Propaganda Art in the 21st Century

JONAS STAAL

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This book is dedicated to my parents.

My mother, Michèle, the environmentalist,

My father, Henk, the socialist,

My stepfather, Gerard, the pilgrim.

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INTRODUCTION

My name is Jonas Staal and I am a propaganda artist. This book deals with the question of what that statement entails by considering the negative historical associations that the term evokes, which resonate strongly with the various authoritarian forms of government emerging the world over, from Erdoğan to Trump, with their own newspeak vocabulary of "fake news" and "alternative facts." What is propaganda and what is propaganda art today? I will argue that propaganda can be defined as the performance of power, and propaganda art as the performance of power as art. Here, the notion of performance has a dual meaning. On one hand, it relates to performance as an *enactment*: the activation of infrastructures of power, ranging from politics to the military-industrial complex, with the aim of constructing reality after a specific set of interests. On the other hand, we will be dealing with performance as a *narrative power*: the process of visualizing, staging, and performing the new realities that propaganda brings about.

If, based on this definition, we ask the question of what it means to be a propaganda artist, then the answer depends on the kind of power we are dealing with. Being a propaganda artist for the Trump regime, for example, as with Steve Bannon's cinematic work, is evidently different from acting as a propaganda artist for the revolutionary underground of the Philippines, as with the protest puppetry of the UGATLahi Artist Collective. As structures of power and the kind of realities they aim to bring about differ, so does propaganda, and, consequently, propaganda art. For this reason, I will insist on speaking of *propagandas* in the plural throughout this book. Our reality is constructed, in part,

from these various and at times conflicting propagandas. This is a process that I will come to refer to as the *propaganda struggle*.

The term propaganda is easily used to decry a work of socialist realism, a Nazi film production, or a leftist agitprop poster. But it's misleading to think that propaganda can be defined through a singular object or artwork. Propaganda is aimed not only at communicating a message, but at constructing reality itself. As I will attempt to establish, it is only when a master narrative—a set of values and ideas—aims to become omnipresent, to become a *norm*, that can we speak of propaganda. This process of constructing a reality takes place on vastly different scales, from the classroom to the theaters of war.

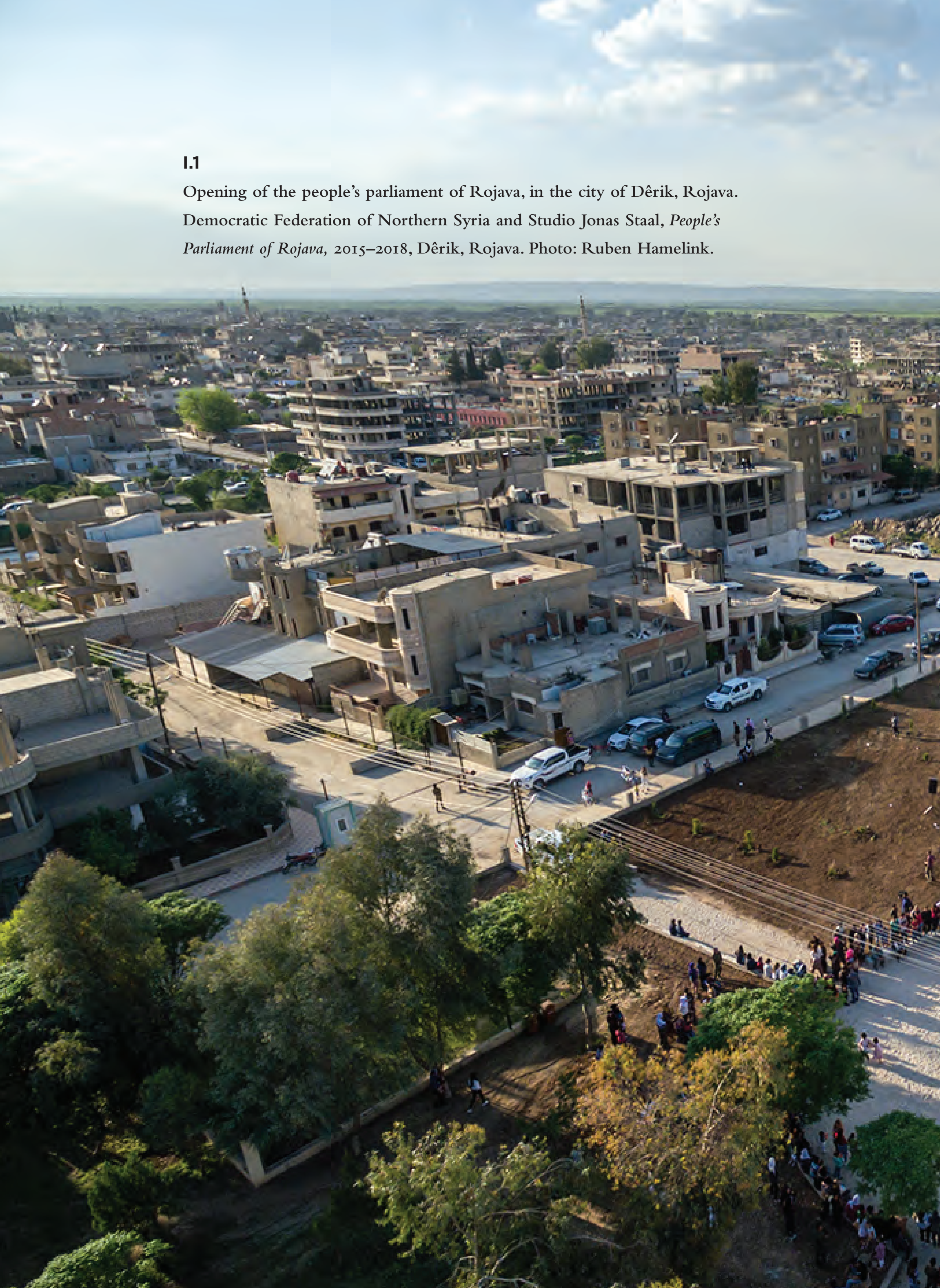
Propaganda thus has a *micro-performative* and *macro-performative* dimension. On a microscale, the worldview that propaganda aims to institute is internalized on a day-to-day level. It manifests in the films we watch, in our dinner table conversations, and even in our voting decisions. On a macroscale, the aim of propaganda is to enable massive processes of transformation, from toppling governments to establishing mass surveillance and instigating global warfare. Propaganda must work on both the smallest and the largest scale in order to successfully transform existing reality anew. In other words, propaganda is performed on us on a macroscale, but to become sustainable it needs us to participate and contribute to this performance on a microscale as well.

To analyze propaganda and its micro- and macro-performative scales, I will use the propaganda model developed by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman in the late eighties. This model analyzes propaganda through what they refer to as *propaganda filters*, which represent the interests of power in the process of *manufacturing consent*—that is, the process of shaping a new normative reality that serves the interests of elite power. I will also argue, however, that this model has severe blind spots as it caters only to dominant forms of monopolized elite power in politics, the media, the economy, and the military-industrial

complex. Popular mass movements, for example, represent forms of emerging power, and with their aim of democratizing society they also hope to establish new norms in the process of constructing a new reality. Yet these movements have been absent from this propaganda model or framed as producers of *counter-propaganda*, instead of being theorized on their own terms as creators of alternative forms of popular, emancipatory propaganda.

To analyze alternative formations of emerging power and their propaganda and propaganda art, I will propose an expansion of Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model, one that will allow us to explore the possibility of such forms of emancipatory propaganda. As Terry Eagleton argued, "The most efficient oppressor is the one who persuades his underlings to love, desire, and identify with his power; and any practice of political emancipation thus involves that most difficult of all forms of liberation, freeing ourselves from ourselves."[1] To liberate ourselves from what we think the world is in order to enable the collective imagination of what we want it to become, is the fundamental difference between what I will discuss as an *elite* versus a *popular* propaganda.

The artistic component of propaganda sometimes conflicts with common definitions of art in the context of galleries, contemporary art centers, and museums. To construct reality, propaganda makes use of multidisciplinary means. As we will see throughout different examples in this book, this can translate to propaganda art through a painting, a graphic or architectural design, a theater play, a film, or even a videogame. Many forms of propaganda art even generate new genres of their own. One such example is the category of *state abstractions* in War on Terror propaganda art, which orchestrate the complete disappearance of previously public archives, geographies, and even human bodies in the name of national security. Here, both our material world and our imaginative understanding of our world turn into a canvass of sorts. But such new categories equally emerge from



I.1

Opening of the people's parliament of Rojava, in the city of Dêrik, Rojava. Democratic Federation of Northern Syria and Studio Jonas Staal, *People's Parliament of Rojava,* 2015–2018, Dêrik, Rojava. Photo: Ruben Hamelink.

popular propaganda art and often in direct opposition to the realities imposed through the War on Terror, such as the genre of *embedded art*, which describes the work of artists who engage directly with popular mass movements in order to contribute to the strengthening of their symbols and (counter)narratives.

Different structures of power enable us to consider different forms of morphological practices as art, each with its own genres and expertise. This, of course, is nothing new. The very notion of the *autonomy* of art was a product of the French Revolution, in which many artists actively participated. The first French Republic broke the elite monopoly of art, previously held by the monarchy, the church, and the bourgeoisie, by instating the first publicly accessible museums and establishing the first public subsidies for the arts. Revolution made a relative artistic autonomy a reality. Therefore, to understand what has been termed *art* throughout history, we must take into consideration the specific formations of power that enabled it to come into being in the first place. There is, in other words, a continuous exchange between different structures of power and different artistic forms. Much of modern and contemporary art can be analyzed in the context of propaganda art, but through the propaganda art lens we can also start to recognize forms of artistic practice that were previously not understood as art at all.

In that sense, propaganda art studies can be thought of as running parallel to the movement of Institutional Critique—the endeavor of artists from the seventies onward to investigate the social, political, economic, and ideological conditions that have shaped the production, distribution, and validation of artworks. From artists such as Hans Haacke and Andrea Fraser, Institutional Critique broke with the supposed neutrality of the institution of art. "We are all always already serving," argued Fraser.[2] But from the perspective of propaganda art studies and propaganda work, we can expand on her statement by asking: who could we serve otherwise and differently? What new morphologies of art can

I.2

Professor Jose Maria Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, lectures at the New World Academy. Jonas Staal and BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, *New World Academy,* 2013, Utrecht. Photo: Ernie Buts.

we come to recognize through the lens of propaganda art? And what can they teach us about both the way our realities are constructed and how to construct them differently?

Upton Sinclair, to whom I will return several times throughout this book, provocatively claimed that "all art is propaganda," as art had always had a dependent relation to dominant ruling powers. Art, from his perspective, was stuck in the prehistory of capitalism, but socialist revolutions emerging across the world provided artists with a chance to break their chains and side with those making new worlds instead. Not making art in the world as it is, but instead contributing to make a new world through art, would be the task at hand. From its historical ontology as an elite propaganda, art would now have the chance to serve as popular propaganda, employing its imaginative capacities to strengthen popular uprisings in the process of creating a new egalitarian world.

Of course, Sinclair was right in the sense that there is not an artwork in the world that is not affected by dominant structures of power, one way or another. In that sense, the history of art is also the history of propaganda art. Even a landscape painter accepts the reduction of their artistic labor to a commodified object, upon which a market can speculate excessively. But at the same time, such generalizations don't bring us much, as it would essentially mean that we could analyze every artwork as propaganda, just as we could argue that every idea in the world has some link to a larger ideological construct. What is more interesting, and more important, is that we must discuss the forms of propaganda and propaganda art that shape and construct the realities we live in on a substantial scale. In that light, the propagandistic dimension of a landscape painting is of lesser importance than the propagandistic role of alt-right cinema or artistic campaigns in stateless uprisings. The former affirms minor aspects of the world as we know it, the latter engage in the making of worlds with the highest possible stakes. Essentially, understanding propaganda and propaganda art means to grasp

the conditions through which reality is constructed. Propaganda studies are thus far from innocent, as they simultaneously study *and* teach the art of world-making.

Today the art of propaganda is of more importance than ever. Faced with the now eighteen-year-long War on Terror, the rise of ultranationalist and alt-right regimes the world over, massive refugee crises, structural racism, a growing global precariat, and the existential threat of climate change, we are better to understand how ruling elites have been able to shape our world according to their interests. And simultaneously, we have an obligation to understand how popular mass movements and their propagandas have aimed to challenge these elites, by trying to employ popular power to construct other worlds instead. To do so, three elements of propaganda and propaganda art will be crucial throughout this book: the control over infrastructure, the control over narrative, and the control over imagination. Because to construct reality we need power, we need a story of the world we aim to create, and we need a vision of what that world will come to look like.

In the first chapter, I will explore a short history of the relation between propaganda and democracy, aiming to demythologize the idea that liberal and capitalist democracies are somehow beyond propaganda, or that propaganda belongs exclusively to a totalitarian past. In the second chapter, I will propose a short narration of the way different structures of power have been performed as art from past to (our recent) present, and how each has manifested in different forms of propaganda art; from avant-garde to totalitarian and modernist propaganda art. The third chapter investigates the role of art in War on Terror propaganda, and how it contributes to an ongoing economy of terror that sustains the central trope of the "Us versus Them" dichotomy. The fourth chapter will focus on artistic and cultural productions developed in popular mass movements of the twenty-first century, often in direct response to the increasing conditions of

artist organisations
are founded
by artists
artist organisations seek for
structural engagement with
social and political issues

I.3

Lisa Ito, representative of the Concerned Artists of the Philippines, speaks at the Artist Organizations International in Berlin. Florian Malzacher, Jonas Staal, and Joanna Warsza, *Artist Organizations International,* 2015, HAU Theater, Berlin. Photo: Lidia Rossner.

precarity for which the War on Terror is partially responsible. In the fifth chapter, I will discuss propaganda art developed in stateless movements based on primary sources acquired through the fieldwork and interviews I conducted with several stateless artists from Azawad to West Kurdistan. Finally, I will present a conclusion in which I emphasize the importance of the future development of propaganda studies and propaganda work in the twenty-first century.

I started this short introduction with a statement. Being a propaganda artist, for me, means to acknowledge the direct relation between art and power. That does not mean, however, that art and power are one and the same. From the French to the Russian to the Rojavan revolutions, we witness an ongoing exchange between power and form. Art shapes the symbols and culture of new regimes of power, and new regimes of power shape the conditions for the creation of art. The morphological competences of a propaganda artist—a visual literacy that enables reading and dialogue through form—differ from political competences, yet that does not mean that one does not influence the other directly (or that one could not be both an artist *and* a politician or revolutionary for that matter). As a result, a propaganda artist takes both an aesthetic and political position in the practice of world-making.

Over the past several years, I have worked directly with political parties, civil society platforms, and popular mass movements, the results of which are documented through photographs in this introduction. In 2012, I founded the New World Summit, an artistic and political organization that develops parliaments for stateless and blacklisted organizations, leading to a commission from the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria to conceive a new public "people's parliament" in their autonomous region of Rojava. With BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, I cofounded the New World Academy (2013–2016), where artists from stateless and progressive political organizations taught artists and students about the role of art in political struggle—a kind of

emancipatory propaganda art school of sorts. With Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza, I organized the Artist Organizations International (2015) in the HAU Theater, Berlin, which aimed to explore the possibilities of a transnational union of artist organizations. And since 2016, I have engaged my New Unions campaign to support Pan-European organizations, among others, by creating the campaign assemblies for the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25). I therefore have an embodied experience of what it means to work within different structures of power, while having also participated directly in the process in which power is performed as art. It is then no stretch to contend that this book about propaganda art could not have been written without my experience as an artist who researches the role of art in dominant forms of elite power, and who also makes propaganda art within emergent popular powers.

Those who lead the propaganda effort in opposing the exploration of the emancipatory potentialities of propaganda art will predictably claim that this makes me a willful instrument of power, and that it is exactly this type of instrumentalization that should be rejected in its entirety in order for art to be art proper. Such voices claim to defend art's liberty and autonomy, but what exactly does this liberty entail when we stand idly by while a new authoritarian world order is rising to power? Is the disengagement on art's part not simply a complicit blessing of the powers that be? I will argue that art has been a constitutive part of the realities with which we live today, and while that means that art is complicit in the various existential disasters we face, as I will discuss throughout this book, it also means it has a true power. Recognizing, claiming, and putting into practice the emancipatory potential of this power is what I believe will contribute to our collective freedom and autonomy.

My hope is that this book will provide the reader with models, concepts, and examples of propaganda art, in order to better understand how our realities are constructed today. I further hope it will spark indignation toward the growing authoritarian

ΔΗΜΟΣΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΑ
DiEM25

1.4

Yanis Varoufakis, cofounder of the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25), stands in the New Unions installation, during the launch of the Athens chapter of DiEM25. Studio Jonas Staal and DiEM25, New Unions: DiEM25, Athens, 2017, Sporting Basket Arena, Athens. Photo: Jonas Staal.

forces that are taking power all over the globe, at a terrifying human cost. Finally, I hope this book will trigger curiosity for the many artists who work in popular and stateless movements, artists who show us a "world of many worlds," and who challenge us all to take part in the process of collectively authoring our own realities.[3]

1

PROPAGANDA AND DEMOCRACY, A SHORT HISTORY

Whatever Happened to Propaganda?

Whatever happened to propaganda? If we are to believe popular media, propaganda was born and died with the rise and fall of twentieth-century dictatorships. The term recalls the mass theater of Nazi party congresses filmed by Leni Riefenstahl, monumental sculptures of Stalin, and agitprop posters and paintings depicting hysterically joyous workers celebrating their leaders and state. When we say, "This is propaganda," or "That person is a propagandist," we tend to mean manipulation, lies, and deceit, which bring to mind the worst historical examples of state terror. At the same time, however, propaganda is considered somewhat old-fashioned—as if it can only refer retrospectively to the age of totalitarianism, rather than to contemporary politics. When the term is employed in newspapers or television items today, it is largely applied to regimes such as those in Turkey and Russia, or the so-called Islamic State—forms of governance and political organization whose respective histories in the Ottoman Empire, the Soviet Union, or religious fundamentalism are associated with aggressive expansion, histories of mass persecution, and terrorist campaigns. While one can certainly say that propaganda plays a key role in these different examples, the assumption that only these regimes use propaganda and that democracy does not is highly problematic. Instead, I will argue that what we are dealing with here are different propagandas in the plural.[1]

When the term propaganda is occasionally applied to democracies, there is still a sense that this propaganda is of a better kind than the aggressive agitprop of the past.[2] One terrifying example is the 2003 invasion of Iraq led by the United States and its so-called Coalition of the Willing. The invasion was based on the false narrative that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, a justification that in the end proved to be something of a true lie, as the United States had provided chemical weapons to the regime twenty years earlier to support Hussein in the Iraq-Iran war. The 2016 election of Donald Trump as president of the United States has provided the possibility of revisiting the role of propaganda in democracy once again. Trump's claims that critical media belongs to the domain of fake news, as well as his own administration's counterarguments in the form of alternative facts, invoke textbook methods of authoritarian propaganda that have been deemed part of a "post-truth" era of politics.[3] Nonetheless, opposition politics and established media, as well as befriended nations, are hesitant to use the term propaganda in fear of being biased or losing US support. That is possibly why South Korea's president, Moon Jae-in, suggested that Trump deserves a Nobel Peace Prize for engaging in diplomatic talks on denuclearization with North Korea. Yet Trump's obsession with his own intelligence, virility, and health—to the point of personally dictating to his doctor a report that claimed an excellent physical condition—makes him a strange capitalist double of Kim Jong-un's neo-Stalinist cult, rather than figuring him as its opposite.

With the exception of rare references to propaganda in democracies, far more comfort in using the term is shown in relation to the North Korean regime. Documentary filmmakers are rarely allowed into the country and are forced to follow the same government-sanctioned travel routes, where they tend to point toward the obvious: the way in which the regime boasts about its military force, the leadership cult of the Kim dynasty displayed through its media, megalomaniac public sculptures, and grotesque musicals that celebrate the regime.[4] But the North Korean

regime is also portrayed with a lot of irony, as Western democratic citizens and their media pundits smirk at the idea that these brainwashed subjects of a totalitarian state actually believe the lies fed to them. Paintings from North Korea—displaying its heroic leaders and soldiers, its phantasmatic industrial progress, and delirious and committed workers—travel around the world under the guise of informative exhibitions. Yet they seem more like mockeries, a strange variation of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibitions set up by the Nazi regime.[5] These exhibitions strengthen the belief that *we*, the West, can see through the obvious propaganda schemes, while *they*, poor subjects of archaic communism, live in a manufactured world of lies and deceit.[6] Rather than being displayed as examples of propaganda from the North Korean regime, they are displayed as propaganda for what democracy is *not*.[7]

The very idea that one could stand outside of propaganda, recognize it, and as such resist it, merely because one lives in a democracy, is itself the product of propaganda. Exploring the relationship between democracy and propaganda does not mean that democracy can be equated with dictatorship. Modern propaganda is the product of societies that went through the process of industrial revolution—or that have been severely affected by it through colonial practices or warfare—and where a certain level of technological infrastructure and means of mass communication are present or within reach. This does not mean that propaganda is always used in the same way, that it serves the same purpose, or that it is necessarily an *evil* phenomenon. Rather, we should understand it as an inherent part of modernity—although, *modernity* is a term that I will subject to different, sometimes conflictual readings.

Furthermore, my use of the word *democracy* is a critical one. Democracy's egalitarian ideals did not stop the Athenian Agora, the Age of Enlightenment, or present-day Western democracies from instigating colonialism, slavery, and global warfare. Democracy was always applied only to a relatively limited class

1.1

View of the exhibition entry to *The World According to Kim Jong-il*, 2004, at the Kunsthal, Rotterdam. Photo: John Stoel.

위대한

of designated and privileged citizens. The fact that Erdoğan, Trump, and Putin—who propagates his own concept of "sovereign democracy," developed by his ideologue and trained theater director Vladimir Surkov—operate within supposedly democratic states has not stopped these authoritarian leaders from abusing power.[8] In many cases, dictatorships can very well operate with a democratic front. Similarly, ultranationalist and fascist parties in twenty-first-century Europe manifest within systems of parliamentary democracy—from the Orbán regime in Hungary (which propagates its own "illiberal democracy") to that of the Law and Justice Party in Poland, the Freedom Party in Austria, and the League in Italy. Differing from fascism's disregard of democracy in the previous century, democratic fascism today has gained power through elections without having to overthrow an existing regime. To state this is to make the point that we need to demythologize democracy in the process of exploring its relation to propaganda and propaganda art.

