboards and YouTube, employ the tactics of denialism, post-denialism and perception management to antithetical ends. The application of artistic strategies for political gain makes this a vital tool in understanding the current age of fake news and so-called post-truth. It has examined why we often choose to accept a narrative over a truth by discussing how UBERMORGEN.COM have created potential futures and alternate realities with digital media. Through the analysis of UBERMORGEN.COM as one model of parafictive practice, this article has considered how artists are engaging with the experience of a fluctuating world and the parafictive paradoxes that creates.

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