Media-N

Introduction

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ABSTRACT

The guest editors introduce the issue, which looks at new media art as a way to critique and subvert existing systems of news and information media.

INTRODUCTION

As the highly contested term "fake news" has become omnipresent in our media sphere and as the hacking of private networks for political gain have dominated the global news cycle, Media-N's current issue is perfectly positioned to uncover the complex relationship between media art and the multifarious forms of news reportage. We find in this wide-ranging journal issue, new media artists, writers, and theoreticians attempting to reveal, expose, and protest the production, rhetoric, and dissemination of news. Exploiting or subverting the existing network or creating alternative technologies, codes, or platforms, new media artists has probed the hegemonic grip of tradition forms of media production. Employing the raw material of journalism or intervening in the distribution and transmission of news information, artists have effectively critiqued or reimagined the unstable and fluid spaces of the contemporary news sphere. The nature of news information and its relationship to concepts of reality, truth, aesthetics, and the public and private are all at play in this issue. As way to better navigate the diversity of the expansive media world, this issue's collection of essays, reviews, and interviews has been divided into three thematic sections, with each accompanied by an introduction.

Uncovering News commences with an initial section, "News Rush: Confrontations with Journalism and Reportage," devoted to various ways in which new media art and discourse confronts, challenges, and critiques mainstream journalism from the 1960s to the present. The continuity of the theme of radicalism throughout section I is striking, and suggests that one crucial concern or function of new media art may be to create vehicles of anti- or counter-news which concretize audience-based dissent of news outlets. Erica Levin's essay "Social Media and the New Newsreel," analyzes a series of short digital videos made in the past decade by two filmmakers, Jem Cohen and Alex Johnston, which consciously take up cinematic memories of early 20th century journalistic formats in order to "negotiate the temporality of network crisis"

that characterizes mainstream news currently. Rather than evoking the outmoded newsreel as a mere function of nostalgia, Levin asserts that this revisitation of a dated medium stems from the need for a paradigm that can express the fluctuations of unity and disunity that protest collectives, such as the Occupy movement, encounter today. Also in section I, multimedia artist and composer Randall Packer details his ongoing efforts to "disrupt the broadcast" since the turn of the millennium through a wide array of détournements and remixes of media culture seeking to expose the system of paranoid disinformation that news markets thrive upon. Through performance, online projects, and blogging, Packer has created an astounding array of works, often in collaboration with others, that seek outright to subvert manipulative journalism through critical "citizen-journalism." In projects such as *US Department of Art & Technology* (2001-2005), *Media Deconstruction Kit* (2003-2004), *A Season in Hell* (2005-2010), and *The Post Reality Show* (2010-present), Packer wields the tools of appropriation in order to alter and rebroadcast live cable news through the internet, with the ultimate goal of "shocking" the viewer out of passive acceptance of information "contamination" by mainstream media. Offering historical perspective for the recent productions discussed by Levin and Packer is Kris Paulsen's review of Jenny Raskin and Jon Nealon's 2015 documentary, *Here Come the Videofreex*, a chronological history of the Videofreex guerrilla media collective in the United States during the 1960s and 70s. Paulsen's discussion of the film puts the important work of the Videofreex collective into context with the digital era, and clarifies their essential contribution of pirate broadcasting as one of radical autonomy from media markets. Section I concludes with Erin McElroy's discussion of the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP), a collaborative digital initiative she co-founded in 2013 in order to battle urban gentrification and eviction caused in large part by the tech boom. According to McElroy, the AEMP battled racial and economic dispossession through tactics of agency: "Projects like this one utilized digital mapping technologies to provide interactive cartographies and spatial analyses useful for fighting displacement."

In section II, "Data, Propaganda, and Discourse Controls," Brandon Bauer, Lisa Moren and Rick Valentin grapple with the ways in which media outlets significantly shape and alter information in the very process of dissemination. Like the submissions in section I, subversion continues as a theme, with an added emphasis upon how users in an audience can themselves actively contribute to, limit, or intervene in the reception of journalistic data. Bauer's "Landscapes of Absence" describes a project in which he appropriates online footage from ISIS propaganda videos of eight beheading incidents and erases the human presence, leaving only the landscape visible. According to Bauer: "While there is an important lineage of erasure in modern and contemporary art, this project uses erasure for a different end… as a way to reassert dignity." In a series of photographic prints, a single-channel video, and an accompanying publication, Bauer reroutes iconoclasm into an anti-violent protest by removing the "dehumanized" record of beheadings in appropriated footage. Lisa Moren's essay "Algorithmic Pollution, Artists Working with Data, Surveillance and Landscape" looks at the work of several contemporary artists and artist teams such as Sheldon Brown, Preemptive Media, Hasan Elahi, and Lexie Mountain, in an extended discussion about the significance of post-consumption agency and creativity in the pursuit of "reverse-surveillance tactics." Drawing upon Michel Foucault's theories of discipline and Gilles Deleuze's writings about control in contemporary society, Moren asserts that new media artists invoke fluctuating, living forms of meaning in complex mediated discourses rather than the frozen and predetermined ones so often resultant from data algorithms. Rick Valentin is similarly concerned with the ways in which audiences are able to "edit" news in his "Top Two News