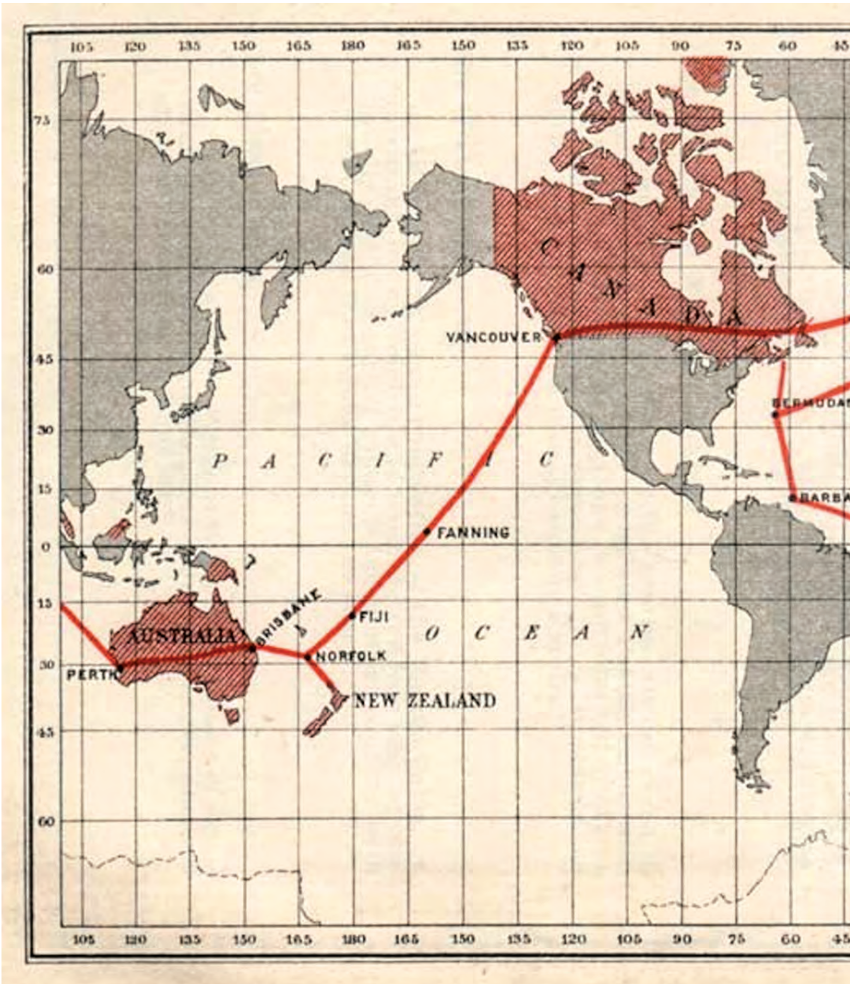
The Emergence of Modern Propaganda

The question of when propaganda came into use is contested. There are even those who argue that from the first cave paintings onward, humans began to propagate their emerging structures of power through images and symbols.[9] In Latin the term propaganda means "to propagate" or "to sow," and until the sixteenth century it was employed in the field of biology to describe the reproduction of plants and animals. It became actively used in the sphere of religion in 1622, when Pope Gregory XV established the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide in order to spread Roman Catholicism amongst nonbelievers. Later, Pope Urban VIII further entrenched the religious genealogy of the term by establishing the Pontificio Collegio Urbano de Propaganda Fide to train missionaries in 1627.[10] This would also lay the foundations for a more negative interpretation of the term, used to describe

unofficial forms of secret societies, further fueled by Protestant hostility toward Catholicism in Northern Europe and the United States. Throughout the course of this book, I will additionally introduce how parallel discourses on propaganda, which do not fit this negative connotation of manipulation and persuasion, took hold.

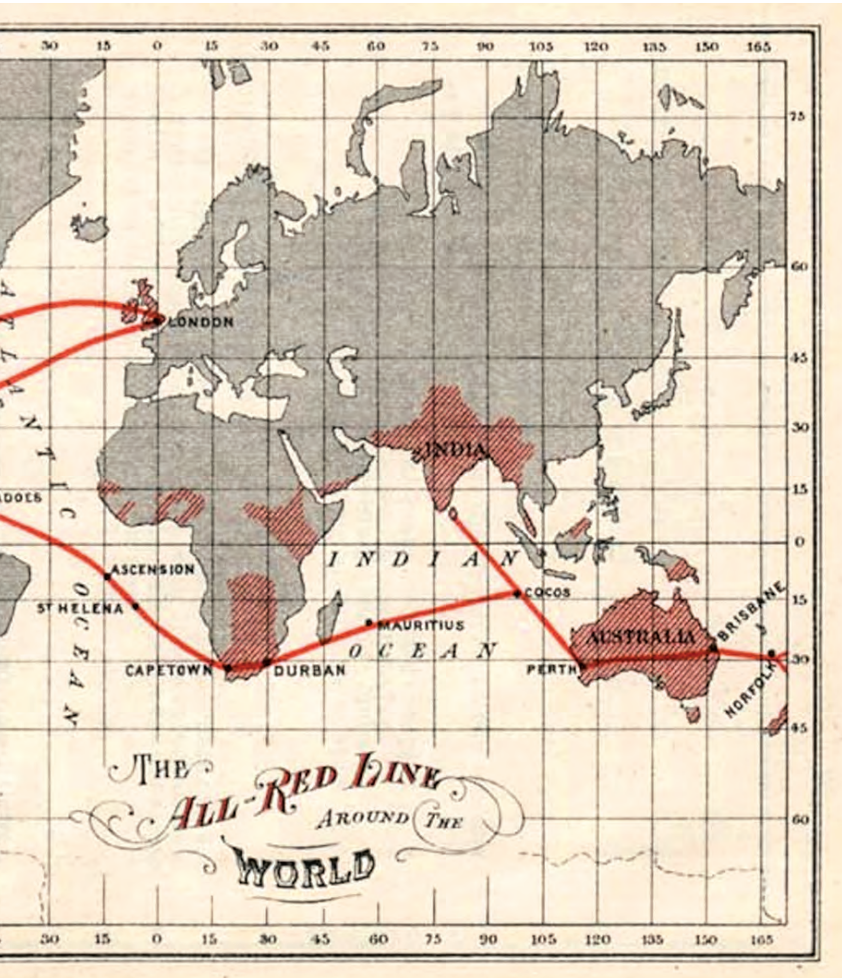
What I will focus on now, however, is modern and contemporary propaganda, which we can trace back to the end of the Second Industrial Revolution and the beginning of the First World War, when industrial and technological achievements created the conditions for a new age of mass communication. It is here that we encounter a convergence between politics, the military, and forms of mass media, which would fundamentally alter our understanding of the world. This convergence is marked by a specific moment, when on August 4, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany and cut several of its All Red Line electric telegraph cables connecting its colonial empire, which until that moment had allowed Germany a direct communication link with the United States.[11] Although covert communication and information manipulation are as old as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, never before had it taken place at such a massive scale and with such an enormous impact. Britain had essentially created an enormous information filter that allowed it to monitor and control information channels in order to shape the outcome of the war to its advantage, thereby forcing the Germans to use unsecured communication channels. What the All Red Line was to 1914 is what the National Security Agency (NSA) and Cambridge Analytica are to the early twenty-first century. Their common aim is not just to send information, but to monopolize the infrastructure through which information is produced, shared, interpreted, and validated.

In order to sell the hesitant British and neutral Americans a war, while maintaining the public perception of an open, free, and evolving democracy, the British established their first propaganda bureau, which operated from 1914 to 1917 at Wellington House in



1.2

1902 British All Red Line map, in *The All Red Line—The Annals and Aims of the Pacific Cable Project* by George Johnson (Ottowa: Hope, 1903).


LONDON
INDIA
ASCENSION
ST HELENA
CAPETOWN
DURBAN
MAURITIUS
COCOS
PERTH
AUSTRALIA
BRISBANE
NORFOLK
INDIAN
OCEAN
THE ALL-RED LINE AROUND THE WORLD

Buckingham Gate. The bureau worked under such secrecy that only very few members of parliament were even aware of its existence and operations. Its main work was focused on overseas targets, with an emphasis on the American elite of policy makers, academics, teachers, journalists, business owners, and media proprietors. Well aware of the mixed sentiments within the United States in regard to its former ruler, the bureau operated in such secrecy so as to avoid any weariness within the American public toward what might appear as the British calling upon their sympathies directly. Therefore, Wellington House disseminated materials that were not directly identifiable as propaganda, but which instead took the form of academically styled documents that only contained facts that did not damage its core narrative—that being the danger the German "Huns" posed to Europe and the world.[12]

One of the most important propaganda documents in this regard was Wellington House's "Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages," better known as the "Bryce Report," conducted by James Bryce, former British ambassador for the United States, and presented on May 12, 1915. With an air of apparent impartiality, the report described German atrocities based on the eyewitness accounts of Belgian refugees, with an emphasis on war crimes perpetrated against the citizenry, women, and children in particular, ranging from "the cutting of one or both hands" to "cases of slaughter (often accompanied by mutilation) of whole families, including not infrequently that of quite small children," and the "use of women and even children as a screen for the protection of the German troops."[13] The Bryce Report allowed for a seemingly objective frame that legitimated retaliatory violence, operating not so differently from the Bush administration's framing of Hussein as a barbaric leader and existential threat to the world order.

American president Woodrow Wilson declared war on April 6, 1917, and although the propaganda work of Wellington House cannot be given the weight of being the sole reason

for US involvement, it most certainly provided the legitimizing framework—the "master narrative," in the words of Terence McSweeney—by effectively portraying and manufacturing evidence of German deceit and atrocities.[14] This eventually encouraged the American people to support military participation. Therefore, on a macroscale, propaganda enabled a war of worldwide consequence, while on a microscale, it shaped the attitudes of elites and citizens alike, to become implicated in the war effort. As such, the manifestation of modern propaganda was not concerned with merely sending a message; it aimed to control infrastructures to shape our reality from the smallest to the largest scale.

Interwar Propaganda

A fundamental ideological problem emerged when the war ended, and the scope of the United Kingdom's propaganda operations, especially with regard to alleged German war crimes, became public knowledge. A war that had cost the lives of millions proved to be based, in part, on sophisticated covert management of information and blatant lies. The modern propaganda effort, engineered in defense of democracy, would prove to undermine the very legitimacy of democracy itself.[15]

In the meantime, one man in particular had become convinced that the Germans didn't lose the war as the result of a military defeat, but rather as the result of a propaganda defeat. In *Mein Kampf* (1925–1926), Adolf Hitler recalled his personal encounter with British propaganda and its demoralizing effect on German troops.[16] Hitler's anger at what he considered the failure of the German propaganda effort while fighting at the front was compensated by what he claimed to have learned from the propaganda efforts of the British. As he wrote, "For what we failed to do in this direction was made up by the enemy with really unheard-of skill and ingenious deliberation. I learned infinitely much more from the enemy's war propaganda."[17] These conclusions would

bring Hitler to take control of propaganda efforts himself when he joined the German Worker's Party after the First World War. During this time, he further developed his theory on the importance of propaganda in relation to political organization. He saw propaganda not just as a message of persuasion, but also as a means to completely change the organizational structures of society and thus reality, starting with the party's aim to take over the government:

> Propaganda works on the community in the sense of an idea and it makes it ripe for the time of the victory of this idea, while the organization conquers victory by the permanent, organic, and fighting union of those followers who appear able and willing to lead the fight for victory. The victory of an idea will be the more possible the more extensively propaganda works on people in their entirety.[18]

Although the spectacular scale of Wellington House's operations makes a legitimate case for it being the first fully functional modern propaganda bureau in history, it was not the only one. A week after Wilson declared war on Germany, the United States had established its own propaganda bureau, known as the Committee on Public Information (CPI), orchestrated under the directorship of George Creel. Compared to the covert propaganda effort of the British, known in propaganda studies as *black propaganda*, the output of the CPI was generally of a more overt nature, known as *white propaganda*. This also explains Creel's own characterization of the bureau not as a propaganda effort, but as a form of public information provision.[19] The idea that a *transparent* propaganda could coexist with democracy was a heated subject of the interwar debates in the United States.

A famous example is the debate between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey, sparked by Lippmann's book *Public Opinion* (1922). For Lippmann, the idea of democracy that was shaped in the Progressive Era could operate only in small-scale communities. The communication revolutions had instead transformed politics, trade, and war into affairs of geopolitics, which for most people

constituted an "invisible world" outside democratic control.[20] Propaganda, particularly through mass media, was a crucial tool in constructing what he calls "pseudo-environments," utilized to create a "barrier between the public and the event."[21] In order to ensure that citizens would have a "reliable picture of the world," Lippmann proposed the creation of an independent government department to guarantee controlled and factual access to public information, untouched by private interests.[22] Dewey disagreed, and responded as such in his 1922 review of Lippmann's book, published in *The Nation*:

> Of course, the expert organization for which Mr. Lippmann calls is inherently desirable. There is no questioning that fact. But his argument seems to me to exaggerate the importance of politics and political action, and also to evade the problem of how the latter is to be effectively directed by organized intelligence unless there is an accompanying direct enlightenment of popular opinion, as well as an ex post facto indirect instruction.[23]

Dewey believed that government-sanctioned information, however independent its providers may seem to be on paper, would run exactly the same risk of shaping information and public opinion based on its own interests. While recognizing the problems of modern propaganda and public opinion in modern democracy, Dewey instead emphasized the importance of journalism as a "fundamental general education" essential to the "enterprise of democracy."[24]

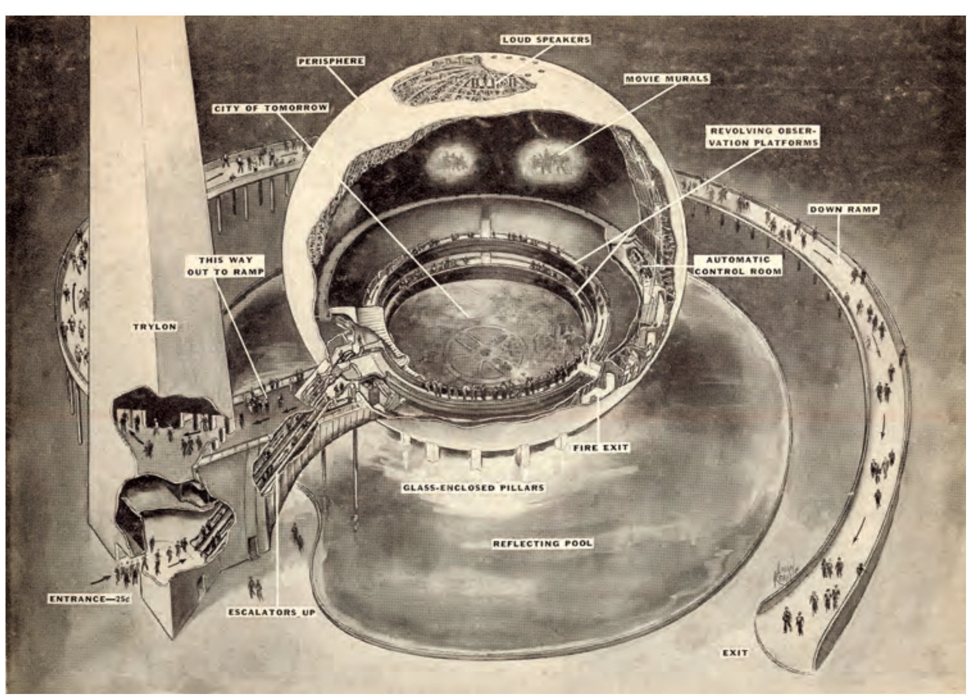
Possibly the strongest and most influential "propagandist for propaganda" was Edward Bernays, nephew of Sigmund Freud, who would popularize and capitalize heavily on his uncle's theories.[25] What Bernays coined as *public relations* was essentially a proposal to introduce the strategies of propaganda developed during wartime to reshape what he considered the problems of democracy during peacetime: the scattered and conflicting interests that defined modern society. As Bernays remarked:

> The manipulators of patriotic opinion [in the First World War] made use of the mental clichés and the emotional habits of the

> public to produce mass reactions against the alleged atrocities, the terror, and the tyranny of the enemy. It was only natural, after the war ended, that intelligent persons should ask themselves whether it was possible to apply a similar technique to the problems of peace.[26]

In Bernays's eyes, politics called upon the mobilization of the discomforts, anxieties, and passions of the masses—with risk of chaos and revolt—whereas the task of the public relations council was to preemptively anticipate the desires of the "herd," and to provide satisfying and regulated forms of competition and social cohesion through commercial services, entertainment, and commodities.[27] Democracy is concerned with the rule of the *demos* [the people], but unlike Lippmann and Dewey, Bernays essentially claimed that the people could never know what they really wanted. Their self-interest was limited by the pseudo-realities they lived in, making it impossible for them to separate private from common interests. The public relations council was to employ mass psychology to understand, regulate, and engineer public opinion into manufactured consent. "Good government can be sold to a community just as any other commodity can be sold," Bernays claimed, and the state was to learn and adapt to this new "invisible government" that began its rule in the era of the free market.[28]

Bernays's vision of such forms of engineered democracy shaped the centerpiece of the New York World Fair of 1939, for which he acted as the public relations director.[29] At the heart of the fair was a massive structure called the Trylon and Perisphere. Visitors entered the construction through an electric staircase, and, once inside, they encountered a gigantic rotating architectural model of the city of the future entitled Democracity, designed by Henry Dreyfuss and crafted in accordance with Bernays's vision of invisible government.[30] The model embodied a corporate-utopian urban infrastructure, imagined through replacing representative government with an invisible government of the public relations industry.[31]



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Henry Dreyfuss, *Dramatization of Two Themes within the Perisphere*, 1938. New York, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. © 2018. Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum/ Art Resource, NY/Scala, Florence.

What Bernays essentially aimed for through modeling Democracity was the replacement of the state by corporations operating under the control of public relations councils, together forming democratic entities insofar as they would be able to represent the desires of the masses in ways that governments could not. The idea of the public sphere as a democratic space of conflict, deliberation, and education—as Dewey argued for—was instead transformed into an upscale focus group, in essence a massive data pool, from which an invisible government formed by the public relations industry was able to manufacture consumer profiles necessary for the smooth engineering of consent. This corporate utopia would not be limited to just a model on display, for the corporately owned engineered city has today become reality the world over. And in some cases, it exceeds the urban scale far and wide. Dubai, which is essentially a corporation owned by the Maktoum family, is modeled on the idea of a hypermodern state. Of its total population only a vast minority are actual citizens, whose needs are not catered to through elections but rather by every possible consumer service. Dubai is Democracity become flesh, and with a measure of historical irony, it will host the World's Fair of 2020.

Propaganda after the Second World War

Bernays's lessons did not go unnoticed during the propaganda effort of the United States as it set out for war against the Nazi regime. Soldiers embarking to Europe received a pamphlet published by the War Department, in which the Disney cartoon character Donald Duck described the history, function, and effects of Nazi propaganda. The pamphlet argued that in response to Nazi propaganda a different propaganda is needed, for "in the struggle of men's minds that is constantly being waged by propagandists there is . . . a fundamental difference between the propaganda of dictatorship and the propaganda of democracy."[32]

This pamphlet may well have been one of the last official US government–sanctioned documents that would pitch a democratic propaganda versus a dictatorial one. The term would soon fall into disuse and disrepute in the face of the dismantlement of the Nazi regime, as its massive propaganda effort, aimed at employing systemic violence on a gruesome scale, came into full view of the international community. The extreme forms of overt propaganda employed by Hitler would come to monopolize our very conception of propaganda up to the present day. As a result, not only did the term become incompatible with democracy, it erased the democratic origins of the practice of modern propaganda as such. Propaganda instead became the equivalent of totalitarianism. Nonetheless, some postwar theorists would continue to emphasize that while democratic and dictatorial propaganda might not be the same, democratic propaganda was far from innocent, and it continued to be employed.

Theodor Adorno considered fascism as an amplification of an already existing mentality inherent in modern mass culture. In his perception, standardization and repetition define the "children of a liberal, competitive and individualistic society," which make them susceptible to fascist demagogues who can mobilize their libidinal energies to transform these atomized units into a new whole.[33] Adorno describes a society in which the culture industry and its advertising, as devised by public relation councils like Bernays's, coincide with the most cynical examples of the role of modern propaganda in fascism, to the point of claiming that "it may well be the secret of fascist propaganda that it simply takes men for what they are: the true children of today's standardized mass culture, largely robbed of autonomy and spontaneity. . . . Fascist propaganda has only to reproduce the existent mentality for its own purposes."[34]

We find a similar reading in the work of Jacques Ellul, who considers propaganda a "sociological phenomenon"[35] that results from what he describes as the emergence of "technological society."[37] For Ellul, power is not performed primarily by

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Cover of the pamphlet *What Is Propaganda?* by Ralph D. Casey. G.I. Roundtable, Washington, DC: War Department, 1944.

humans, but by technological society upon humans, resulting in the construction of a reality defined and dominated by technique. This analysis results in his claim that "propaganda no longer obeys an ideology."[37] As technological society becomes omnipotent its professed ideological values differ less and less from one another as its underlying principles—that of technique itself—will model the propagandists after the interests of propaganda. The outcome of this feedback loop in technological society is the creation of what Ellul calls "total propaganda," in which humans are reduced to the tools of technique.[38] While Adorno argued that modern society created the conditions for both capitalist democracy and fascism to emerge, Ellul fully equates the two in a prophetic technological totalitarianism to come—one that resonates with the worst excesses of Bernays's Democracity, in which the techniques of public relations replace democratic governance.

In the late eighties, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman developed a propaganda model that departed from Adorno's and Ellul's generalizations. Their model was based on a set of five filters through which mass media is employed to "manufacture consent" based on the dominant interests of both corporations and states. They described these filters as following:

(1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms;
(2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media;
(3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power;
(4) "flak" (misinformation) as a means of disciplining the media; and
(5) "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism.[39]

The controversy around this propaganda model was that it was not just applicable to dictatorships but focused specifically on American capitalist democracy. A filter is here described as a

screen of interests, largely defined by the agendas of mass media owners and financiers. As a result, Chomsky and Herman argued that "the US media [does] not function in the manner of the propaganda system of a totalitarian state," but rather maintains the idea of a free and critical media "as long as these remain faithfully within the system of presuppositions and principles that constitute an elite consensus, a system so powerful as to be internalized largely without awareness."[40]

Chomsky and Herman's major contribution was the structural way in which they approached propaganda as a "performance of power" with a specific focus on the mass media.[41] With the use of the term *performance*, Chomsky and Herman do not refer to its artistic connotation, but rather use it in terms of assessing the enactment of a certain goal or objective, in a similar way to how one might speak of the performance of a company and its employees. Nonetheless, we will benefit from expanding this notion of performance to the domain of the arts in the next chapter. For example, in relation to the importance of embodiment within artistic performance, which we can link to the importance of embodiment in propaganda—that is to say, the internalization of certain convictions and behaviors by individuals, which then go on to serve a propagandistic purpose. Erika Fischer-Lichte defines performance as "events in which all the participants find themselves in the same place at the same time, partaking in a circumscribed set of activities."[42] This can apply to "a traditional theatre performance in a proscenium theatre in which the actors and audience are strictly separated; a 'Happening' in which these roles are not so clearly demarcated; a soccer game with spectators as well as a Church mass, a wedding as well as a political convention; a funeral as well as a World's Fair."[43] Fischer-Lichte thus moves effortlessly from defining performance in an artistic context to understanding it in a political one. Similarly, many propaganda studies that are not necessarily grounded in the arts engage interdisciplinary readings of performance, such as the work of Tilman Allert, who discusses the introduction of the Nazi

salute as a form of mass performance. With his study he offers a clear example of the interrelation between what I have referred to earlier as the micro- and macro-performative scales of propaganda. The Nazi salute was imposed from above, declared on July 13, 1933, as "a general civic duty . . . mandatory in all party and state buildings and at commemorative sites."[44] But the actual aim was to increasingly alter simple exchanges and social intimacies in everyday life:

> Postmen used the greeting when they knocked on people's doors to deliver packages or letters. Customers entering department stores were greeted with "Heil Hitler, how may I help you?" Dinner guests brought, as house gifts, glasses etched with the words "Heil Hitler"; children were given three-inch-tall plastic figures with pivoting right arms; and print shops turned out millions of copies of photographer Heinrich Hoffmann's famous portrait of the Führer.[45]

Chomsky and Herman's model, in a similar way, tries to trace the macro- and micro-performative scales of propaganda, from elite power invested in the mass media to the desired attitudes this imposes on its audience, but they do so specifically in the context of modern democracy. Their propaganda model shows how elite monopolies of power are enacted through the mass media to create a normative reality—a set of values and narratives—that strengthened their own position, sometimes with direct geopolitical consequences. An example is the role of propaganda filters in defining who in the world at large are "worthy" and "unworthy victims."[46] The first consist of victims belonging to friendly or client states who have received excessive media coverage, whereas the unworthy ones are severely undermediated victims belonging to what the United States regards as hostile states—a division that equally defines what are to be considered worthy and unworthy democracies.[47] Possibly most telling in this regard is the fifth and final filter of the propaganda model titled "anticommunism," which formed a crucial tool in establishing the normative reality of perpetual fear that legitimized anticommunist witch hunts at home and the engineering of proxy states, military

invasions, and occupations abroad. This filter shows similarity with the World War I framing of the Germans as the barbaric "Huns," just as we see it employed today once more in the War on Terror and in the rise of ultranationalist and alt-right movements in the form of the anti-Islamism filter.[48]

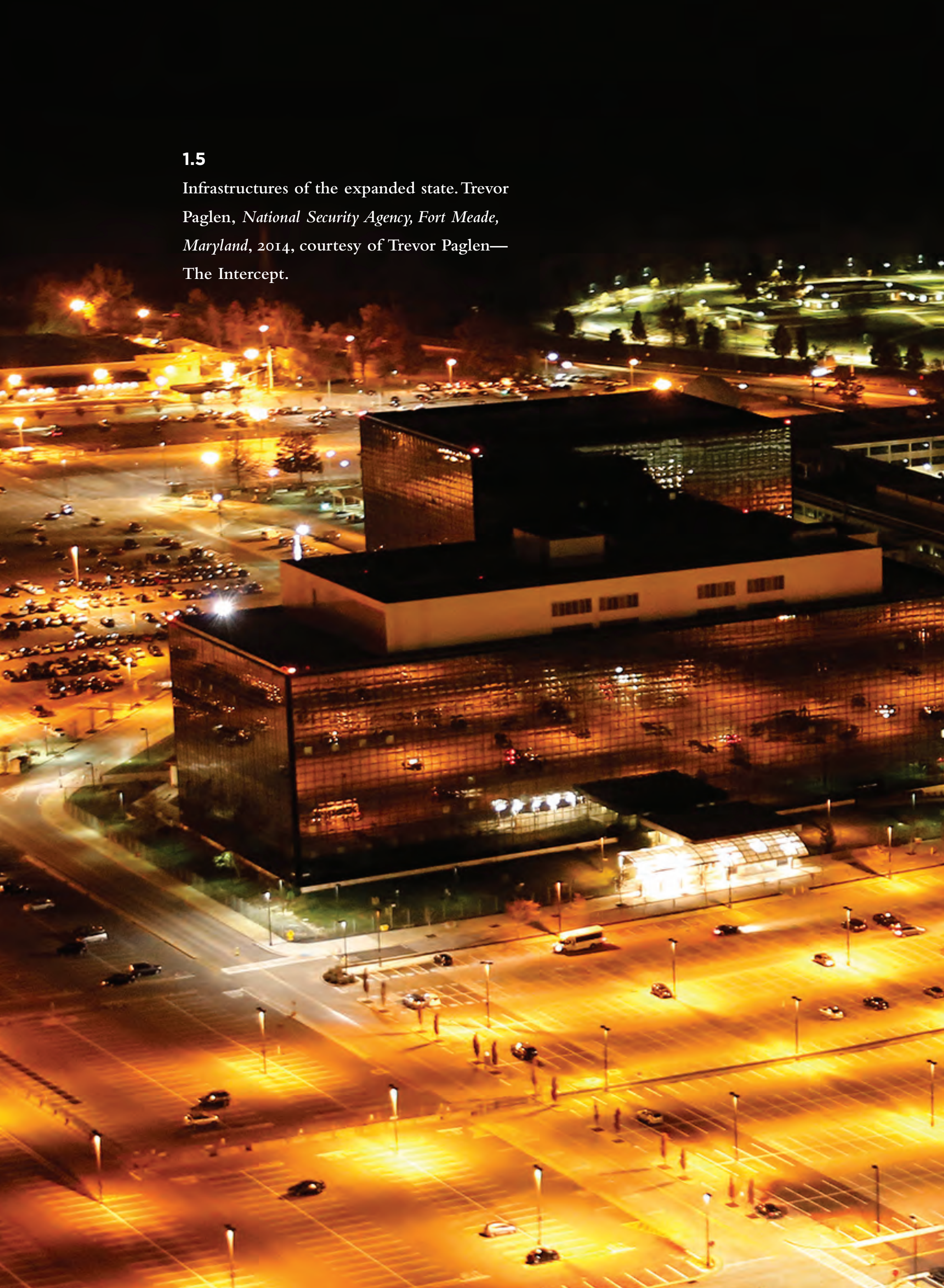
Contemporary Propaganda

Although contemporary propaganda studies have become increasingly rare, focusing instead euphemistically on *public relations* or *advertisement*, they did not entirely disappear after Chomsky and Herman's landmark study. From the eighties to the present, Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell have continued to rework their own "model of the process of propaganda," focused on the sociohistorical and cultural context of propaganda, not excluding contemporary democracies.[49] Marshall Soules's recent attempt to contribute an analysis of antidemocratic, market-fundamentalist propaganda that manifests in the guise of democratic interest is laudable, although lacking a similar structural model of analysis.[50] The same can be said for Jason Stanley, who makes the crucial case that "the distinctive danger propaganda poses in liberal democracies is that it is not recognized as propaganda."[51] Unfortunately, he limits his definition of democratic propaganda to a rhetorical rather than an infrastructural operation. Lacking, to different degrees, in these studies is Chomsky and Herman's crucial emphasis that a model for analyzing propaganda is simultaneously a model for analyzing the performativity of specific formations of power.

The Chomsky and Herman propaganda model aimed to assess the heritage of the Cold War, the increase of government influence on the media, and the ties between government and corporations. Framing the communist threat as an existential one allowed for forging a sense of community and nationhood. It is a reverse social contract of sorts, which defines who we are in relation to who could destroy us at any given moment.[52] In today's

War on Terror we see a direct continuation of the use of this propaganda filter, which in the past decade and a half has established completely new paralegal realities through which civil rights are suspended via ongoing declarations of states of exception, allowing the unprecedented surveillance and detention of civilians, while legalizing torture and extralegal killings through assassinations and drone warfare. As Giorgio Agamben noted in relation to President Bush's self-description as "Commander in Chief of the Army," this results in a "situation in which the emergency becomes the rule, and the very distinction between peace and war (and between foreign and civil war) becomes impossible."[53] To manufacture consent around this alternative reality, the entanglement between public and private institutions as well as between governments and corporations had to be expanded even further. The war economy of the military-industrial complex and its political lobby machine, prisons such as Guantánamo Bay, the creation of classified, so-called "black" budgets for security purposes, and a perpetual culture of secrecy that erases archives, humans, and even geographies from public view are all real-life manifestations of this *expanded state*'s modus operandi.

Of course, in some sense the state has always been expanding, or at least transforming. Max Weber's three-elements approach to defining the state in terms of the state apparatus, state territory, and state population in its real-life application has, as Bob Jessop argues, always been polymorphic.[54] A fourth component of defining the state, as is additionally proposed by Jessop, is the *state idea*, meaning the "political imaginaries" that shape the manifestation and performativity of state power.[55] Today, that political imaginary is shaped by a "transnational deep state,"[56] in which supposed sovereign states are co-governed by transnational corporations on the one hand, and by the "homeland security system" on the other.[57] The merging of these state ideas results in what Jessop describes as "a form that generates crises and thereby creates the conditions for further extensions of the security state!"[58]



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Infrastructures of the expanded state. Trevor Paglen, *National Security Agency, Fort Meade, Maryland*, 2014, courtesy of Trevor Paglen—The Intercept.

Indeed, ongoing extensions of the expanded state in the form of illegal interventions against previous allies, now opportunistically framed as the infamous Axis of Evil, have created the conditions through which actual enemies can emerge. The recruitment of what would become the Islamic State from the remnants of Al-Qa'ida in Iraq, deposed Ba'ath Party members, and tortured civilians at "black" (that is, classified) sites such as Abu Ghraib, would have been unthinkable without the brutal destabilization of Iraq brought about by the War on Terror.[59] As such, this war does not so much fight terror as much as it creates new forms of terror, which it then uses to legitimate the continuation of the war.[60] In his work on War on Terror propaganda, Joseph Masco describes this as "a potentially endless recursive loop of threat production and response."[61] The twisted utopia of the War on Terror, which promises a world without terror in the name of democracy, simultaneously maintains a continuous economy of terror. This is not only limited to coauthoring foreign terrorist organizations into being, since extremist platforms, such as the Tea Party and alt-right, effectively emerged from the core narratives of the War on Terror as well.[62] Such platforms went on to radicalize its discourse even further, fueled by nonstop partisan coverage on the Fox News network. So, not only is the expanded state itself an outcome of the polymorphic history of statism, in its wake it has also bred new state formations and new state ideas—from the ever-expanding caliphate of the Islamic State to the Trumpian alt-state.[63]

The anticommunism filter of the Chomsky and Herman propaganda model is appropriated as the antiterror, or worse, anti-Islamist, filter in the War on Terror and alt-right governance. This is done in order to maintain the master narrative of an "Us versus Them" dichotomy. What used to be citizens turned Cold War warriors are now citizens turned counterterror warriors. The endless recursive loop of threat production and response, produced by the economy of terror, strengthens time and again who precisely "Us" is in relation to endless variations of existential threats.

Al-Qa'ida in the mountains of Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein and the Axis of Evil, the Islamic State, the North Korean regime, Iran, homegrown sleeper cells ready to strike out of hatred for America. Simultaneously, this Us versus Them dichotomy operates as a form of occlusion or even censorship in relation to the actual threats we are facing, ranging from extreme forms of economic inequality, systemic racism, global warfare, and the planetary threat of climate change.

Masco notes that such truly existential threats are easily recuperated into the economy of terror, as in the case of the 2005 hurricane Katrina, which left the city of New Orleans utterly devastated. In response, government officials and mainstream media continuously referenced the dangers of so-called weapons of mass destruction rather than actually focusing on the root cause: climate change. For if a government cannot even protect its citizens from violent weather, how could it ever protect them from terrorism? While an actual threat is at our doorsteps in the form of a tropical storm, neither its causes nor its effects, or future preventions for that matter, are addressed. Instead, the threat is transposed to another, more politically beneficial enemy in the form of the supposed terrorist. The propaganda filters in this case are so powerful that they enable one reality (climate change) to be completely transposed by another (terrorism). Even when the actual threat is right in front of our eyes, we cannot but see another.

This is not traditional censorship as we know it, but a form of censorship that results from rewiring the sensibilities through which we perceive the world. In this regard, the concepts of fake news and alternative facts in the alt-state—the *flak* filter in the Chomsky and Herman propaganda model—are quite important. The continuous bombardment of scandalous claims does more to a population than merely sow doubt, because it structurally removes the capacity to recognize knowledge that would benefit their actual existential struggles. Trump governs through memes, through concepts and propositions that have no congressional

approval, are not budgeted, and are often unknown to his own ministries—ranging from the building of a wall on the Mexican border, to arming school teachers, and threatening various regimes with “fire and fury”—but which are instantly shared and spread, and are therefore capable of subsequently rewiring our capacity to understand what our true struggles are. When something forces us to no longer see what we ought to, it is a form of existential censorship. And it shows that the expanded state—or the alt-state that emerged from it—is not only an expansion of the state through neoliberal entanglement and security apparatuses, but also an expansion of a former reality into a new one.

From Wellington House to Bernays, from Adorno to Ellul, and from Chomsky and Herman to Masco, we can track a severely neglected history of modern and contemporary democratic propaganda. Today, considering the never-ending War on Terror as well as the campaigns of misinformation waged by the likes of Cambridge Analytica and the Russian government, or the rise of authoritarian politics within democracies ranging from the United States to Hungary and Turkey, the consequence of this lack of understanding of the history and present-day effect of propaganda has major consequences. Propaganda deals with the means of production of our reality, and today our world is manufactured through state expansions that claim to act in the name of democracy, but which undermine the fundamental capacity of its constituents to understand, oversee, challenge, and change its modus operandi. Through propaganda our reality is shaped for us, not by us.

A Propaganda History Yet to Be Written

As I have defined it earlier, propaganda is the performance of power. By this I mean that propaganda is the process through which infrastructures of power—whether in the domain of politics, the economy, the military-industrial complex, or the media—are enacted to shape our very understanding of reality, from the

micro-performative scale of a citizen, to the macro-performative scale of a government. And the realities discussed so far tend to serve those who hold ownership over the infrastructures that brought them into being in the first place. Propaganda is not primarily the domain of communication, but of reality-construction.

By tracing the history of propaganda and democracy, we learn to comprehend the means of production through which various realities are constructed. I make this argument not to say that democratic propaganda is the same as dictatorial propaganda—although in the case of democratic fascism it sometimes is—but rather to make clear that reality is constructed by a plurality of propagandas. If propaganda is the performance of power, then wherever there is power there is also propaganda. When taking into consideration that not all forms of power are the same, it logically follows that propagandas also differ among one another. What we understand as reality can be defined, to a certain extent, by the outcome of conflicting propagandas, by what I term as the *propaganda struggle*.

While the examples I have proposed so far challenge the dominant history of propaganda as a product of dictatorship, they deny other alternative historiographies. Each example I have discussed prioritized monopolized forms of power; infrastructures that control the means of production of reality to such extent that they can create completely new ones. Chomsky and Herman's propaganda filters relate to ownership over politics, the media, the economy, and the military-industrial complex. But what about the various anti-imperialist movements that resisted US invasion, or the civil society platforms and militant groups that organized themselves against the war effort at home? And today, how might we interpret the efforts of the manifold popular mass movements gaining momentum across the world, many of which propose alternative or competing state ideas, which reject the idea of fighting fictional enemies in the War on Terror and instead focus on political alternatives to combat real existential threats (from economic inequality to racism, global warfare, and

impeding ecological disaster)? Do they not also represent a form of power, or at the very least aim to gain power to make their alternatives a reality? Should we then understand their efforts as a form of *counter-propaganda*, or do they aim for a world without propaganda altogether?

Only a world without power would be a world without propaganda. Rather than opting for a powerless world, it seems more important to differentiate organizational models of power from which different notions of modernity and different definitions of modern propaganda emerge. Already in the late nineteenth century, for example, Filipino reformists declared a "propaganda movement" aimed at reconstructing national identity in the face of Spanish colonists, followed by a second propaganda movement in the mid-twentieth century aimed toward a revolutionary Maoist-styled modernization project.[64] Abdullah Öcalan's definition of "democratic modernity" developed through the Kurdish guerilla struggle of the eighties and nineties, intended to bypass the very model of the modern state altogether, propagating a confederalist "stateless democracy" instead.[65] More recently, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams have called for a contemporary "left modernity," which places an emphasis on automation to employ the power of technological infrastructure for a transnational egalitarian project.[66]

These examples show a lineage of different, conflicting understandings of power and modernity, and thus of modern propagandas. In contrast to Chomsky and Herman's model from the late eighties, which does not recognize such alternative forms of *emerging* power, I propose an *inverted propaganda model* in order to analyze the performance of power in liberational, revolutionary, and popular mass movements. While this inversion is specific to Chomsky and Herman's model, I believe it will allow us to retrospectively analyze how histories of emancipatory propaganda have evolved parallel to that of elite monopolization, as in the case of propaganda art practices of the Soviet Revolution that I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chomsky–Herman's inverted Propaganda Model

FILTERS:		DEMANDS:
Monopolization	→	Democratization
Corporate Advertising	→	Grassroot Mobilization
Source Control	→	Public Knowledge
Flak	→	Transparency
Anti-Communism	→	Collectivity

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Jonas Staal, expanded version of Chomsky and Herman's Propaganda Model, 2018.

The reversal entails, first of all, that we replace the propaganda filters with *demands*. For while the interest of elite power is to maintain control over a given construction of reality, popular power demands that we overturn and reorganize these conditions of ownership. From the first propaganda filter of monopolization, we thus move to the demand of *democratization*. From the filter of corporate advertising, aimed at redirecting mainstream narratives through private interests, we move to the demand of *grassroots mobilization*, in which narratives emerge from an overt base rather than being covertly imposed upon them. From the filter of source control, we move to the demand of *public knowledge,* meaning the importance of public information access to challenge structures of power. From the misinformation campaigns in the flak filter, we move to the demand of *transparency* in relation to the sources and interests invested in the construction of a particular reality. And finally, from the anticommunism—or today, the anti-Islamism—filter, we move to the demand of *collectivity*,

which challenges Us versus Them dichotomies to articulate new communalities based on collective instead of elite interest.

Even though the traditional propaganda model continues to prove crucial in analyzing the ongoing presence of monopolized forms of elite power in democracy and dictatorship alike, the inverted propaganda model aims to become susceptible to alternative histories of emerging power, and alternative histories of propaganda. In the following chapters, while discussing dominant powers and propaganda, I will—with the inverted propaganda model in mind—simultaneously try to sketch possible propaganda histories and contemporary practices resulting from emerging powers and alternate modernities. To do so, I will first analyze the performance of power as art through propaganda art. For the construction of reality cannot manifest without imagination, without visualizing, composing, and staging such a reality. To understand how propaganda shapes our contemporary world, I propose to start from the forms it takes: the morphologies of propaganda art.

2

PROPAGANDA ART, FROM PAST TO PRESENT

The Art in Propaganda Art

I say propaganda art, you say Nazi Germany. Despite the history of modern propaganda being rooted in modern democracy, and despite the fact that the Stalinist Soviet Union would end up developing a propaganda apparatus on a far wider scale, for many, Nazi Germany is considered propaganda's birthplace. It evokes images from propaganda films like Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), which chronicles the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg, or Fritz Hippler's *The Eternal Jew* (1940), which adopted a method of editing that equated rats and vermin with the "plague" of Judaism (as it was termed by the Nazis). While we should not downplay the impact of such films upon the population when it comes to the effect of Nazi ideology, it is worthwhile to note that they constitute only a relatively small part of Nazi film production.

In the twelve years of its existence, the Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment, headed by Joseph Goebbels, produced more than a thousand films. Only 10 percent of its production was directed toward overt propaganda, as is the case with the examples I just mentioned, whereas the other 90 percent was escapist entertainment that displayed the Nazi state as a normalized backdrop.[1] Love stories and family dramas of prototypical "Aryan" people unfolding under the flag of the new Reich helped to turn Nazism into the new norm; think, for example, of

The Great Love (1942) by Rolf Hansen. This highest grossing film of the Nazi period narrates the love story of a Nazi lieutenant and a singer. Although the enveloping and amorous relationship between the two is undermined by the war at first, the lieutenant's heroic duty to his country finally brings him home to his wife-to-be. In this covert propaganda, the core narrative that war is love, meaning that true love for another individual can be mediated only through our shared love of the state, is brought home through the soap opera–like story that unfolds between the two protagonists. When it came to overt propaganda films, the ministry was even forced to introduce a mandatory screening for Nazi Party members in order to guarantee attendance. This shows that within dictatorships of the past, citizens were just as able to detect overt propaganda as we are in retrospect—we cannot attribute the susceptibility to propaganda to a different historical timeframe. The frightening conclusion is that the propagandistic value of overt propaganda allows us to think we know what propaganda is, and thus become more susceptible to internalizing that which we believe is mere entertainment.

The pompous artistic expressions of the so-called totalitarian regimes distract us from their actual, more complex manifestations of propaganda. For propaganda is not limited to what we can see; it is also what we come to embody and perform without necessarily being aware of our own implication in the process. This, as I have argued, relates to the macro- and micro-performative scales of propaganda. On a macro-performative scale, we might be able to detect certain propaganda narratives, for example, when our governments try to twist facts to legitimate a military invasion and occupation of Iraq. But on a micro-performative scale, we might internalize these macro-narratives more than we think. When an Arab person is not admitted to the next round of a job application, or an abandoned suitcase on a train platform instantly evokes the idea of a bomb, we get a small impression of the penetrative magnitude of propaganda in our day-to-day lives. To put it simply, propaganda is communicating to us, but, over

2.1

Scene from the movie *The Great Love,* 1942, courtesy of ullstein bild Dtl.—Getty Images.

time, it also communicates *through* us. We become the micro-performative vessels of the core ideological motives that sustain the macro-performative scale of propaganda. The master narratives of propaganda will appear in politics, but also in education, in mass entertainment, in art, and in culture, up until the point that it appears in our day-to-day exchanges with coworkers, family, and friends, by which time we have become conscious or unconscious vessels of power.