Words (By Hour)." Starting in 2007, this project featured a computer and a dot matrix printer connected to an online parsing routine that gleaned from fifteen different major news sources on an hourly basis. The results are analyzed and reduced by the program, resulting in the printout of a continuous sheet of paper that showed the two most frequently occurring words—in Valentin's words "creating a linear document of the 24/7/365 news cycle." For Valentin, this "parasitic work of art by its very nature" helps raise and to some degree respond to contestatory dialogues about contemporary news consumption and curation.

Francesca Franco opens section III with a comprehensive interview with renowned artist and media critic, Alessandro Ludovico. Ludovico's role as the editor-in-chief of the groundbreaking magazine *Neural* has remained an important vehicle for the dissemination of new media practices for over two decades. Franco allows Ludovico to trace the evolution of the magazine as it developed a wide readership for those interested in new media art, sound art, and internet activism. Through this interview we get insight into how the platform exemplified the aesthetic of the digital age, promoted social change through its various hosted events, including hacklabs and interventions, and developed a collaborative spirit and mission based on global connectivity. Following the Ludovico interview, Yasuhito Abe's insightful essay, "Why Manga Matters after Fukushima," examines manga in post-Fukushima Japanese society. As one of the most prominent and widely circulated forms of cultural expression in Japan, manga had built a particular aesthetic around forms of atomic destruction, including Hiroshima and Chernobyl. Through the analysis of *Ichi Efu*, a non-fiction narrative based on the experiences of the Fukushima cleanup worker Kazuto Tatsuta, the author is able to investigate how particular forms of manga move across media and circulate globally to become a transformative force. The metaphor of transformation also plays a major part of Mina Cheon's review of the 2016 SeMA Biennale at Mediacity, Seoul. Cheon provides insight into the intersecting ideas and practices that make up the exhibitions, programs, and residencies held in the numerous buildings of Seoul Museum of Art. In her review, Cheon carefully unpacks the philosophical underpinnings of the Biennale, beginning first with the exhibition's stylized title *NERIRI KIRURU HARARA*. Roughly translated as "Two Billion Light Years of Solitude" (the line is inspired by a 1952 Japanese poem by Tanikawa Shuntaro), the title gives a clue to the expansive and interstellar nature of the Biennale. Through the metaphor of the alien, or Martians, the Biennale's curator and director, Beck Jee-sook, seeks new artistic languages to explore forgotten and estranged pasts and to shape new unexplored futures. The final essay of section III, entitled "Creative Data Mining *Diamonds in Dystopia*," describes a series of collaborative performances by interdisciplinary practitioners Allison, Cellucci, and Ostrenko. This ambitious series of performances extends the creative possibilities of the popular TED Talk format. Since its inception in 1984, the TED Talk had developed into a fairly standardized new media form, commonly centered on high-profile curated presentation. In the *Diamonds in Dystopia* improvisational performances, the artists introduce multiple levels of audience participation powered by web and mobile technology, and through complex orchestration the artists are able to synthesize art, music, and poetry. Importantly, the authors provide the technical attributes, such as the all-important 'creative data mining' function that drives this experimental project.

AUTHOR BIO

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of *Media*-N since 2014 and a member of CAA's New Media Caucus Board of Directors since 2015. Her essays, interviews and reviews of media art and aesthetics have appeared in *The Journal of Curatorial Studies* (2012), *Public: Art, Culture, Ideas* (2012), *The Senses & Society* (2013), *Journal of Curatorial Studies* (2013), *Meta- and Inter-Images in Contemporary Visual Art and Culture* (2013), *Media*-N (2014 and 2016), *Art2Drone* (v1b3, 2015), and *ISEA Conference Proceedings* (2015).

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