But wasn't art supposed to be exactly the thing that we *can* see and sense? Art is partly reliant on its visibility—it is how we

identify it as *art*—but making one thing visible can simultaneously mean making something else invisible. Early Soviet avant-garde propaganda art wanted to reveal the substructure of power in the process of the proletarianization of society, but it also made invisible artist groups that shared this aim but who deviated from the party line. In the examples of Nazi propaganda, one part of overt propaganda art is that it explicitly aims to be visible through obligatory viewing, whereas its covert entertainment department is not. In the case of the utilization of abstract expressionist art as a propaganda instrument in the Cold War, which I will discuss in more detail further on, we encounter a complete reversal; one where propaganda art has to be visible only as art, but not as propaganda. Power relies on form to manifest in the world, but what is actually revealed and concealed through art depends on the kind of power in question.

Different structures of power enable different forms of propaganda, and thus of propaganda art. To research propaganda art means to compare specific models of power to specific artistic *morphologies*. Where the term *morphology* today has significance in domains as different as linguistics, biology, and mathematics, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is considered to have defined the term in relation to the study of plants, explaining it as "the science of form [*Gestalt*], formation [*Bildung*], and transformation [*Umbildung*] of organic bodies."[2] In the present, Caroline Levine builds on expanding morphological analysis by claiming that "there is a great deal to be learned about power by observing different forms of order as they operate in the world."[3] Levine uses models such as whole, rhythm, hierarchy, and network to understand the intersections of various forms that structure social life, from the form of an idea to that of an artwork, and from the form of a timetable to that of a prison. Although we will look more specifically at the relation between power and artistic morphologies, Levine's question, "Which forms do we wish to see governing social life . . . and which forms of protest or resistance actually succeed at dismantling unjust, entrenched

arrangements?," is pertinent to us, as we will see that propaganda art is not merely shaped by specific formations of power, but in some cases tries to create new forms of infrastructure just the same.[4] In other words, it is not always simply power that shapes art: art can also shape power.

What we call art is a product of historical and infrastructural processes. The modern age, which made modern propaganda possible, also made modern propaganda art possible, and in doing so it redefined what we understand to be art. The artwork cannot be separated from its reproduction and mediation in this context.[5] A painting is *also* its reproduction as a propaganda poster, it is *also* its mediation through a television program on Western "high" culture, it is *also* a legitimating symbol of ruling powers when it hangs in the director's office, and so forth. To study the history of propaganda art means to map the relation between power and artistic form, to subsequently understand what different models of propaganda art simultaneously conceal and reveal in the process of constructing reality.

Autonomy through Revolution

"All art is propaganda," declared Upton Sinclair in *Mammonart* (1925), for art has always been dependent on dominant power.[6] He argues that whether it was the first cave painter, who sought support from the clan leader by attributing magical artistic skills to it, or the artists from the following centuries, who glorified and legitimized the church, state, and upper echelons of the bourgeoisie, there has long been a relationship between art and its legitimation by a higher authority. It's a claim that stands in harsh contrast with the present-day validation of art, which is exactly understood as that which stands "outside" of propaganda, and thus as that which is "free." Art can hold up mirrors, ask critical questions, challenge every taboo, but to declare itself on the side of power—any power, whether established or emerging—means

to become propaganda. And propaganda, in that same logic, is all that art is not.

This reasoning however, stands in stark contrast to the fact that what is often referenced as art's autonomy—its supposed relative independence from power—was achieved through political struggle.[7] Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that the artist was in chains owing to his or her addiction to royal applause and luxury. The freedom of artists, Rousseau claimed, would instead be found in dedicating their skills to the general will and "happiness of the peoples they have enlightened by their wisdom."[8] But until art would act for the common good, the artist would achieve nothing but to "fling garlands of flowers over the chains which weigh [the people] down."[9]

Liberation from these chains—and a chance to dedicate artistic skill and craft to the common good—would come through the French Revolution. This was possibly best exemplified through the work of painter Jacques-Louis David, a member of the Jacobin Club and a dedicated supporter of Maximilien de Robespierre. David was not the only artist who would join the revolution. For young artists and students who were not benefiting from the highly exclusive and privileged position of a minority of artists who served the upper classes and monarchy—and who tended to marry into other rich artist families from generation to generation—the revolution was a chance to demand equality of artistic opportunity.[10] David would consequently play a key role in introducing public subsidies for artists and the establishment of new public cultural institutions, such as the Louvre Museum, the Museum of French Monuments, and the National Jury of Arts.[11] Art propagated the revolution, but the artist was also an inherent part of the revolution through developing countless revolutionary festivals. These events were to circulate the new revolutionary calendar and bestow the rites of the new "secular religion" of the Republic upon the French population.[12]

Much of our understanding of modern art, particularly in European history, is the heritage of the European Enlightenment, as

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Pierre-Antoine Demachy, *The Festival of the Supreme Being*, 1794, Paris, Carnavalet Museum.

well as the French and Industrial revolutions. If artists gained any autonomy from monarchy, aristocracy, and the church, it was by partaking in these struggles and transformative processes, not by isolating themselves from them. The crises and revolutions sweeping throughout Europe up until the twentieth century, and the rise of modern technology and industry, were a chance to redefine the relation of art to life. New structures of power—and ideological and organizational visions of how to distribute and apply this power—also made a new art possible. The remnants of the autocratic institutions that heralded an art of privilege and exception were to be destroyed in order for a new world and a new art to be born.

Even Immanuel Kant, who tends to be wrongly credited for defining the autonomy of art (he was actually speaking of the autonomy of aesthetic experience),[13] had been a supporter of the Jacobins, as a result of his belief that the revolution would further the progress of a rational society and a moral world.[14] Kant's claim that "we should not call anything art except a production through freedom, i.e., through a power of choice that bases its acts on reason,"[15] can therefore not be entirely separated from the political struggle necessary to enable that power of choice in the first place—that being revolution. Art's freedom is an interdependent freedom, unthinkable without the transformation of power in a given society and the subsequent commitment of artists in furthering that transformation.

The history of art is a result of its exchange with power. This is not a one-way process. Power enables the creation, validation, and circulation of art, but simultaneously, power needs art in order to be shaped, recognized, and naturalized. Art institutes power just as power institutes art. This is a process that was clear, more than anywhere else, in the history of avant-garde propaganda art. The former military term *avant-garde* had been adopted by Henri de Saint-Simon, after his participation in the American Revolution, and applied to what he perceived as the possibilities of the Industrial Revolution. Saint-Simon claimed that the faculty of the artist was that of the imagination, not just in foreseeing the future, but in creating it.[16] As such, he called for an alliance between artists, scientists, and industrialist artisans, as an avant-garde in advance of modernity.[17] That vision would prove to be more than mere theory when the Futurists in the spirit of the imperialist, antidemocratic, and patriarchal politics of Mussolini's fascism, famously declared to liberate Italy from its museums and embrace what they regarded as the purifying effects of war and technology.[18] Similarly, the Berlin Dadaists, strongly allied with German Bolshevism, rejected what they considered *expressionist elitism* in favor of the total work of art that was modern urban life, where "every man is chairman and every man can have his

say in artistic matters."[19] Artists had joined the revolutions that advanced modernity, and as such, modernity had turned into the artistic project of the avant-garde.

Revolutionary Modernity

Of all the various competing modernities that emerged throughout the twentieth century, the Soviet revolution gave testimony to the possibility of a *revolutionary modernity*, which, despite its eventual collapse during the Stalinist dictatorship, continues to invoke the possibility of alternate futures today.[20] It also laid the foundations for a distinct model of avant-garde propaganda art, which was first defined by Lenin when he called for the production of literature to be placed under party control. Rather than considering this censorship, he believed that the party—the vanguard of the proletariat—would liberate art, as he argued that "there can be no real and effective 'freedom' in a society based on the power of money, in a society in which the masses of working people live in poverty and the handful of rich live like parasites."[21] In Lenin's eyes a new genuine freedom loomed in the artist's dedication to the proletarian cause.

Lenin regarded art as a propaganda tool for mass education that could serve in tackling the 80 percent illiteracy rate in his country. His decree to remove tsarist monuments in favor of newly commissioned busts depicting predecessors of socialism in the fields of philosophy, politics, science, and culture is an example of his attempt to educate the Soviet people with a new canon of revolutionary modernity.[22] Lenin, nonetheless, considered propaganda as oppositional to indoctrination; its aim was to disseminate knowledge while mobilizing and politicizing people to bring this knowledge into practice through the collective construction of socialism. The proletariat, at least in theory, was to be made co-owner of the means of production and the performance of power that is propaganda.[23] In other words, the multilayered performance of power—its macro- and micro-performative

dimension—became part of the project of proletarianization. Sender and receiver were to operate equally.

This idea was strongly embodied by the rise of different agit-prop groups that emerged after the revolution, which initiated carnivalesque street festivals and popular theatrical events derived from the festivities of the French Revolution and Russian Orthodox processions.[24] But Lenin considered tendencies to act independently from the organization of the party—such as the case with Alexander Bogdanov's semiautonomous Proletkult group—a deviation from the proletarian cause, and he shut them down.[25] Nonetheless, he allowed a relative cultural pluriformity, one that generated a variety of avant-garde movements loyal to the Bolshevik party line, to flourish. In fact, such movements might have been unimaginable without the vanguard party in the first place.

Constructivist artists, such as El Lissitzky, rejected the historically subservient role of the artist as "a moralist, as a story-teller, as a court-jester" and instead turned to "the rebuilding of life cast[ing] aside the old concept of nations, classes, patriotisms, and imperialism."[26] Just like his former teacher Kazimir Malevich, Lissitzky believed that the artistic exploration of technology served this reconstruction of life. The First World War had given testimony to the destructive capacity of the modern age. But through communism, technological and industrial infrastructures provided humans with the tools to become the master builders of their own faith.

Similar ideas were developed by Vladimir Tatlin in his famous *Monument to the Third International* (1919–1920), a tower in the shape of stacked transparent rotating cylindrical structures meant to facilitate political offices, a radio station, and loudspeakers, as well as a platform for public lectures. Combining both Lenin's call for a public, educational, and monumental propaganda art, and Lissitzky's ideas of a necessary correlation between art and technology, Tatlin's monument, even though it was never realized, has become a historical symbol of the conditions in which political,

artistic, and technological revolution converged. In this work, art actively contributed to building and operating a collective propaganda interface instead of just merely participating in it.[27] This ambition to combine constructivist aesthetics with practical applications in the domain of propaganda can also be found in the work of Gustav Klutsis and his *Design for Propaganda Kiosk* (1922), which took the form of temporary public sculptural displays that merged a platform for public speeches, radio amplification through loudspeakers, and distribution channels for revolutionary books and newspapers. In Klutsis's work, the creation of art and the creation of a new propaganda infrastructure were one and the same endeavor. The work of art is both a carrier of propaganda and a tool through which its users can partake in the collective propaganda effort.

Among the most radical avant-garde propaganda artists was Alexander Rodchenko, who declared a commitment to the domain of industry through what he termed a "productivist art."[28] This form of art would liberate constructivism from the realm of artistic speculation, enabling the artist to "work in the midst of *everyone*, for *everyone*, and with *everyone*" by embracing mass production.[29] Although at this time the Soviet Union was still far from being an industrially developed country, Rodchenko made significant contributions toward the possibilities of its advancement. One example came in his *USSR Worker Club* (1925). This work took the form of a multifunctional space that offered workers a communal table for discussion, study, and play. It was surrounded by new technologies, such as a screen for educational materials and a speaker, as well as a corner dedicated to Lenin's ideals of mass literacy and the active engagement of workers in social and political life. When exhibited as part of the Soviet Pavilion at the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris, we encounter an artwork transformed into a full propositional infrastructure for political and social activity. The artwork facilitates and provides tools for furthering revolutionary consciousness and practice. It enacts revolutionary modernity and

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Gustav Klutsis, *Design for Propaganda Kiosk—Workers of the World Unite,* 1922, gouache, ink and pencil on paper, Thessaloniki, State Museum of Contemporary Art—Costakis collection. © State Museum of Contemporary Art—Costakis collection, Thessaloniki.

simultaneously provides the means for its users to perform and apply its possibilities on their own terms—but of course, always within party lines.

While Rodchenko's efforts opened pathways into the realm of mass production, it was artists such as Lyubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova who would most fulfill the ideal of productivism becoming an actual part of industrial production. Popova summarized this task as the process of "making the artistic organization of the object into the principle guiding the creation of even the most practical, everyday things."[30] At the first state cotton-printing factory that opened after the revolution, she and Stepanova radically expanded their constructivist canvasses into the field of clothing and textile designs, and demanded in the process to be involved in all facets of production, from direct contact with tailors to the promotional strategies for the products and the designs of their displays. This insistence on an intimate exchange throughout all phases of development showed how Popova and Stepanova considered each aspect of production part of productivist artistic competences, necessary to de-alienate both the creation of an object, and the object itself.[31] The same counted for the impact of their expanded canvasses, which in the form of clothing challenged the bourgeois representation of femininity and introduced androgynous forms through enlarged collars that removed emphasis from the chest, or—in the case of Popova's theater costumes—obliterated the gendering of female and male dress in its totality. This revolutionarization of the domestic sphere and the reconstruction of gender can be understood, in Christina Kiaer's words, as part of a "socialist, feminist modernity, taking seriously the multiple briefs of de-objectifying the female body, appealing to consumer tastes even while attempting to transform them, and reinventing the material culture of everyday life under socialism."[32]

Just as the French Revolution had intended, wrote the first Soviet People's Commissar of Education Anatoly Lunacharsky, art

had now joined the masses. "It will unite everything in a common act," he claimed, for the revolutionary artist and revolutionary leader both believe in the unification of art and life.[33] Not only did revolutionary artists propagandize the ideals of the revolutionary government through their work, they educated themselves through communist ideals simultaneously. This resulted in a propaganda art model of which the full potential remains largely unknown today. It has left us with an alternative infrastructural map of a world on the verge of becoming reality, from high-tech monuments to propaganda kiosks and worker's clubs—an infrastructure made imaginable through the vanguard party, while simultaneously stretched in its political imaginary through artistic practice. While the Soviet Revolution has provided us with a brutal lesson on the treasonous nature of power, capable of manifesting in the name of a people to, over time, destroy that very people, it has simultaneously left us with a historical spark of possibility and potentiality. As China Miéville argues in his account of the October revolution, "Twilight, even remembered twilight, is better than no light at all."[34] Popular propaganda art, which I will discuss in the fourth chapter, partially builds on that new infrastructural map of the world.

The Two-faced Propaganda of Totalitarianism

In 1934, Andrei Zhdanov, the head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee, declared the Stalin-sanctioned artistic doctrine of *socialist realism*. It followed the dissolution of all existing and competing art groups in 1932, with the aim of shaping Stalinist cultism and his return to political nationalism. Zhdanov declared that the task of the artist was "knowing life, so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, not to depict it in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as 'objective reality,' but to depict reality in its revolutionary development."[35] This "realism," as Boris Groys has argued, was essentially the realism of the party's objectives, the inevitable development

from feudalism to bourgeois capitalism and from socialism to communism.[36]

It is in light of this realism that we should consider famous paintings like *Sketch for Stalin's Speech at the 16*th *Congress of the Communist Party* (1933) by Aleksandr Gerasimov, which depicts the fatherly figure of Stalin guiding his party. Or *To Mother for the Next Feed* (1935) by Taras Gaponenko, which showcases joyous peasants working modern machinery in the midst of an overabundant harvest, and *Relay Race Around the "B" Ring* (1947) by Alexandr Deyneka, which represents healthy young Soviet athletes running through the main streets of Moscow. It is easy to add more of these stereotypical and artificial icons to one's imagination in the form of heroic fighters of the Soviet army and committed workers of its industry. These are the archetypal images that have come to define our associations with the cultist dimensions of propaganda art in dictatorships, and therefore, propaganda art in general.

The difference between the work of the constructivists and productivists—who through their art had essentially conceptualized a new propaganda infrastructure for the collective construction of life—and the reductive copies by socialist realist painters of the nineteenth-century prerevolutionary painter group known as the Wanderers could not be a more evident symbol of the break between the revolutionary potential of the Soviet Union and its indefinite collapse into Stalinist dictatorship.[37] Nonetheless, Groys argues that the Stalinist regime was a continuation of the revolutionary avant-garde in many ways, because "the Stalin era satisfied the fundamental avant-garde demand that art cease representing life and begin transforming it by means of a total aesthetic-political project."[38] Groys thus perceives Stalin as responsible for completing the avant-garde project, becoming not just a political leader but also an artist-engineer who modeled society by means of brute force, industry, technology, and a cultural apparatus organized according to his will.[39]

Igor Golomstock, who popularized the notion of a *totalitarian art*, shares Groys's analysis, but attempts to expand on it by introducing the idea that all artistic production in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and Maoist China was dictated by the same principles and aesthetic doctrines.[40] He explains how this resulted in the foundation of the Reich Culture Chamber in Nazi Germany, the Fascist Academy and the National Syndicate of Fascist Visual Art in Italy, the Central Committee's Section for Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) and the USSR Union of Artists in the Soviet Union, and the Union of Art Workers in the People's Republic of China. What strikes us in the propaganda art of dictatorships are the reoccurring figures of heroic leaders, heroic soldiers, heroic factory workers, and heroic peasants, depicted in styles that reassert the aesthetic models of a glorified past. But Golomstock also observes differences. He references, among other things, the rural quality of the romantic depictions of peasant life in the Stalinist Soviet Union versus the more rigid neoclassicist tendencies of Nazi art. However, such differences, he claims, pale against the overarching aesthetic homogeneity dictated by the totalitarian machine.

These differences, however, consist of more than formal details. For example, Mao Zedong's art theory, as laid out in his "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art" (1942), aimed for mutual education by promoting cooperative artistic practice between art professionals and peasant communities, arguing that "prior to the task of educating the workers, peasants, and soldiers, there is the task of learning from them."[41] The famous sculpture group *Rent Collection Courtyard* (1965) resulted from such a process of cocreation and revolutionized various aspects of traditional sculpture. It rejected the pedestal as well as durable materials such as marble. Instead, the figures were created from clay and placed directly on the ground so that villagers could walk by them and scorn and spit on the sculptural representations of the landlords that used to rule over them.[42] These specific characteristics of art production and presentation—cocreation,

2.4
Rent Collection Courtyard, in *Rent Collection Courtyard: Sculptures of Oppression and Revolt* by Ye Yushan et al. Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965.

removal of the pedestal, and theatricality—were absent in Stalinist socialist realist sculpture. In the latter, monumental, pedestal-facilitated figures made of solid materials, towering far above the crowd, sought to embody a sense of near eternity. So rather than describing totalitarian art, Golomstock's work represents a form of *totalizing historiography* that overlooks difference in order to establish a closed-system theory.

The problem with Golomstock's analysis is that all notions of authorship, from the diversity of cultural movements in the early Russian avant-garde to Stalin's supposed integration of these concepts in socialist realism, disappear. In what he, after Lewis

Mumford, refers to as the "mega-machine" of totalitarianism, not even Stalin can be considered the ultimate performer.[43] Instead, totalitarianism becomes totalized to the point that it can *author itself*, and thus becomes the sole creator of dictatorship and propaganda artist alike. Additionally, Golomstock claims that this totalitarian condition, generated by war and revolution, stands in absolute opposition to modern democracies: "This monster [the Soviet totalitarian state] functions according to laws unknown in democratic societies, where artistic styles usually emerge spontaneously and only then engender new structures and new forms of organization of artistic life."[44] The ultimate example, he concludes, can be found in the works of former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who was himself an amateur painter who wrote a treatise on art, and in whose entourage we find no 'totalitarian' artist comparable to those surrounding Hitler and Stalin.[45]

Aside from the fact that Churchill's far from innocent, minuscule writings on art compare his gaze as an artist to that of a military commander—he describes, for example, the preparation of a landscape as a battlefield, noting that "to make a plan, thorough reconnaissance of the country where the battle is to be fought is needed"—Golomstock's remarks are mainly important to understand the political implications of the concept of totalitarian art, as it becomes clear that the term serves to establish an absolute opposition to democratic art.[46] This shows that there is something propagandistic about the notion of totalitarian propaganda art as such, both that it would be wholly "other" from art produced under democratic regimes, and that it is a logical continuation of the avant-garde experiment of merging art with life.[47] Through the notion of totalitarian propaganda art, we essentially define what is free art, thus automatically making all regimes that do not fit the radical label of totalitarianism the potential protectors of artistic autonomy. Not only does this deny the actual differences between various dictatorships and their cultural apparatuses, it also denies the reoccurring role of propaganda art in modern democracy while fully rejecting the idea that

2.5
Winston Churchill, *The Giza Pyramids at Cairo*, 1946, courtesy of Curtis Brown, London—Churchill Heritage Ltd.

the notion of democracy may in fact very well serve totalitarian objectives. As such, the concept of totalitarian propaganda art has a dual function. It offers a "complete" description of the role of art within specific twentieth-century dictatorships on the one hand, yet on the other it also serves to create the myth of *democratic exceptionalism*.

Modernist Propaganda Art

The myth of democratic exceptionalism as a liberation from propaganda is best exemplified by the work of Clement Greenberg. For him, the very project of modernity became the sole property of American capitalist democracy and its particular brand of male artists: the abstract expressionists. Through Greenberg, they would be turned into the ultimate counterpart of what he considered the "kitsch" produced by propaganda artists.[48] American abstraction in his perspective, was the product of an avant-garde no longer tricked into revolutionary politics, but dedicated to making the ultimate autonomous art, an art that could no longer "be reduced in whole or in part to anything but itself."[49] This was no longer modern art, Greenberg claimed, but "modernist art."[50] Centuries of struggle for artistic freedom finally found its culmination, its end of history, in the United States. Paradoxically, it was exactly Greenberg's reading of modernist art as "nonideological" that would turn it into the ultimate ideological weapon in the Cold War.

Greenberg's defense of modernist art became increasingly characterized by an explicit sympathy for capitalist democracy, exemplified by his membership in the American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF) in the early 1950s, which aimed at discrediting Marxist ideology and campaigning against communism.[51] Greenberg was one of the core members of the organization who refused to denounce the anticommunist campaigns of Senator Joseph McCarthy, just as the Red Scare was strengthening its grip on American cultural life.[52] The ACCF was further affiliated with the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), which, during the Cold War, had the task of covertly propagating American modernist art in Europe. This was done in order to win sympathy for the American cause by highlighting its exceptional avant-garde culture, engineered as a counterpart to the production of state-sanctioned socialist realism in the Soviet Union.[53]

As described in detail by Frances Stonor Saunders, in its operational period from 1950 to 1976 the CFF "had offices in thirty-five countries, employed dozens of personnel, published over twenty prestige magazines, held art exhibitions, owned a news and features service, organized high profile international conferences, and rewarded musicians and artists with prizes and public performances."[54] To be successful, it was crucial that the CFF upheld an image of utmost independence. Formally, CFF members were unaware of the exact sources of its funding, which the CIA transferred through a complex series of seemingly private American initiatives and foundations that supported the promotion of democratic cultural values in response to the Soviet threat.[55]

Congress for Cultural Freedom

The first international Congress for Cultural Freedom symbolically was held in Berlin and lasted five days, from June 26 to 30. Attended by 150 delegates from countries all over the world, large audiences heard outdoor sessions. Dr. Eugen Kogon, noted editor-author and president in Germany of "Europa Union," is speaker. (Photos by Jacoby, PRD HICOG)

Review

By WOLF von ECKARDT

2.6

Article by Wolf von Eckardt on the first Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin, in *Information Bulletin*, September 1950, 19.

Through progressive culture, the Soviet enemy could be framed as barbarian, both politically and culturally. But it is precisely here that one of the great paradoxes of the CFF is evident, namely that its preference for the covert use of modernist art was far more progressive than any other overt national program of the United States itself. President Truman even referenced the "degenerate" impulses of abstract art.[56] The CCF saw something entirely different in the work of the modernist artists—we could call it capitalist-democracy's liberation from doctrinal Soviet figuration through abstraction—and supported the dissemination of their work in the form of large-scale touring exhibitions such as *Modern Art in the United States* (1955) and *The New American Painting* (1958–1959).[57]

It is also relevant to note that the abstract expressionist artists were not as depoliticized and unaware of the instrumentalization of their work as is often claimed. Apart from the painter Ad Reinhardt, who remained loyal to his leftist political orientation and who was the only one of the group to participate in the March on Washington in support of black rights in 1963, several of the artists had direct and voluntary links to the anticommunist movement.[58] Barnett Newman had no problem speaking publicly of his work as a reflection of the "new America," and Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock, just like Greenberg, were members of the ACCF.[59] In 1940, Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb even helped to establish the Foundation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, which became an active agent in the anticommunist movement by "exposing party influence in various art organizations" with the aim to "destroy all Communist presence in the art world."[60] Not only did the abstract expressionists elevate themselves to a universalist category of near mythological white male painter geniuses, they also did not hesitate to campaign aggressively against those who could challenge their position of power.

Even though today's general public has been aware of the use of modernist propaganda art in the Cold War for several decades, the omnipresent faith in modernist art remains largely unshaken.

Only with the greatest exception do we find any reference to the anticommunist political orientation of its artists or the use of their work as propaganda. This absence of political context shows us the durational success of the CFF. Even though we know, or could easily know, the implications of these works as propaganda at a time in which the CIA instigated gruesome military takeovers of democratic and popular governments, those works are still not acknowledged directly enough as the propaganda that they are. In our mind, the drippings of Pollock remain abstract. They do not depict heroic American leaders or evil communists, even though, in fact, they do. Just as covert CIA operations might leave nothing but a void of disappeared bodies and classified archives, in the very abstraction of their absence they represent a terrifying political reality. Essentially, there is nothing nonfigurative about the works of modernist propaganda art. Instead, these works offer figurative representations of the freedom supposedly inherent in nonfigurative representation.

Modernist propaganda art is not exhibited in a dark corner of *Entartete Kunst*, but is at the very heart of museums, as the true backbone of Western democracy and capitalist modernity. Even when we are told that these images are propaganda, and that their makers openly endorsed the ideological warfare for which they were used, we somehow remain deeply convinced that they are not; or otherwise, that it is a mere mistake. In viewing modernist propaganda art, we continue to enact its idea of democratic freedom. That makes modernist propaganda art, more than any of the propaganda art in the past, still effective and operational. It remains visible as art, yet invisible as propaganda.

The Propaganda Art Struggle

The infrastructures that aimed to establish revolutionary modernity brought about a distinctly different form of propaganda art than those of capitalist modernity. Power thus enables particular artistic morphologies that are characterized by different macro- and

micro-performative dimensions of propaganda. Whereas the propaganda art of revolutionary modernity aims to make people both the receivers and creators of propaganda—through Klutsis's *Propaganda Kiosk*, for example—the propaganda art of capitalist modernity privileged concealment. We might think we see a drip painting, but in actuality we see the residue of the performance of democratic exceptionalism. In the first case, the propagandist becomes sender and receiver at the same time, and the macro- and micro-performative dimension of propaganda are aimed at synchronization. In the second instance, not even the artist, Pollock in this case, is completely aware of his micro-performative implication in macro-performative propaganda—a drip painting in America is a weapon in the European culture war.

To understand propaganda art means to understand something of the infrastructures that enable it. These span across Pollock's artist studio, the collectors and museums that purchase his works, the proxy organizations that lend them for their traveling exhibitions in Europe, their reproduction in catalogues and newspapers, and their subsequent mediation through lectures by Greenberg on Radio Free Europe. In Pollock's case, the creation of the artwork is consciously separated from the structures that circulate it as propaganda. The contrast with the constructivists and productivists, who made propaganda art in the form of infrastructures in which output and input were to be collectively controlled (from propaganda kiosks to workers clubs), could not be stronger. Strangely, we could even say that the work of the avant-garde propaganda artists might actually be more autonomous than that of the modernist propaganda artists. As members of the party, they did not merely operate in a predefined infrastructure, but made artworks *as* infrastructure. In other words, artworks themselves became part of the means of reality production. And although the case of revolutionary modernity is troubled by its authoritarian tendencies—exemplified by Lenin's ban of the progressive Proletkult movement—it nonetheless shows the possibilities of the inverted propaganda model that I proposed in the first

chapter. That is, a propaganda aimed not at the monopolization of elite power, but at the demand of democratizing mass power. In the case of the constructivists and productivists, this resulted in a propaganda art model that operated as a tool for and by the masses to construct the collective reality of socialism. The potentialities of that short revolutionary moment, and the artistic forms it made imaginable and possible, constitute an archeology of the future that continues to haunt our present ideas of a different world.[61]

In the first chapter, I discussed the propaganda struggle through different, competing *ideas* of reality. In this second chapter, we have moved to the propaganda struggle of different *visualizations* of reality. Historically, we can witness a condensed period of this propaganda art struggle in the arena of the 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* in Paris. Here, the propaganda art struggle was dominated by the towering German and Soviet pavilions in the centrally located international exhibition. The Soviet pavilion, designed by architect Boris Iofan, functioned mainly as a pedestal for Vera Mukhina's enormous sculpture *Worker and Collective Farm Woman*, which depicts two gigantic figures striding forward while holding a hammer (male) and a sickle (female). If these figures were striving toward anything, it was the German pavilion, which was positioned directly across from the Soviet pavilion. In his autobiography, architect Albert Speer, who designed the German pavilion, writes that he accidentally came across drawings of the Soviet pavilion and decided to anticipate the design.[62] Speer's visual strategy was subsequently to "create an imperial, quasireligious monument that would counter the forward thrust of the Soviet pavilion and dominate it in height. In opposition to Boris Iofan's dynamic, multiplanar structure, the fortress-like facade of the Deutsches House appeared stoic and immutable."[63] The monumental male nudes in Josef Thorak's sculpture *Comrades* were placed in front of Speer's construction, while an eagle positioned on top guarded the surrounding area. Both constructions—each

challenging the other, forcing an even more aggressive and monumental aesthetic—were as much military as artistic statements, with Speer at the frontline, anticipating the next cultural move of his enemy.

But although the aesthetics of overt propaganda art dominate the memory of the 1937 World's Fair, various other manifestations of the propaganda struggle were taking place simultaneously. Of course, there was the modernist Spanish pavilion, designed by Josep Lluis Sert and Luis Lacasa, in which the Republican government made its final appeal for international support in their fight against the advancement of Francisco Franco's fascist army. Center stage was Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, next to a photographic mural of Republican soldiers surrounded by posters and slogans. Picasso's work depicted the gruesome bombing, requested by Franco, of the Basque city by Italian and Nazi bombers. But more covert was Franco's own cultural presence, which was embedded in the Vatican's Pontifical Pavilion in the foreign section of the fair, situated just behind the Spanish pavilion. It included votive altarpieces from various countries, including José María Sert's mural-sized canvas *St. Teresa, Ambassadress of Divine Love to Spain, Offers to Our Lord the Spanish Martyrs of 1936* (1937). Sert's pro-Franco mural depicts a crucified Christ and Saint Theresa each blessing a line of Catholic martyrs—a dedication to the anti-Republican forces who died in the Spanish Civil War. Formally commissioned by Cardinal Isidro Gomá y Tomás, who was the archbishop of Toledo and a famous supporter of the Nationalist movement—and who would as such revitalize the function of the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*—the pavilion operated as Franco's de facto alternative fascist pavilion and as a symbol of the alliance of the Roman Catholic church and the brutal regime to come.[64]

The propaganda art struggle is the process in which different aims of reality construction compete in the domain of morphology. And it shows that just as there is a plurality of propagandas, so too is there a plurality of propaganda arts. To map the

2.7

The Nazi and Soviet Pavilions face one another at the 1937 World's Fair in Paris. Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-S30757 and Bild 146-1990-036-19/ CC-BY-SA 3.0.

histories of propaganda art simultaneously means mapping different structures of power—as in this last example, which ranged from Nazism to Stalinism, from Spanish republicanism to fascism. The clashes of different structures of power on the world stage are far from over. They rearticulated themselves during the Cold War and again today in the War on Terror. Frontlines move and change names, but propagandas remain persistent. From a

Western perspective, what was once the anticommunist filter is now the anti-Islamist filter as the Us versus Them divides expand from Russia into the Arab world in what Samuel P. Huntington claimed to be a "clash of civilizations."[65] Again, we find the claim to democratic exceptionalism on the side of the West, and the projection of the barbaric totalitarian other in the East. Having briefly explored the relation between power and form, traveling through the French Revolution to the Cold War, we can now begin to map how the propaganda art struggle shapes the culture wars of the present through the never-ending War on Terror and the rise of the international alternative-right.

3

IMAGINING TERROR

Expanded State Realism

Apart from exhibiting military force, the War on Terror has also been described as "a cultural turn" within the military-industrial complex, proving it to be a creative force as well.[1] The War on Terror is not a war waged against an already existing enemy whose image merely has to be aggrandized and exaggerated in order to mobilize support. Rather, it is a war against an enemy that needed to be imagined and created from the very beginning. The War on Terror, in this sense, is not only about fighting terror, but also about imagining terror. And in order to transform this imagination into reality, artistic tools are a crucial part of the arsenal.

But which cultural institutions and artists help constitute the expanded state and its War on Terror? To answer this question, I will analyze what I consider to be the dominant style in War on Terror propaganda art, which I refer to as *expanded state realism*. With this term I aim to describe the practice through which the imagination of terror is created; the representation of endlessly duplicating enemies through cinema, theater, games, and visual art, from Islamic terrorists to microbiological warfare. This constant threat production through threat imagination allows the construction of a new reality structured on perpetual fear, in which the expanded state claims far-reaching executive authority through a near permanent state of exception, illegal military interventions, mass surveillance, extradition, and torture in black sites.

The term *social realism* originated from the social struggles of working class people, so as to mediate the suffering and oppression that ruling classes either ignored or actively maintained. But in the case of the War on Terror, we are dealing with a form of realism that largely benefits the interests of the expanded state rather than its population, as it stages the threat necessary to institutionalize a dependency on specific military industries, legitimize a politics of secrecy, and promote the inevitability of perpetual warfare. As such, the realism projected by the expanded state is much closer to socialist realism, as discussed in the second chapter, than to social realism, since it approaches reality not as it is from the perspective of the struggling working class, but as it ought to be from the perspective of a powerful elite. This notion of realism further overlaps with what theorist Mark Fisher called "capitalist realism." He defines this as the cultural output that normalizes the economic, social, and environmental disasters of contemporary capitalism as the only realistic order, co-opting all real social alternatives in its wake.[2] In a similar way, expanded state realism propagates its own inevitability. The reasoning is that no one wants to wage wars, yet we cannot but defend ourselves against those who dream day and night of our complete and total annihilation.

Although such claims might come across as rather conspiratorial, I do not approach the expanded state as a singular actor who has one common drive for domination. State and corporate agencies, while possibly sharing more interests in power monopolies than not, are nonetheless not a homogeneous mass. In some cases, some parts of the state may be more consistent in addressing actual existential threats than others. One example of this is the growing awareness of certain military agencies over the danger of climate change, something frighteningly ignored by the dominant political classes, which are more occupied with the next elections than long-term survival.[3] In other cases, governmental agencies might act against the interests of a government, for example in the case of the FBI's investigation into Russian ties

3.1
MSCMC briefing and documentation of TOPOFF 2 (2003), US Department of Homeland Security Office for Domestic Preparedness.

to the Trump regime. A final example is former government operatives who turn against the infrastructures they are supposed to enable, such as the case with whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden. In other words, the public-private infrastructures of the expanded state are conflictual among themselves, but that does not mean that in the context of the War on Terror they have not created dominant and reoccurring master narratives through propaganda and propaganda art.

When I use the term *art* in the context of War on Terror propaganda art, I refer back to the interdisciplinary nature of propaganda. In the context of propaganda, the morphological and imaginative practice we term art can never be understood in an isolated manner or as a single medium. For propaganda to construct reality through as many domains and media as possible it must be interdisciplinary. I will try to show how visual art, cinema, games, theater, and so on, have to be understood as interconnected in the process of constructing reality according to expanded state realism—the successor to socialist realism in the twenty-first century.

The Spect-actors of the War on Terror

Black smoke emerges from the site. Metro buses and cars are burning. Hundreds of bodies lie in the debris. First-aid workers try to pull people from underneath the concrete rubble. This sounds like the description of a catastrophe or an attack in an urban environment, and in our contemporary age that tends to mean a terrorist attack. But what we are actually witnessing here is a form of spectacular theater authored by the United States Department of Homeland Security Office for Domestic Preparedness, titled TOPOFF (shorthand for "Top Officials").[4]

The scene that I just described was that of TOPOFF 2, which took place over the course of five days in May 2003. Standing as a fictional scenario played out in real time, a dirty bomb was detonated in Seattle and an imaginary biological weapon was released in Chicago. The group responsible for the attack was an equally fictional terrorist organization called GLODO (Group for the Liberation of Orangeland and the Destruction of Others). This theatrical spectacle—framed by government officials as an exercise for public safety—followed a two hundred-page script and was staged in decor by scenery production house Production Services. Yet despite the scenario's evident theatricality, it involved the participation of eight thousand actual citizens,

including government officials, aid workers, and journalists. Michelle Dent, who witnessed TOPOFF 2 firsthand, wondered who, in this staging of reality through spectacular theater, was actually the audience: "The government officials in play? The real-time media? The would-be terrorists?"[5] The answer seems to be all of them at once, only they are not merely spectators but actors as well. They are what the progressive Brazilian theorist and theatermaker Augusto Boal termed "spect-actors."[6] In the process of collectively enacting and witnessing one's own destruction, the new reality of the War on Terror is established; the imagination of fear becomes internalized and collectively embodied. We witness a spectacle so extreme and detailed in TOPOFF 2, and so inclusive of all segments of society, that it literally transforms an existing reality into a new one through a totalizing spectacular theater made manifest by propaganda art.[7]

To imagine fear and construct reality according to the style of expanded state realism, various artistic disciplines are necessary. A theatrical spectacle similar to TOPOFF, although styled exclusively for government elites, is the *Atlantic Storm* game, staged by the Center for Biosecurity at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center in 2005 as a ministerial tabletop exercise.[8] The script of *Atlantic Storm* starts during a fictional multination summit meeting in Washington, DC, when reports suddenly come in that a massive terrorist attack in Europe is taking place in the form of a virus rapidly spreading smallpox.[9] Senior government leaders played the role of heads of state assembled at the summit, with former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright acting as the president of the United States.[10] Gathered around a large oval mock summit table, an LCD screen displaying a newsflash of the fictional global news channel *GNN* is placed in front of the leaders. As news of casualties rolls in, the message of the game scenario is clear: the combination of disease and terrorism poses a threat greater than all the wars of the past century combined. Rather than aiming at rational governance or diplomacy, the *Atlantic Storm* game cultivates a scenario in which only the

3.2

Soldiers move forward to search a building during training at the National Training Center, Mojave Desert in northern San Bernardino County, California, 2005. Photo: Beth Reece.

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most drastic responses are imaginable—militarization of public health infrastructures, radical securitization, a disregard of any previously existing law, and unlimited patriotism and nationalism to protect at least part of one's own population. In other words, from the perspective of *Atlantic Storm* the world is no longer governable via rational means.

In the ungovernable world, the expanded state rules. As citizens, we follow orders to survive. In order to train populations to become counterterror warriors, spectacular theater and games also have a digital version known as *America's Army*, a free multiplayer shooter game conceived by Colonel Casey Wardynski in 2002 and developed as a recruiting and training platform for the US army. This product of "militainment"[11] requires players to log in through the army's recruitment website and places them in wartime scenarios based on actual (although sanitized) experiences of soldiers in war zones in Afghanistan and Iraq, reconstructed into fictional regions such as the country of Czervenia.[12] Different from games developed by the Hezbollah organization, such as *Special Force* (2003) and *Special Force 2: Tale of the Truthful Pledge* (2006), in which the killing of Israeli soldiers is graphically depicted, the enemy in *America's Army* is rather abstract, wearing nondescript black uniforms resulting in "faceless enemy avatars" upon which the player can project any possible future enemy of the United States.[13] The success of *America's Army* has been enormous. In ten years, more than thirteen million people had played the game, spending around 260 million hours fighting anonymized, ever-expanding threats around the world.[14]

The fact that the US Army has by now become a stakeholder in the video game industry allows it to work with its most prominent competitors. When *Call of Duty* game developer Dave Anthony left his company, he was contacted by the Pentagon and hired as an advisor at the neoconservative think tank Atlantic Council. The Pentagon had been impressed by his imaginative scripts of future forms of warfare, focused on cyberattacks aimed at

toppling stock exchanges or hacking drones to turn them against their operators. In this regard, Anthony himself noted, "As a director and writer, my job is to break expectations and established thinking without fear of failure in order to create new and fresh ideas."[15] The switch from game developer to government advisor is potentially as small as the one between gamer and soldier.

The relationship between the war industry and the game industry is one of interdependency rather than antagonism, making it easy to imagine how a virtual user of *America's Army* would end up in the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, nicknamed "The Sandbox." This vast area in the Mojave Desert of California houses detailed copies of villages in countries against which the US Army is waging—or might wage—war. In 2009, Scott Magelssen recounts, the focus was on Iraq, and apart from crafting whole towns (optimized by Hollywood set designers) based on actual locations in the country, it also employed Iraqi-Americans to live seventeen days of the month in the simulation—in some cases even adding homeless people from nearby villages as "extras." Detailed scripts were provided to each actor in order to create a full-scale immersive simulation for the soldiers. It included sudden suicide attacks, bombs, sniper fire, and continuous scrutiny from the reporters of INN (a fictional version of CNN), which broadcasts each military mistake instantly through local television channels. "Insurgents" were trained by actor Carl Weathers, famous for his role in the action film *Predator* (1987), and leaders of the NTC refer to the day-to-day scripts of villagers and soldiers as "improvised Shakespearean plays."[16] Referencing Boal, Magelssen concludes that "while all political theatre hopes its messages will be explicitly manifested in the world outside the simulation, theatre immersion in the Sandbox is clearly one example where there is no question about theatre having an impact on reality."[17]

The practice of War on Terror propaganda in the style of expanded state realism—through the spectacular theater or the game—shows a constant alternation of reality; staged wars run parallel to real wars, one slowly morphing into the other. The

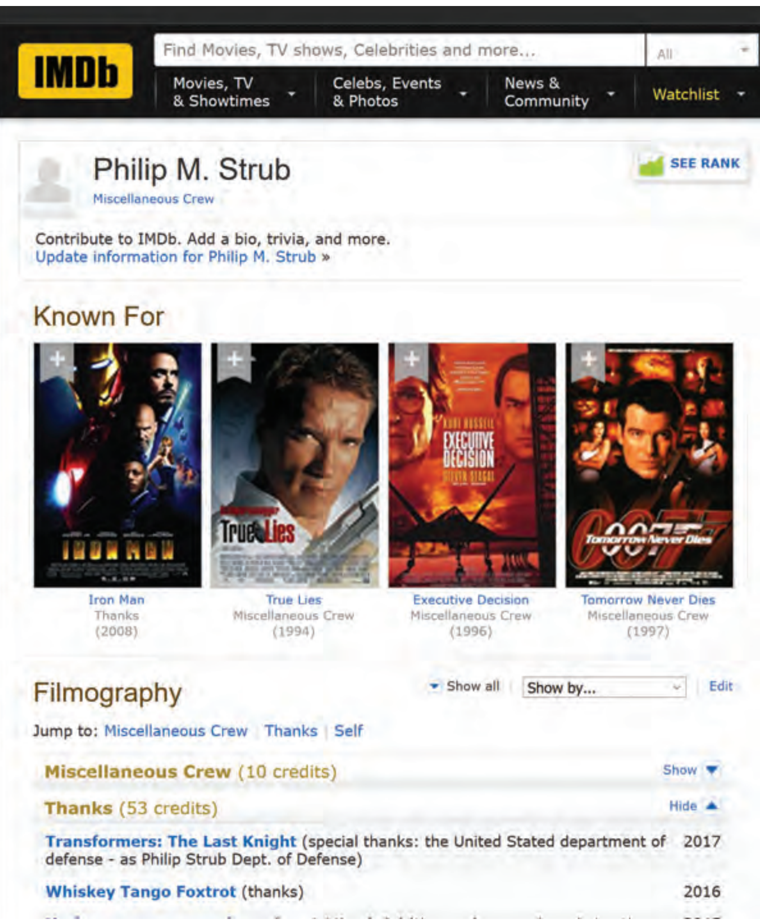
masses of spect-actors are the vanguard of the War on Terror's new reality in the making. They internalize the master narratives of the War on Terror on a micro-performative level to sustain its macro-performative theater of operations.

Curators of the Pentagon

Where spectacular theater and games in expanded state realism integrate citizens and governing elites to participate directly in their own potential destruction, the use of more passive forms like television and cinema is aimed at implicating audiences by having them powerlessly witness their own destruction via alien invasion, asteroids, tsunamis, global war, and terrorist agents. The creation of the spect-actor succeeds only when the closest possible proximity between those watching and those watched is established; when the civilian on-screen becomes the full embodiment of the one off-screen.

In spectacular disaster cinema, planetary threats help society to overcome dysfunctional families and broken communities, while simultaneously forcing them into dependency on the state. Family conflicts, class oppression, or race divisions become seemingly irrelevant when the whole planet is faced with destruction and only the War on Terror's expanded state has the military and infrastructural means to sustain survival. At the same time, scientists, doctors, and average citizens turn into heroes and instant recruits of the expanded state as they contribute their knowledge and bravery as civil defense. The spectacular disaster film thus simultaneously destroys society and rebuilds it in the interest of the expanded state through a narrative of state of exception.[18]

Expanded state realism's display of excessively detailed disaster in War on Terror propaganda art subsequently normalizes the War on Terror itself. Compared to the planetary state of exception shown in spectacular disaster cinema, ranging from the indiscriminate employment of nuclear weapons to the selection



3.3

Screenshot of the IMDb filmography of Philip M. Strub, entertainment liaison at the United States Department of Defense.

of the fittest citizens to rebuild the post-disaster world, the War on Terror itself seems like a rather modest, contained, and even rational endeavor. The excess of disaster that we rehearse by witnessing spectacular cinema turns actual disaster enacted in our name in the present into negligible incidents of the new norm.

A much-debated example is the notorious figure of Counter Terrorism Unit agent Jack Bauer in *24*. By the end of this post–September 11 television series, Bauer had prevented a nuclear attack on Los Angeles and halted the release of the Cordilla virus. To prevent this endless sequence of threats to the United States, Bauer relies on a great variety of torture techniques to acquire the information necessary to locate a given terrorist suspect, more often than not, via caricatures of terrorists depicted as Muslims.[19] The excesses of Donald Rumfeld's state sanctioned torture in *24* even led the US military to ask the show's producers to tone down their depictions in order to not inflict damage on the country's image abroad.[20] This request allowed the US military to project itself as modest in comparison to the exaggerated depiction in *24*. The torture employed in the actual War on Terror suddenly appeared as measured compared to Bauer's extremist disregard of any law, foreign or domestic.

Similar yet more subtle TV series would be developed in the wake of *24*. One such example is *Homeland*, in which protagonist Carrie Mathison, a CIA agent with bipolar disorder, uncovers internal terrorist plots in her own agency. Although the series seems to strike a more critical tone toward the expanded state, the madness of its narrative is that it takes a rogue bipolar agent to expose terrorist plots and agency conspiracies. *Homeland's* more "liberal" setup, including "good" American Muslims working for the CIA dedicating themselves to foreign interventions, extralegal abductions, and drone killings, might have been the reason for it receiving former president Obama's praise. But its core narrative is not actually a critique of the system through which the War on Terror is waged, but rather proposes that an even more

extreme "bipolar" approach to policy is necessary in increasing its brutal efficiency.

The interdependency between the expanded state and the production of spectacular disaster and torture television and cinema is not only ideological, but also material. Hollywood has a long history of supporting war efforts, ranging from state-produced war cinema like the World War II film series *Why We Fight* (1942–1945) or the Vietnam War film *The Green Berets* (1968). In the case of the infamous *Top Gun* (1986), cinemas even installed recruiting booths for the American military, which saw US Air Force enlistment grow by 500 percent.[21] Today, the involvement of the Pentagon in the production of films that benefit its aims is carefully orchestrated via its Film Liaison Unit, operating through offices in the Pentagon and Los Angeles that can be contacted voluntarily by film directors who are in need of military equipment. Essentially, the Film Liaison Unit "lends" its materials, but only when the military is represented in a way they consider accurate.[22] As Phil Strub, entertainment liaison at the Department of Defense since 1989, states, "We're after military portrayal and they're after our equipment."[23] Strub's view of an accurate portrayal privileges spectacular television and cinema, and he's credited for providing material support to series such as *24* and spectacular disaster movies like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and the *Transformers* franchise.

The CIA's entertainment liaison operates in similar ways, although with less material support available it offers access to its classified campus and officers instead.[24] An important example of its influence is *Charlie Wilson's War* (2007), which tells the story of the CIA operation that armed the Afghan mujahedin in fighting the Soviets. Crucial script interventions by the CIA's entertainment liaison removed scenes that effectively linked US support of the mujahedin to the September 11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror.[25] Isolating the earlier American involvement in the Soviet-Afghan war is a form of historical censorship that prevents a vehicle of entertainment from portraying causal relations

between past and present. It reveals the power of the CIA alongside the Pentagon as the curators of Hollywood cinema and the frightening reality they aim to construct.

The participation that spectacular cinema and television demands of its spect-actors is actually passivity—a paralyzed status as they witness their own societies destroyed in brutal detail right in front of their eyes. And it is passivity that forms the crucial act of civic resignation to allow states of exception to become permanent replacements for democratic governance. In that sense, the expanded state is a state idea that actively shapes our very existential state of being. This state is defined by permanent instability through nonstop threat production induced by enemies appearing in endless shapes and forms. The spect-actors' malleable passivity, cultivated in spectacular cinema and television, is an essential part of the expanded state's activity.

State Abstractions

So far, I have proposed several examples of how expanded state realism imagines fear and constructs reality through its vanguard of spect-actors, either through their active participation or active passivity. But what made it possible to supplant one reality for another? The fictional GLODO, the faceless enemies of *America's Army*, or the interplanetary robot wars of *Transformers* can hardly be credited for being so convincing that whole populations instantly submit to becoming the civil defense of the War on Terror. To supplant an existing reality with a new one a void has to be created. An annihilation of a history that previously operated as a common frame of reference is needed, an act far more fundamental and structural than a rewritten script of *Charlie Wilson's War* can alone provide. For this, War on Terror propaganda art relies on what I propose as its secondary style: *expanded state abstraction*.

Fourteen-year Guantánamo Bay prisoner Mohamedou Ould Slahi wrote his book *Guantánamo Diary* in 2005. But for it to

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blessing when the warm GTMO ~~hit me~~ sun hit me.
I felt the life sneaking back into every inch of
my body. I had always this fake happiness, though
for a very short time. It's like taking narcotics. "How
you been" said one the portoricans escorting guards
with his weak English. "I'm OK, Thanks, and you", "No,
worry, you gonna back to your family" he said. When
he said so I couldn't help breaking in [redacted] Lately,
I became so vulnerable. What's wrong with me?. Just a
soothing word in this ocean of agony, was enough to
make me cry. [redacted] We had a complete
portorican division. They were different than other
Americans. They were not as vigilant and
unfriendly. Sometimes, they ~~take~~ took detainees
to shower [redacted] Everybody liked
them. Due to their friendly and humane approach to
detainees, they got in trouble with the responsible of the
camps. I cannot objectively speak about the people
from porto rico b/c I haven't seen enough, however,
if you ask me have ever seen a bad portorican
guy?, My answer would be no. But if you ask
is there one? I just don't know. And the same
way with the Sudanese people. " [redacted]
and give him no chair" said the DOC worker on the
radio, when the escort team dropped me in [redacted]
[redacted] entered the
room. They brought a picture of an American black
man called [redacted] " We're gonna talk

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3.4

Declassified pages from Mohamedou Ould Slahi's original manuscript ***Guantánamo Diary*****, 2005.**

be published, every single page had to be put up to the United States government for review. When it was finally released as a book in 2015, black rectangles of censorship littered the pages. The motivation for censoring Ould Slahi's original text is most telling when a black rectangle appears in the following description of a conversation between Ould Slahi and one of his guards:

> "No worry, you gonna go back to your family," he said. When he said that I couldn't help breaking in ▬▬.[26]

It might be hard to imagine, but it seems the US government chose to classify the word "tears." In the name of national security, censorship is applied to evidence of the fact that Ould Slahi is a human subject capable of experiencing and expressing emotions. It is also a censorship of the affective dimension a reader might experience when reading Slahi's words. By canceling testimony a dehumanizing abstraction emerges, which can then be substituted with the images of imminent societal destruction enacted by an ever-threatening *Them* in the Us versus Them divide. In other words, from expanded state realism to expanded state abstraction, Ould Slahi can be turned from a human into a tearless monster deserving of indefinite detention and torture in a war prison. This is but a small example of the voids and abstractions created in the War on Terror, which have further classified whole parts of government administration, public information sources in libraries, and even geographies and human bodies in the name of national security.[27]

Trevor Paglen calls this realm of state abstraction the "black world," and much of his artistic and written work has aimed at mapping secret sites and classified aircraft and corporate offices that form its predominant locations of operation.[28] The complexity of this endeavor is that the black world is by definition conceived as a "secret geography," one not merely hidden by the state, but in Paglen's words, "designed to exist outside the law."[29]

3.5

Trevor Paglen, *Large Hangars and Fuel Storage, Tonopah Test Range, NV. Distance 18 Miles 10:44 AM,* 2005, C-Print, courtesy of Metro Pictures New York, Altman Siegel, San Francisco.

His strategy, essentially, is to juxtapose information that we do have against that which is missing. A so-called classified black budget for example, can be partially deciphered by subtracting all known expenses of the state from its total expenditure. That which remains unaccounted for is used for covert operations.[30] Supplemented by Paglen with information he gathers through amateur astronomers detecting classified satellites, or indigenous activists protesting the appropriation of their lands for military test sites, this secret geography can be made partially visible.[31]

Yet there is a counterpart to this black world's invisibility, specifically when it wants to be "visibly invisible."[32] For example, Paglen painstakingly collected badges produced by the Pentagon that were to be worn by operatives involved in classified missions. These badges display a wide array of symbols, such as magicians, dragons, aliens, geometrical patterns, skulls, satellites, and aircraft, and are accompanied by short titles such as "A LIFETIME OF SILENCE BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR," or "ALONE AND UNAFRAID."[33] Internally, they provide the badge holder with the mystical symbolism of a secret society, whereas externally, they communicate an image of impenetrable power that aims at keeping Paglen and his befriended amateur astronomers and activists at a distance. This language of visible invisibility is so powerful that even a critical researcher and artist like Paglen becomes affected by it in adopting its cryptic visual language as an artistic vocabulary. His telephotography series, for example, which consists of blurry images of classified military bases carrying detailed titles such as *Large Hangars and Fuel Storage, Tonopah Test Range, NV. Distance 18 Miles 10:44 AM* (2005) and *Detachment 3, Air Force Flight Test Center #2, Groom Lake, NV, Distance ~26 Miles* (2008), are in actuality not revealing anything but what the expanded state allows him to see. In fact, Paglen even adds a certain elegance by means of his highly conceptual aesthetics. As such, expanded state abstraction manages to reproduce itself through the artist that critically researches it. While Paglen starts off with the aim of making visible the invisible—to which he certainly, in part, succeeds—the near-mystical aesthetics of the expanded state nonetheless manage to reproduce through the artist's work.

State abstractions—the aesthetic translation of Donald Rumsfeld's infamous "known unknowns"—are not the sole practice of countries that wage in the War on Terror, as they are also duplicated by the enemies this war helped to bring into being. The Islamic State's counter-abstractions, inspired by its desire to return to the age of its prophet's existence, similarly aims to erase

information that could undermine this planned return to history. This objective takes the form of iconoclastic gestures, which themselves translate to new powerful images.[34] On April 9, 2015, for example, the Islamic State's digital militia CyberCaliphate began the operation #OpFrance, hacking eleven channels of the French broadcasting network TV5 Monde, as well as turning its website and social media accounts black. The only text appearing on these black canvases was the signature "Je suIS IS," a word play on the "Je suis Charlie" slogan that was popularized after attacks by Islamic State members on the headquarters of satirical French journal Charlie Hebdo. For a moment, the attack stopped screens from producing any moving history. This erasure of image history represents a major step back in time to the Islamic State's desired year zero—the "sealed time" of its global caliphate.[35]

These cyberattacks can be considered as the iconoclastic equivalent of the destruction of cultural heritage in the Islamic State–controlled part of Iraq and Syria. For instance, international outrage followed after a video was released by the organization that same year whereby its members can be seen destroying statues and artifacts dating from the Assyrian and Akkadian empires, held in the collection of Mosul Museum. But these iconoclastic gestures—whether in the realm of Western media machinery or in the context of museums—can of course be equally seen as the production of new imagery. These videos, produced by the Islamic State's al-Furqān media channel, build, in the words of Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, on a particular brand of "Islamic futurism," characterized by "aestheticizing approaches towards politics with a strong emphasis on technology," despite the retro-futurist discourse of the Islamic State that calls for a return into history.[36] Indeed, the Islamic State's high production value videos and films are constituted not only by the depiction of the destruction of cultural heritage and the torture-killing of "infidels," but also by the excessive parading of high-tech machinery and equipment, from the now infamous lines of weaponized SUVs to the brand new weaponry they obtained from the embattled

3.6

Islamic State members destroy artifacts in the Mosul Museum, Iraq. Still from a video released by al-Furqān Media, February 26, 2015.

Iraqi army, as well as drones, computers, and phones. Botz-Bornstein notes that, while operating in nonurban environments, various shots in major works such as *The Clanging of the Swords IV* (2014) are framed so that the new caliphate seems to operate in a techno-urbanist context. Although the ultra-fundamentalists present themselves as anti-aesthetic in their rejection of religious iconography, the Islamic State bypasses this problem by presenting its imagery through violence, a *death-style* (instead of life-style) of sorts, as "ISIS propaganda evolved towards the *la-violence-pour-la-violence* scheme whose end is the complete sacralization of violence."[37]

But this Islamic State futurism is not an objective in and of itself; its violence is not meant to be an art, but a tool to mobilize

the collective annihilation of imagery in the caliphate all together, in order for only a single, all-encompassing anti-image to remain: the black canvas of the flag of the Islamic State itself.[38] Through its use by the Islamic State, the black square is returned to representation in imaging the beginning and end of the ever-expanding caliphate. It stands as the image that comes before and after all others, which represents the seizure of the immoral image feed of Western heresy on one hand, and the return to the origin of the world and the Prophet's word (not his image) on the other. It is upon this monochrome black, this abstract void, that the Islamic State constructs the cultish reality of its caliphate and it does so in a very similar way to how the United States has used its black world to construct its own expanded state.

The construction of a new reality in War on Terror propaganda art demands the destruction of an old one. Every void, every state abstraction, creates space to reconstruct reality anew. And where realist and abstract art in conventional art history form each other's counterparts—although in the previous chapter we already saw how abstraction can itself be a form of figuration—in the context of War on Terror propaganda art, they act supplementarily; one creates what the other has erased. The erasures of the expanded state or the Islamic State are simultaneously acts of creation, upon which new historical narratives and state ideas of global empires are crafted. Erasing key events and sites in our collective consciousness on a macro-performative scale allows us to rewire our sensibilities on a micro-performative scale, to come to embody on a day-to-day level the new narratives and realities reconstructed through and upon us.

Steve Bannon, Propaganda Artist

If the Islamic State is the external foreign manifestation of the War on Terror—its *double*, so to say—then the rise of ultranationalist and alt-right movements in the course of the War on Terror form its internal domestic double. The extremist right has been

3.7

Collage of film stills from Stephen K. Bannon's *Generation Zero* (2010). Jonas Staal, *Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective, Study*, 2018, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam. Image by Jonas Staal and Remco van Bladel.

steadily supplanting the neoconservative establishments that initiated the War on Terror in the first place. While George W. Bush and his allies invaded Arab countries despite continuously stating that their enemy was not Islam but terrorism, movements such as the alt-right have instead declared a total and inevitable clash of civilizations. Once we begin rewriting history, and abstractions and voids begin to emerge in our collective frames of reference, there might be unforeseen others who hijack the process, to narrate reality according to their interests. In the case of the alt-right, we are dealing with what David Neiwert describes as "the gradual coalescence of the alternative-universe worldviews of conspiracists, Patriots, white supremacists, Tea Partiers, and nativists," which, in the years leading up to Trump's election, forged their "lethal union" online, gradually building international alliances with European anti-Islamic ultranationalists.[39] The propagandists and propaganda artists of this growing international alt-right alliance radicalized the discourse of the War on Terror and took over what the neocons began.

The work of propagandist and propaganda artist Steve Bannon, the campaign director of Trump's 2016 presidential bid and the White House chief advisor in the first year of his administration, is important in this regard. Bannon's work in the early nineties for Goldman Sachs was foundational for his organizational work as a propagandist, as it provided him with the tools to develop various venture-capitalist and political enterprises. His role as the CEO of the Biosphere 2 project in Arizona from 1993 to 1995 already revealed his obsession with closed-system technologies.[40] As the largest ecosphere ever built on earth, Biosphere 2's original remit was to explore the possibilities for interplanetary colonization, but under Bannon's leadership it became a massive laboratory for researching the impacts of climate change, in sharp contrast to his later decisive role in convincing President Trump to pull out of the Paris Climate Agreement. In 2007, with funding from the ultraconservative Mercer family, Bannon cofounded Breitbart News—the self-declared "home of the alt-right"—and helped

organize the anti-Obama Tea Party movement. Over time he has been instrumental in constructing, step by step, an expanding biosphere of the alt-right, with its own political, financial, and media wings—its own infrastructure.

A less discussed, albeit crucial, aspect of Bannon's oeuvre is his work as a propaganda filmmaker—as an instigator of narratives intended to unite the (extreme) right. The first of Bannon's ten documentary film pamphlets, *In the Face of Evil* (2004), still followed a rather classic neoconservative narrative, albeit with a paleoconservative touch. It presents a glorified life story of the Republican president Ronald Reagan, portraying him as a dedicated hero facing the evil of the Soviet Union. The film ends with images of the attacks on the Twin Towers, from which, out of residual dust and smoke, the figure of Osama Bin Laden appears. It emphasizes Bannon's view that Western civilization once again faces an existential threat; the danger of Cold War communism mutates into War on Terror Islamism. Bannon considers this "return of evil" as a cyclical process. He contends that societies rise and fall over four generations, and to reinforce their glory, a clash of civilizations must be led by formidable leaders, time and time again.[41]

The combination of Bannon's sensitivities to fringe conspiracy theory and his search for a new Reagan brought him to become a campaigner and filmmaker for the Tea Party movement, which united disillusioned Republicans, independents, and libertarians, as well as white nationalist and white supremacist groups. In *The Undefeated* (2011), Bannon portrays former vice-presidential candidate and Tea Party figurehead Sarah Palin as his champion. Combined with images of Reagan, Palin is depicted as a people's hero—an icon of the free West, a fighter for free market economic nationalism, and simultaneously a dedicated mother who upholds the values of family and defends Christian doctrine. Just like Reagan, she faces a multiheaded enemy. From the outside it's Islamic Terrorism. From the inside it's a cultural Marxist plot of radicals that are infiltrating universities and government with

the aim to collectivize the state from within.[42] Finally, the film contends that connecting the domestic and the international is the enemy of the globalist elite: hippies turned Wall Street sharks, whose hedonistic and individualist worldview created the conditions for the financial crisis of 2008. Bannon, who claims Palin was the true beginning of Trump, used his films to work and rework the scripts that would go on to create *Trumpism*—and did so well before Trump actually entered the political arena.

As far as Trumpism can be considered an ideology, we can trace it back to the cinematic narratives of Bannon, who developed his own doctrine of white Christian free market nationalism over the course of his career. It was not just these narratives that would shape Trumpism, however, but also their strategy of communication. Bannon characterizes his cinematic style as a form of "kinetic cinema," inspired—in his own words—by the work of Sergei Eisenstein, Leni Riefenstahl, and Michael Moore—the latter of which released his anti-Trump film *Fahrenheit 11/9* (2018) at the very same moment that Bannon presented his latest filmic work *Trump@War* (2018).[43] Formally, Bannon's work follows clear documentary stylistic conventions. Voiceovers of ideologues posing as "experts" lead us through what look like historical documents that provide proof for the argument of a cyclical rise and fall of civilizations. This narrative is strengthened by an avalanche of stock footage, depicting a reoccurring visual ecology of rising storms, crisis graphs, collapsing buildings, and burning banknotes, which suggest a prophetic algorithm that directs both human and nonhuman phenomena. This dense aesthetic and narrative assault affirms a sense of inevitability, twisting and turning, overwriting history as we knew it, embodying Bannon's own claim that "What I've tried to do is weaponize film."[44]

Kinetic cinema, in Bannon's words, aims to "overwhelm an audience."[45] That strategy is as true for Bannon's cinematic work as it is for his political work. In that sense, the Trump campaign was a "kinetic campaign," and continues to be so. It is an overwhelming narrative that on closer inspection consists of

3.8

On October 13, 2015, Trump retweets his portrait as the alt-right *Pepe the Frog* meme.

contradictory statements and provocations. Its bombardment of ideas, scandals, and controversies make it impossible for mainstream media to even keep track. Hillary Clinton had to refer to a special website of fact-checkers during a debate with Trump as it proved impossible for her to debunk all of his lies within the timeframe of the discussion itself. The kinetic campaign is one that rewrites all conventional narratives and turns them against themselves. Trump is accused of sexual harassment? Bannon stages a counter–press conference for Trump in which he sits next to women who have accused Bill Clinton of rape. Trump is accused of supporting the alt-right? Bannon stages a press conference in which Trump points to the alt-left as the real danger.

The George W. Bush administration transformed the Us versus Them narrative of the Cold War into that of the War on Terror, redirecting history to serve the purpose of military invasion and occupation. When the time came for Bannon, he hijacked and radicalized this process, expanding War on Terror propaganda to include the propaganda of the alt-right. He has subsequently tried to broaden this to the international stage through his Brussels-based organization The Movement, a campaign bureau for European alt-right and ultranationalist parties and platforms. The fact that the rise and internationalization of the alt-right took place first through culture and then through politics affirms Angela Nagle's thesis that the Gramscians of the twenty-first century are not on the left, but on the right, organizing their own long march through the institutions—from universities to politics to the media—to manufacture a new alt-right consent.[46] Its foot soldiers, in the form of the online troll armies, perpetrate their white nationalist, anti-Semitic, racist, and misogynic messages through culture, best exemplified by their co-option of *Pepe the Frog*—a cartoon that was turned into a nihilistic and violent vessel of extremist ideology and gained popularity among the online 4chan imageboard users.[47] In turn, the scripts of Trumpism were written through Bannon's fringe cinema, awaiting a Reaganesque vessel to enact them into being. From Bannon to the troll armies

of the alt-right, we can essentially trace the process in which artistic and cultural imagination has transformed into our present political reality.

In other words, War on Terror propaganda does not only construct its own realities through expanded state realism and expanded state abstraction. The procedure of altering reality also creates unplanned external and internal doubles, such as the Islamic State and the international alt-right, which aim to hijack and repurpose its strategies to their own ends. This hijacking redirects our script as spect-actors, as we find ourselves witnessing and participating in new forms of unprecedented terror in the spectacular murderous videos of the Islamic State's al-Furqan network, or in Bannon's choreographies of Trumpism with new wars (and the new enemies these wars generate) coming into being as a result.

Our State of Exception

In War on Terror propaganda art (and now increasingly in its alt-right double), the Pentagon and CIA are the new art institutions, Phil Strub, the new curator, and game designers, meme creators, and Steve Bannon the new artists. On a macro-performative level, War on Terror propaganda enacts the actual wars and invasions that murder hundreds of thousands of people, but on a micro-performative level, War on Terror propaganda art is crucial in sustaining these global operations of state terrorism. Its art institutions and artists implicate us in apocalyptic disaster and bring us to witness and rehearse fictional threats to the point of their embodiment, making lived experience of what was once mere imagination. Long have we asked how authoritarians in the past were able to come to power, but in our perpetual state of existential anxiety, we are unable to ask the same question in the present—there is always a next sleeper cell, a next microbacterial attack, a next nuclear threat, a next war about to happen. The state of exception is not merely political, but an existential state

20:06:19:18
CAM 3
"GITMO LIVE"

3.9

Coco Fusco, *A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in the New America*, 2006–2008. Photo: Eduardo Aparicio. Courtesy of Coco Fusco and Eduardo Aparcio.

of living under War on Terror propaganda.[48] It is often said that art deals with the human condition, but War on Terror propaganda art has actually created it.

The imagination of terror is not limited to our television screens or the staged sceneries of TOPOFF. As Stephen Eisenman showed, the cultural construction of enemies in the Us versus Them dichotomy can result in the material horror of "intimate theaters of cruelty."[49] In the photos taken by the guards of Abu Ghraib prison, we witness not only the hooded prisoners placed in stress positions, covered in excrement, or forcefully composed in suggestive, erotic postures, but also the soldiers themselves acting proudly and openly as their torturers. This theater of cruelty is nothing like the transgressive theater of Antonin Artaud.[50] Instead, the supposed bestiality of the prisoners grants the guards the right to shame them and to thus affirm their own "feeling of national and racial superiority,"[51] alongside the "naturalness and inevitability of [a] political, economic and cultural system—continuously under threat by nations on the periphery or semi-periphery—whereby the United States occupies the core of a global order."[52] Once its victims are turned into faceless avatars, the fictional realities of War on Terror propaganda take hold, and torture and murder become the final completing acts in which artistic imagination turns into the political reality of our perpetual state of exception. "Torture is painfully real," argues performance artist Coco Fusco in line with Eisenman, but this indisputable reality does not change the fact that "theater and performance are crucial to make it work."[53] An important part of Fusco's analysis is the use of female bodies in the process of torturing prisoners. During a 2007 symposium at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) entitled "The Feminist Future," Fusco appeared in full army uniform, acting as a US Army representative addressing the importance of women in the War on Terror. Bypassing any use of covert language, Fusco pronounces:

> We exploit the vulnerability that is common in Islamic fundamentalists in order to get them to cooperate with us. The sexual freedom women gained in the twentieth century has turned out to be a highly effective means of disarming our enemies.[54]

In doing so, Fusco lays bare the intimate theater of cruelty through its performativity. She does so not by framing it as a site of violent excess, but as a site where macro-politics are performed on a micro-political scale, physically and ideologically. The use of female torturers is part of a recuperation of the emancipatory gestures of the feminist movements, which are now transformed into symbols of Western civilization and exceptionalism, and thus into effective weapons in a new crusade essentially antithetical to everything these movements stood for.

As I argued previously, the expanded state and War on Terror propaganda largely follow the propaganda model of Chomsky and Herman. Monopolization, source control, and anti-Islamism all form essential components in securing complicity in the reality-construction that benefits the interest of the stakeholders of the expanded state. But as we discussed in previous chapters, the aim to construct reality is not yet the same as monopolizing reality as such. There are various forms of power at play that shape the propaganda struggle. Just as I critiqued the use of the notion of totalitarianism for its suggestion of absolute totality or homogeneity, so too I believe that we must not fall into the trap of thinking that War on Terror propaganda is the sole author of our world—despite it being an excessively large stakeholder in it.

A propaganda history yet to be written, as I noted in the first chapter, is one that would be based on the inverted propaganda model. It would focus on emerging powers that aim for democratization rather than monopolization, transparency rather than source control, public information instead of flak (misinformation), and collectivity instead of anticommunism or anti-Islamism. In the twenty-first century we have witnessed such emerging constituent powers take shape.[55] From the Arab Spring to M15/

Los Indignados, from Occupy to the Greek "Oxi," from Black Lives Matter to Nuit Debout, popular mass movements are combating their collective state of precarity by joining forces. Where covert elite power aims at monopolitization and thus reiterates the singular power of the sovereign upon a people, overt popular power aims at democratization, in which those who participate in the performance of power share in collective autonomy, becoming instrumental to one another through the formation of interdependency. As such, popular mass movements do not impose propaganda filters, but enact demands—demands of a different distribution of power, which takes the form of a different propaganda and propaganda art.

Even those in power once had to get to power, and propaganda and propaganda art begin to emerge from those very first stages of organization, of building infrastructures through which reality can be constructed anew. To suggest that propaganda belongs only to those already in power is to deny the emancipatory history of propaganda and propaganda art in popular mass movements. It is also to deny the possibility that they could come to power one day as well. Popular mass movements the world over challenge existing power structures and pre-enact their own against, or in spite of, our current state of exception. What then is the popular propaganda art through which this imagined new world is trying to take hold?

4

POPULAR REALISM

To Make a World

Popular mass movements represent a paradoxical form of power as they emerge from a collective embodied experience of powerlessness. Few will put their well-being at risk simply because a spontaneous democratic impulse has taken hold of them. Extreme and mass precarity is experienced before that happens, which manifests in structural oppression through dictatorship, criminal mortgage schemes that bankrupt families and whole communities, toxic destruction of indigenous lands, endless spirals of student debt, systemic police violence against people of color, working several zero-contract jobs without making ends meet, increased prosecution and criminalization of religious communities, and torture of terrorist suspects deprived of legal protection.[1] When it becomes clear that these extremely varying conditions of precarity are structural, and that the state ideas used to impose them leave no means to challenge the injustice they cause, we begin to assemble on streets and squares, on indigenous lands, in universities, and in community centers and religious institutions, as well as through hunger strikes in war prisons.[2]

Now, what exactly constitutes the *popular* in the popular mass movement? Size and mass participation are obvious characteristics, but simultaneously can be random indicators. Depending on the geographical and social contexts, can the popularity of a movement genuinely be measured by the number of its

participants? I want to argue that the popular emerges first of all from its appeal to the *popular imagination*, its capacity to mobilize and incite an idea—maybe even a competing state idea—with the intention to install a different norm, a new consent. Sometimes, popular imagination is incited by a clear minority, which acts on behalf of a majority or creates the space for a majority to appear. Whenever the chant "We are the 99 percent" is uttered, the 99 percent are never bodily present in its totality, but is evoked through a minority just the same. Sidney G. Tarrow argues that, "disruption is the source of much of the innovation and the repertoire of the power in movement,"[3] specifically through the "invention of innovative ways of performing protest."[4] In this chapter, we will see how the process in which precarious peoples identify a common oppressor and assemble in the act of contention and disruption articulates popular imaginaries of new collectivities and infrastructures to sustain them. What Tarrow refers to as *disruption* and *protest*, I will argue, are not merely expressions of popular power, but contribute to the formation of a future power.

Although popular mass movements—resulting from the gathering of precarious constituents—have emerged globally since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is a fundamental difference between precarity that results from student debt and that which results from torture. And even within precarious constituents, a black student protesting debt has more chance of being exposed to police violence than a white student. But the growing and increasingly overlapping conditions of precarity, as Judith Butler has argued, do provide a site from which new forms of collectivity can be articulated and where interdependency within the diverse precariat can be formed.[5] Artists (in their majority) belong to the precariat, and this has been an important factor in their reasons for joining revolutions and popular mass movements in the past as well as the present. The liberation of society was simultaneously the liberation of the artist, on both a socioeconomic and imaginative level. I say this not to separate artists as a special class within the precariat, but because in

this chapter we will focus on the specific contribution by artists to artistic morphologies that emerge in and from popular mass movements.

Sinclair was right to claim that all art is propaganda, as all art is implicated—in one way or another—in the performance of power. More often than not, art serves as a status symbol or as a glorification of ruling power, as it contributes to imposing its normative reality upon a population and transforms the interests of ruling classes into a naturalized "culture." But as victors dictate history, it is easy to lose sight of the manifold emerging powers of popular mass movements of past and present that challenged ruling power monopolies and aimed to liberate its people and its art from capitalist prehistory. It was not for nothing that Sinclair ended *Mammonart* with a call to a new generation of artists who witnessed the emergence of socialist revolutions the world over:

> The artists of our time are like men hypnotized, repeating over and over a dreary formula of futility. And I say: Break this evil spell, young comrade; go out and meet the new dawning life, take your part in the battle, and put it into a new art; do this service for a new public, which you yourselves will make. . . . That your creative gift shall not be content to make art works, but shall at the same time make a world; shall make new souls, moved by a new ideal of fellowship, a new impulse of love, and faith—and not merely hope, but determination.[6]

To make a world we have to imagine changing it first. We have to imagine the alliance of precarious people that will bring this change about, to imagine the symbols, slogans, and culture that unifies and mobilizes this new composition of a people willing to sacrifice and risk their wellbeing, and to imagine the infrastructures needed to take power—a power different from the one that oppressed us in the first place. In that process, artistic imagination and the emerging powers of popular mass movements cannot be considered separate from one another, but complementary. Political power and artistic imagination—infrastructure

and narrative—are the cornerstones of any reality we aim to construct.

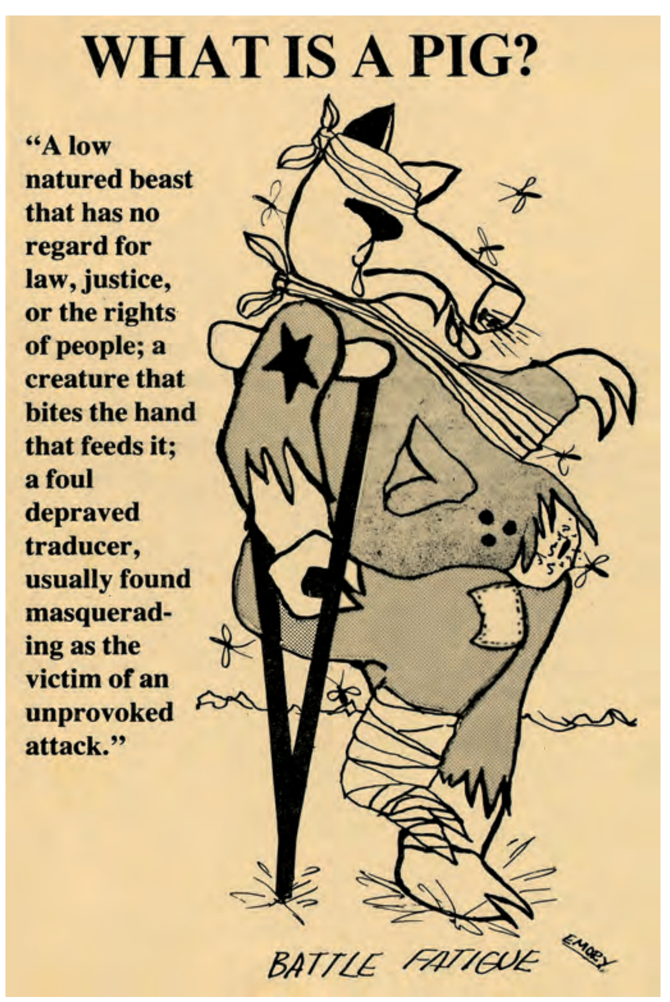
Protagonists of popular art history, like Sinclair, have attempted to argue exactly this: in order to rewrite history, and thus be able to imagine our present and future differently, we must revisit the intersections between art and emerging power. The gaze of Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model of monopolized elite power should not be our guide here. Instead, I propose to keep in mind the inverted propaganda model, which I introduced in the first chapter and which takes the performance of popular power in mass movements as its starting point by enacting demands such as democratization, transparency, and collectivity, rather than by imposing propaganda filters. Just like War on Terror propaganda art, the aim is to construct reality, yet a difference lies in the *kind* of power performed and the form of governance it aims to bring into being.

To define what is popular propaganda art it is necessary to compare specific forms of emerging power to the specific artistic forms it enables. In that process, we can witness a shift in the balance between the macro- and micro-performative scales of propaganda, as, in Marxist terms, the sub- and superstructure of power gain in proximity. Through its resonance with the propaganda models of the Soviet Revolution discussed earlier, we will see how in popular propaganda art the aim is to make the subject that receives propaganda equally the producer of propaganda by providing new artistic tools and infrastructures. In other words, the practice of world-making in popular propaganda is authored no longer by a particular elite but by a popular mass. Propaganda therefore becomes a collective, overt practice. Through this shift in the distribution of power, we can clearly articulate the difference between the propaganda filters of the Chomsky and Herman propaganda model and the demands of the inverted one. Popular art history, to begin with, already shows us clearly how popular power generates distinctly different artistic imaginaries than those of monopolized elite power.

Popular Art History

The Black Panther Party (BPP) operated as a parallel state, with its own infrastructures in politics, education, healthcare, public safety, and culture. As the United States predominantly functioned as a white ethno-state, the Black Power movement was not only legitimate but also necessary to protect its precarious constituents and resist political and cultural censorship and oppression. It was Emory Douglas, minister of culture of the BPP, whose enormous artistic output of newspaper covers, flyers, book designs, posters, murals, banners, and events would rewrite the artistic and cultural canon from the perspective of black liberation—a cornerstone of popular art history.

Douglas's representation of the pig as an allegory for the police became famous. As he described, it is a "no-nation beast that has no regard for rights, the law, or justice and bites the hand that feeds it."[7] Primarily inspired by the history of art from the African continent, Douglas's work was further influenced by liberational art in Cuba, Vietnam, and the Middle East.[8] Douglas was thus not only propagandizing the Ten-Point Platform of the Black Panther Party in a visual and artistic sense, but he was also building a new art-historical and aesthetic canon through which he developed a cultural body specific to the party's aims to unify, politicize, and strengthen a revolutionary people. In the history of black liberation and civil rights struggles, this attempt to structure visual morphologies on new organizational models, as an alternative form of propaganda, has manifold examples. Claude McKay, during his 1922 speech at the 4th Congress of the Communist International in Moscow, had already addressed the effort of organizing internationalist alliances between black people in the United States and the Soviet Union and proclaimed that "the label of propaganda will be affixed to what I say here. I shall not mind; propaganda has now come into its respectable rights and I'm proud of being a propagandist."[9] Four years later,



4.1

Emory Douglas, *What Is a Pig?*, 1967. Photo: Emory Douglas/Art Resource, New York, Courtesy of Pictoright Amsterdam 2018.

during a speech at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in June 1926, W.E.B. Du Bois called upon black artists to reject the cultural categories of white pre-judgment, for "until the art of the black folk compels recognition they will not be rated as human."[10] This would be recognition of black people's own cultural and political terms, not on the normative reality propagated by the white ethno-state. Thus, Du Bois argued, an equality of propagandas was to be achieved:

> All art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent.[11]

For Douglas, revolutionary ideology provided a political understanding of the struggle, but revolutionary art provided its picture, with the combination of the two manifesting in the infrastructure and imaginary of the black power movement. Knowledge about the struggle and its art ran parallel in the workshops and educational sessions he organized. "Revolutionary art is an art that flows from the people," he argued, and "it must be a whole and living part of the people's lives, their daily struggle to survive."[12] As such, the role of the artist cannot be separated from the communities they are trying to educate and assemble. Douglas wrote and taught a new popular art history as much as he was making it, in order to "have power and freedom to determine the destiny of our community and help to build 'our world.'"[13]

Lucy Lippard, a member of the Art Workers Coalition, similarly aimed to connect popular struggles with artistic form through the feminist movement. Lippard considered propaganda as the equivalent of education that allowed art to liberate itself from "the clutches of the ruling/corporate class that releases and interprets it to the rest of the world." This would then lead to a propaganda "for *us*, instead of for *them*."[14] In her view, feminist

artists should be at the frontline of redefining propaganda, as they had the embodied experience of having been excluded from the patriarchal canon of art. As she stated, "Women artists' historical isolation has prepared them to resist taboos. Our lives have not been separate from our arts, as they are in the dominant culture."[15]

Lippard is convinced that feminists can reinvent propaganda as an artistic practice able to challenge patriarchal, ruling-class historiography. An emancipatory propaganda in her view is one that is informed by social and ethical awareness, whereas an oppressive propaganda is characterized by exploitation and mechanisms of economic control.[16] For Lippard, the feminist influence on the art of the seventies is key to articulating a feminist propaganda of education, drawing from the multidisciplinary practices of performance, video, film, music, and poetry readings, but most of all "meetings"—the physical assemblies of people as a form of artistic practice in its own right.[17] This, in her words, shows an alternative understanding of an "intimate kind of propaganda," one that is "inherently feminist" in the manner in which it introduces personal and intersocial relationships as a propaganda practice.[18]

Particular struggles bring about particular artistic forms that aim to strengthen the cultural imaginary and unity of a larger movement, from the Black Power movement to feminism. In the case of Douglas this manifested through a new artistic canon of liberation movements, and in the case of Lippard by narrating the possibility of an intimate feminist propaganda art, both of which continue to resonate today in various ways, not least in the cultural narratives of the international Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements. But nowhere might we find more continuity of a popular art history than in the case of the Philippines, which runs from the declaration of the first propaganda movement by Filipino reformers in the face of Spanish occupation at the end of the nineteenth century, to the second propaganda movement manifested in resistance to the US-backed Marcos dictatorship

from the sixties to the eighties, and finally to its manifold contemporary practices of social realism today.

The propaganda movements in the Philippines were anti-imperialist cultural revolutions, as they called for a collective reconstruction of Filipino history—its language, its rituals, and its symbols—which faced erasure under the Spanish and American occupation. These movements brought about artistic practices that, as Alice Guillermo explains, merged social realism and Maoist cultural theory into a form of revolutionary realism. It is an art that is aimed at popularizing revolutionary ideals through the broad dissemination of art and culture, whereby knowledge in the form of aesthetic praxis is derived from the concrete exchange and involvement within the day-to-day struggle of peasants and workers in the Philippines.[19] In Guillermo's writing, the notion of *a people* becomes almost an aesthetic category in and of itself, as it is composed, assembled, and created through a montage of artistic means. In her words:

> Because of its link to the revolution, aesthetic theory is necessarily affected by the immediacy and urgency of the people's struggle. As theory takes on the cogency of the revolution which is the praxis, the dialectical relationship between theory and praxis becomes vital.[20]

As a consequence, revolutionary realism developed its own traditions of excellence in the form of murals, theatrical interventions, progressive comics, and protest puppetry.[21] One such example is the UGATLahi Artist Collective, which develops *effigies*—representations of Philippine presidents or foreign aggressors sculpted in the form of enormous puppets—to be then carried by thousands of protestors. The puppets are used as targets for scorn, while the protesters give speeches addressing injustices in the country, thereby essentially accusing the puppet in the form of a public people's trial.[22] At the end of the procession, the puppets are set on fire as a theatrical pre-enactment of justice staged against oppressors.

BREEZY

4.2

Burning effigy of President Aquino III on the streets of Manila by UGATLahi Art Collective. From the series Jonas Staal, *Anatomy of a Revolution: Philippines*, 2013.

Just as Douglas and Lippard show how the alignment of artists with popular mass movements initiated new aesthetic vocabularies, Guillermo narrates the process in which art contributed to shape national cultural identity through the propaganda movements of the Philippines. The effigies literally participate in the performance of popular power, as people assemble around them and collectively act in relation to them, making it possible not only to compose as a unified people, but to construct a form of revolutionary or *popular realism*. The macro-performative dimension of propaganda that sustains white supremacy, patriarchy, and imperialism through political, economic, cultural, and military institutions is challenged, and new institutions—new state ideas—are imagined and created through popular power, from the Black Panther Party and its own ministries to a parallel revolutionary government in the Philippines. The precariat, those previously secluded in the micro-performative scales of propaganda, now become collective authors in the process of constructing reality based on their interests and demands.

Assemblism

Popular mass movements emerge in response to extreme forms of precarity. Although its constituents might experience precarity for different reasons and at different levels of severity, it allows for a moment in time to articulate common struggles. Butler emphasizes that the process by which the precariat assembles is characterized by a performative dimension. She calls this the *performative assembly*. As mentioned earlier, the precariat gathers as a result of the dilution of collective life support, a lived condition made so severe that they must seek alliances with one another to survive. But despite this "unchosen" dimension, once the precariat gathers it has the potential of prefiguring new forms of collectivity.[23] In Butler's words:

4.3

Erdem Gündüz, *Standing Man,* 2013. Photo: ANP/AFP Marco Longari.

> A social movement is itself a social form, and when a social movement calls for a new way of life, a form of liveable life, then it must, at that moment, enact the very principles it seeks to realize. This means that when it works, there is a performative enactment of radical democracy in such movement that alone can articulate what it might mean to lead a good life in the sense of a liveable life.[24]

The Occupy movement, for example, developed self-organized free libraries, alternative media channels, and a daily "general assembly." Following Butler's observations, we could say that Occupy's performative assembly collectively imagined and pre-enacted the kind of democratic and socialized infrastructures its precarious constituents desired. This pre-enactment is discussed

by Butler in specific artistic terms, as she speaks of the "theatrical"[25] dimension of the protest, the visual "morphology" of its social forms,[26] and the overall assembly as an "assemblage."[27]

Similar to Butler, Yates McKee discusses the performative assembly as an "embodied collage"[28] but even goes as far as to claim that "Occupy as a totality—rather than just this or that phenomena within it—can itself arguably be considered an artistic project in its own right, assuming we reimagine our sense of what art is or can be."[29] But the precariat assembles not with the aim of making art projects, but with the aim of living a livable life. There is most certainly an artistic and theatrical component at play, but the objective is to strengthen a collectivity across the lines that divide the precariat internally and not to produce an art project. And, not unimportant, the social forms brought about through performative assembly—ranging from the general assembly to the makeshift libraries—are not necessarily conceived by artists. The theatrical staging, visual morphologies, and assemblages that performative assembly brings about result first and foremost from the emerging collective imagination of the precariat.

These artistic components of performative assembly, which I refer to as *assemblism*, are analyzed by Athena Athanasiou as "self-poietics," a term that borrows the ancient Greek word for *creation*, and which, in her words, "emerges as a performative occasion in an ongoing process of socially regulatory self-formation, whereby under different circumstances the self struggles within and against the norms through which it is constituted; and such struggles are only waged through and with others."[30] Through performative assembly, the precariat establishes an interrelated self that is supported and sustained through the presence and acts of the bodies of others. The act of "corporeal standing" is in that regard a core element of assemblism, as it forms the first act of occupying—or better, reclaiming—a collective space.[31]

In the days following massive state violence against the Gezi Park protestors in Turkey, choreographer Erdem Gündüz initiated what became known as "Standing Man" by simply standing on the

contested space of Taksim square. Not only did other people join him in a collective act of standing, but they began to stand across the country in groups of various sizes, developing a country-wide choreography of dissent against the policing and privatization of public civic space. The standing bodies shaped a parallel space of popular dissent within the space of the state—a network of bodies that articulated an almost serene, vulnerable site of collective belonging.[32] The fact that authorities began to aggressively disband the standing people made the contrast between the nonviolent standing bodies and the overreach of the military arsenal by state authorities even starker. Athanasiou's self-poietics, the choreography and spatial motives enacted through assemblism, not only performs the emerging popular power of the precariat, but also forces elite power to articulate itself as its opposing force. It exposes the illegitimacy of elite state power vis-à-vis the legitimacy of emerging popular power.

We see a similar example in the collective slogans and chants of the Black Lives Matter movement. In the words of Alicia Garza: "What happens to a community under siege, a nation under siege, a diaspora under siege, is that those people will and must fight back. And this is where we hear "Hands Up, Don't Shoot," "I Can't Breathe," and "Black Lives Matter."[33] "Hands up, don't shoot" and "I can't breathe" were the last words of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, black men who were murdered by white police forces. Obviously, the slogans and collective chants of Black Lives Matter were not conceived as poetry or artistic performance but derived directly from the brutal murder and extreme precarization of black communities. Nonetheless, in the collective appropriation of the slogans and chants, a self-poietics emerges that articulates the sharpest possible contrast between the militarized violence against Black Lives Matter protestors, who, en masse, held their arms up high as Brown had done, and en masse chanted they could not breathe, just as Garner couldn't. The suffering of a single body is adopted by the bodies of the many, designating a collective precarity, but also a collective demand for the end of

police violence in defense of egalitarian society, as "Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum."[34] It is through this assemblist practice that Black Lives Matter also brings about new organizational and infrastructural models of enacting popular power, such as the crucial notion of the *leaderful movement*, as explained by Black Lives Matter UK member KUCHENGA:

> We have to think of how the issue of grief pertains to the African diaspora, where it is the case that [revolutionary] leaders are picked-off and assassinated, which is something that has been really demoralizing. So, whether that is Patrice Lumumba or Malcolm X, or even if they're not killed-off practically but ripped out of the movement, the way that Marcus Garvey was, or Toussaint Louverture. I think that in having a leaderful movement, it's de-censoring that. . . . In actual fact, we need to foster the leadership skills of everyone. And I found that to be really enriching in working with Black Lives Matter, because all of our voices are equal. It's something that endues everyone with confidence. And it's really useful, because you're not so easily picked-off.[35]

Assemblist practice invokes a new political space through the enactment of popular demands toward a reality beyond dispossession, austerity, indebtedness, police violence, structural racism, and murder. As such, assemblism emerges as part of the performative process through which a diverse precariat gathers and begins to form a collage or assemblage that composes a people, and brings about a new infrastructural set-up. Whether it is the free education and health care provided by improvised tents during the Occupy movement or the very notion of a leaderful movement, it is these new organizational forms and redistributions of power that make new macro- and micro-performative arrangements possible. Artistic components play a role in this process of composition and the instigation of new infrastructural forms, but only as one element of many in the social and

aesthetic texture of popular mass movements. The aim of assemblist practice is not to make art, but to make a people.

Embedded Art

Outside the museum, masses of protestors march the streets among fumes of tear gas and assemble in and around Gezi Park in Istanbul. Inside the museum, an international art crowd is gathered to listen to a lecture-performance by Hito Steyerl as part of the 2013 Istanbul Biennial program. There, Steyerl calls on the audience to "storm the museum"—just as has been done countless times at the Paris Louvre since the beginning of the French Revolution—firmly linking the gathering inside the museum to the popular mass movement outside.[36] Steyerl produces the moment for the former to open the door to the latter.

The lecture-performance in question was titled *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* (2013), and retraces the history of the bullet that killed Steyerl's friend Andrea Wolf, a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), after a helicopter attack in Turkey's Van province.[37] Steyerl traces the arms to various manufacturers with headquarters in Western metropoles, which, she comes to realize, were all designed by some of the most highbrow "starchitects" in the world, such as Frank Gehry, who conceived the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. It is these very same museums that buy Steyerl's work, that display it, and that, on closer inspection, are themselves rather reminiscent of the rounded shapes of gun shells and missiles:

> This is when I realized that missiles, once they are fired, they can suddenly change their form. They suddenly transform in midflight into a piece of cutting-edge starchitecture designed by Frank Gehry. . . . In this case, it's quite easy to understand, because the software that Gehry's studio uses to produce these nicely rounded organic shapes is actually a version of the same software on which some of the Cobra helicopters were developed.[38]

4.4

Not An Alternative, *The Natural History Museum,* 2014, vinyl wrapped bus. Photo: The Natural History Museum, courtesy of the Natural History Museum.

By tracing the overlapping of military and cultural industries, Steyerl's claim that the museum is a battlefield takes shape. Suddenly, the battlefield on the streets outside resonates inside. An alliance—or a "montage," in Steyerl's words—between the audience inside and the protestors outside becomes imaginable.[39] Reclaiming the museum means to become an embedded artist, operating with one foot in the museum and one foot in the popular mass movement.

Embedded art describes the work of artists that work within or in direct relation to popular mass movements. But just as the example of Steyerl shows, this embedment is often dual in nature. Owing to their own precarious conditions, popular mass movements generally do not pay artists and so, in order to gain recognition as an artist (and thus achieve something of a viable income), the institution of art—from the museum to the art market—is one of the few options that make it possible to maintain one's profession. This can easily prompt criticism from both sides, namely, the abuse of art for political means, or the abuse of popular mass movements for artistic means.[40] This defines the particular precarity of artists as both a material and ideological one. Sinclair called upon artists to "make a world," but artists in popular mass movements are essentially between worlds—between the world as it is and the one that is emerging, between ruling elite power and emerging popular power. This brings about a specific challenge to repurpose power invested in art institutions to the infrastructures emerging from the popular mass movement.

Nonetheless, artists and artist groups around the globe have been able to repurpose their embedment in the institution of art into an embedment in popular mass movements. For example, the artist, activist, and theorist collective Not An Alternative has been acting as the "branding agency" of popular mass movements for years. For Occupy, they developed tools such as *Occupy Tape* (2011), mimicking the yellow and black striped tape used to seal off foreclosed homes, which was now used to seal off financial institutions instead. Their *Occupy Shelter* (2011) went

a step further, and consists of packages of panels through which tables, benches, and shelters could be constructed to fortify the fragile infrastructure of the makeshift camps. Building forth on the assemblist imaginary, they provide institutional legitimacy for these new social forms. The most powerful example, siding with the climate activist movement, is their *Natural History Museum* (2014–ongoing) that focuses on the impact of humans on climate change and the role of fossil fuel industries and their influence on museums. Like a twenty-first-century propaganda train, Not An Alternative's mobile museum is capable of setting up instant pop-up displays adorned with colorful child-friendly imagery that is still deeply politicized through slogans such as "Cut Ties to the Fossil Fuel Industry: Stand Up for Science." Like few others, Not An Alternative is able to mobilize existing institutions in this endeavor *of institutional liberation*, which in this case gains a double meaning: liberating the existing national history museum from its instrumentalization by industries that are making future history impossible because of their intergenerational climate crimes, and liberating the embryonic morphology of a new institutional framework lingering in the climate activist movement.[41]

These practices of embedded art, aimed at instituting the imaginary of the popular mass movement, resonate with Matthijs de Bruijne's work for the Federation of Dutch Labor Unions (FNV). De Bruijne's *Trash Museum* (2011) is a mobile museum that displayed a diversity of objects found by cleaners in their workplaces—from trains to airports—that publicly demonstrate their harsh working conditions. It was first presented in the hall of the Utrecht Central Station, a major transit point for thousands of commuters, before going on tour to four other Dutch cities.[42] De Bruijne erected yellow walls mimicking the colors of the yellow gloves and yellow cloths used by the cleaners in the central hall of the station. Plastic ziplock bags were attached to these walls, each containing objects found by cleaners—from plush animals and drug needles to sex toys—with a sign next to every object providing the background story of the cleaner who found it.

4.5

Matthijs de Bruijne and the Federation of Dutch Labor Unions, *Trash Museum,* 2011. Photo: Matthijs de Bruijne, courtesy of Matthijs de Bruijne/FNV.

4.6

Chto Delat, *Park Fables,* 2018. Photo: Dmitry Vilensky, courtesy of Chto Delat and Fast Forward Festival.

ART IS NOT POSSIBLE APART FROM THE PEOPLE
THE THEATER IS NOT A PLACE OF A BUILDING
ΕΧΝΗ ΔΕΝ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΞΕΧΩΡΙΣΤΗ ΑΠΟ ΤΟΥΣ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥΣ

The yellow flags of the union and its symbol of a clenched fist in a yellow rubber glove surrounded the walls marked a spatial claim to the museum in the middle of the train station. Instead of injecting the message of a popular mass movement into the museum, de Bruijne proposed to institute the museum as part of the popular mass movement itself.[43]

The collective Chto Delat shows just how much the ideas of embedded art are indebted to popular art history, going back as far as the festivals of the French Revolution and the carnivalesque practices of Proletkult. Their *Park Fables* (2018), produced in collaboration with Anton Kats, joined the assembly of the manifold users of the Pedion Areos park in Athens—from students to unemployed denizens, and from refugees to homeless people—in transforming its increasingly decaying infrastructures into a weeks-long Brechtian mass theater.[44] Tours that provided Marxist economic analysis of the park's history, a propaganda kiosk-type public radio station, and a popular open-air theater reinstituted the park not as it was, but through what it had become my means of its precarious constituents. The precariat, the proletariat of the twenty-first century, directs Chto Delat's embedded art as embodied by one of their park slogans: "The theater is not a place or a building, but a way of transforming society."

Assemblist imaginaries—from makeshift camps to general assemblies and notions of the leaderful—form the starting point for embedded artists to institute popular demands into new durable infrastructures; to storm the museum and repurpose its capital into tactical tools for protest, mobile museums, and revolutionary festivals.[45] Embedded art strengthens the legitimacy and durability of the precarious infrastructures of the popular mass movement, needed not only to compose but to sustain a people. As such, it constructs popular realism, the world we make by acting through the demands of the mass movement.

Organizational Art

In embedded art practice there is a clear organizational component. Not only in the way in which artists and artist groups strengthen the assemblist imaginaries of the popular mass movement, but also through their conception of completely new popular institutions.[46] What I term *organizational art* goes a step further, though, as this is a practice of popular propaganda art that develops through the model of the "artist organization"—political parties, social platforms, and schools—conceived both as political organizations *and* as artworks. Organizational art is often derived from popular mass movements and supports their causes, but acts in parallel to them rather than being embedded within them.

An early example of organizational art is the Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) founded in Yugoslavia in 1984. Most famous is their *NSK State in Time* (1992), an art project that takes the form of a new state that issues actual passports, yet which exists not as a physical territory but rather as a geography of ideas.[46] The lack of territory however has not stopped more than fifteen thousand citizens from joining the State in Time.[47] In this context, one could see the 2015 concert of the musical wing of the NSK known as "Laibach" in North Korea as real-time international diplomacy between the State in Time and the neo-Stalinist state.[48]

The twenty-first century has seen a substantial rise in organizational art, partially in response to the dual precarity of artists who aim to work in relation to popular mass movements. Where embedded art demands that the artist repurpose financial means from their artistic practice into their political work, organizational art tries to operate both as artwork and as political organization to increase its sustainability. For example, the International Institute of Political Murder (IIPM), founded by Milo Rau, aims to challenge the international judicial order through reenacting historical trials and manifestos, and by exploring the theatrical and

visual dimensions of evidence. The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (labofii), founded by John Jordan and Isabelle Frémeaux, operates mainly from the Zone À Défendre (ZAD) near Nantes, France. ZAD is an autonomous communal camp of climate activists through which laboffi develops its public carnivalesque agitational actions against corporations they consider to be implicated in global climate crimes. The Zentrum für Politische Schönheit (ZPS) emerged from a large collective of German artists and political campaigners with the aim of developing high-profile media actions—characterized by their signature style of *aggressive humanism*—related to the refugee crisis.[49] One such example is their highly controversial initiative to bury the bodies of refugees who died at sea in cemeteries in the German capital.

While the names of these artist organizations imply near-utopian objectives, they are shaped and formed directly in relation to popular mass movements in the realms of social justice (IIPM), autonomism and climate activism (laboffi), or refugee rights (ZPS). Using the form of the organization adds legitimacy, but also allows for long-term investments in specific crises by challenging the institution of art—and sometimes other structures capable of providing financial support, such as NGOs and universities, to not just finance an artistic "project," but to co-conceive fully functioning organizational infrastructures that provide the income and capacity for the ongoing engagement of its members.

One of the most enduring examples of organizational art is the work of Tania Bruguera, who revived the notion of *Arte Útil* (or, "useful art") originally conceived by Eduardo Costa and later also adopted by Lippard.[50] Unlike Steyerl, Bruguera argues that "We do not have to enter the Louvre or the castles, we have to enter people's houses, people's lives, this is where useful art is."[51] Her artist organization Immigrant Movement International (IMI, 2010–2015) provides one of the best examples of useful art in practice. IMI operated from a storefront in a former beauty salon in Queens, where Bruguera and her collaborators organized English

4.7
Tania Bruguera, *Immigrant Movement International*, 2010–2015. Photo: Immigrant Movement International, courtesy of Tania Bruguera.

lessons, provided legal support for immigrants, established cultural workshops for children, and collectively authored the *International Migrant Manifesto*.[52] This modest community center had an agenda as pragmatic as it was radically imaginative. It operated as a practical space of empowerment and community building for immigrants, politicizing them by giving concrete insight into their juridical status and by unifying those often hidden in informal economies because of fear of arrest or deportation. At the same time, Bruguera positioned this tiny space as the first building block of a radically new transnational organization, a

movement of immigrants to be organized throughout worldwide community centers and undocumented political parties that claimed the immigrant as a new "global citizen."[53]

Even more infrastructurally elaborate is Ahmet Öğüt's *The Silent University* (SU, 2012–ongoing), which builds on the notion of "parasitic practice," in this case resulting in a "para-institution" of sorts, owing to its operating through existing art spaces and universities.[54] This overlaps with the act of repurposing institutional power into popular mass movements, as I just discussed in the case of embedded art, which in organizational art results in a dialectic outcome of public institutions as they exist at present and as they are being imagined into being. SU is an "autonomous knowledge platform" that focuses on asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants with an academic background that is not recognized in their country of arrival.[55] This lack of recognition leads to a destruction of capital, which can be countered by activating their *silenced* knowledge. Today, the SU has been or continues to be active in London, Stockholm, Hamburg, Ruhr, Amman, and Athens. In each case it originates from the same principle: to create a para-university through the domain of the arts that provides recognition and work for asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants with a predominantly academic background, harboring their knowledge and skills in the society of arrival.[56] Similar to IMI, the SU operates somewhere between the real and the possible. It has been modestly successful in providing academic work for its members but is unambiguous in its near-utopian ambition to reject traditional currencies, overthrow pedagogical hierarchies, demand equality of all languages, and recognize silence as an alternative form of knowledge transfer.[57]

Although organizational art is often critiqued for providing but a fraction of what actual universities, political parties, and NGOs give to their constituents, their true work lies in the way they conceive and pre-enact the complete transformation of institutions as we know them. From the transnational campaign to the transnational university, organizational art builds an infrastructure of

4.8
Ahmet Öğüt, *The Silent University Resource Room*, 2012–ongoing, educational platform. Photo: Silent University, courtesy of Silent University.

popular power for the twenty-first century from the imaginary of assemblism and embedded art. But just as precarity is a category that can mean different things depending on geographical, cultural, political, and economic contexts, the mapping of artist organizations the world over also shows as much overlap as difference.

The Artist Organizations International (2015) organized at HAU Theater, Berlin, where more than twenty representatives of artist organizations from across the world were invited, was, in that light, perhaps more a site of contestation than unification.[58] Antagonism was directed not only to the organizers, but also to the definition of organizational art and its objectives.[59] To give a few examples, the Concerned Artist of the Philippines (CAP) is a cultural platform with a direct link to the Filipino resistance and underground, whereas artist organizations such as Yael Bartana's Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP)—which calls upon Israeli Jews that fled Poland to return, thus partly undoing the occupation of Palestinians—is more speculative in nature, providing membership but with doubtful political effect. And the pragmatic localized approach of Wochenklausur with their *Renovation of a Refugee Hostel* (2016) in Smålandsstenar, Sweden, for example, stands far apart from the neocolonial provocations—or "over-identifications," as it was termed by Žižek in relation to the work of NSK—of Renzo Martens's Institute for Human Activities (IHA), which aims to gentrify Congolese plantations as a way of employing art to accumulate capital for its former workers.[60]

There is also a question as to what extent these various artist organizations are really organizations with their own executive power or whether they are mere imaginaries of possible forms of organization. More often than not, there are no mechanisms of democratic control held by the artist-directors of artist organizations. Financial transparency is lacking, clarity of labor conditions of employees absent, and dependency on existing art institutions weighs heavily on their capacity to make executive decisions and align transnationally. Regarding artists who run various artist organizations simultaneously—Bruguera, for example, not only directed IMI, but also founded the Migrant People Party (MPP) in 2012 and the Hannah Arendt International Institute of Artivism (2016–ongoing) and announced her bid for president of Cuba in 2016—James Bridle noted that we could also think of them as an appropriation of the "front organization," a formation deployed

by both intelligence agencies and blacklisted organizations.[61] In this case it results in what Fotini Gouseti calls "an army of concepts," with the aim of instigating the imaginary of alternative infrastructures of life support in order to mobilize the popular power to actually realize them.[62] That is a strategy that maintains the dictum of May 1968: "Be realistic, demand the impossible!" The state ideas of the twentieth century have turned extremist in the expanded state and the alt-state, and in that light, the demand of a new imaginary of transnational infrastructure in popular propaganda art is the only reasonable act. But this will require insistence on translating artistic imaginary into political reality in order to avoid this new infrastructural imaging of organizational art to become the symbol of its own impotence. In the context of popular propaganda art, the artist organization has the obligation to measure its transformational imagination in relation to its real-time capacity to enable the construction of popular realism.

A People-in-the-Making

Popular propaganda art is made within, in direct relation to, or parallel to popular mass movements—the emerging powers of the twenty-first century that stand in stark opposition to the power monopolies of the War on Terror and the increasing influence of the international alt-right. Instead of focusing on fictional enemies created by the expanded state's economy of terror, popular propaganda is directed at real existential threats, such as the mass precarization of peoples through economic inequality, racism, police violence, torture, war, and climate change. Its objective is to enact the demands of the assembled precariat, not in the form of filters to manufacture consent in the service of an elite (the Chomsky/Herman propaganda model), but through the demand of democratization as a means to redistribute power (the inverted propaganda model).

Just as War on Terror propaganda art builds on its own dark heritage of the Cold War, popular propaganda art also has its

own popular art history, derived from revolutionary, anticolonial, anti-imperialist, and liberational movements. These past practices provide the tools and artistic competences in contemporary forms of embedded and organizational art to redefine *Us* in the Us versus Them dichotomy. This means a rethinking of what the conditions are through which new forms of collectivity can be articulated, and real oppressors can be identified.

Whereas War on Terror propaganda art maintains an existential state of exception, popular propaganda art creates the conditions for a *state of construction*. By performing popular power and composing a people, the aim is to construct popular realism. This is not the realism of elite power in socialist realism and capitalist realism, but reality as it becomes imaginable and possible by enacting the demands of the popular mass movement. It is the realism of a world no longer made for us but made by us.

In popular propaganda art the notion of *the people* becomes itself an aesthetic category. The people are staged, composed, and performed, but this is never a people that is indefinitely unified or absolute, but a "people-in-the-making."[64] The people are composed and recomposed. They fall apart and reorganize into competing factions before they re-ally into yet another different formation. Lippard praised Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1979) as a landmark of intimate feminist propaganda art in which thirty-nine mythical and historical women were monumentalized, initiating a new canon of those who were previously made invisible by the patriarchal canon of art. But it was not until Patricia Kaersenhout created *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Too?* (2017), that those who had been absent in Chicago's recomposition of a people were made fully visible. In Kaersenhout's version, black women and women of color from various eras—from spiritual guides to liberational icons, from artists to activists—took their seat at the table as well, and as a result, once again, the people were in the making.

In Bartana's *What If Women Ruled the World?* (2017), we see a similar attempt at recomposing the people. The context is a

reconstruction of the film set of Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), which in its original setting features an all-white male cast playing the roles of the US president, his staff, and his military aids, while trying to overturn a nuclear attack against the Soviet Union. In Bartana's version, set at the theater, all acting subjects are women with diverse backgrounds, who in different sessions are faced with various forms of nuclear threat. The all-women's government, whose policies are based on a pacifist constitution and a state disarmament program, is forced to respond to patriarchal geopolitics. With a cast consisting half of actors and half of actual policy experts, human rights lawyers, academics, and activists, the challenge Bartana poses is to overcome—at a moment when the Doomsday Clock is nearly full circle—dominant gendered power binaries, and not fall for the dualistic choice between aggression on one hand and passivity on the other. Repurposing the categories of spectacular theater in War on Terror propaganda art into popular propaganda art, the work merges wargaming, social experiment, and popular assembly that borders the real and the possible. *What If Women Ruled the World?* proposes, despite its sometimes overly theatricalized intermezzos, to recompose our idea of the people by divesting power to the half of the world's population that has historically been faced with structural oppression. It furthermore repurposes militarized spectacle to explore the dilemmas and conflicts an emancipatory world government could encounter. From Kaersenhout to Bartana, we thus see how popular propaganda art is a transformative propaganda as the aesthetic category of the people—in this case focused on the intersections of gender and race—is always, and must always be, in the making.

But just as Kaersenhout shows who is missing in Chicago's assembly, and as Bartana is highlighting the feminist deficit in geopolitics, there are also voices missing from the assembly of conflicting propagandas that this book aims to analyze. I have discussed the monopolized forms of elite power in the context of

4.9

Patricia Kaersenhout, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Too?*, 2017, installation. Photo: Aat Jan Renders, courtesy of Patricia Kaersenhout.

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18191
3507
124
3710
37
0468
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915

4.10

Yael Bartana, *What If Women Ruled the World?*, 2017, documentation. Photo: Birgit Kaulfuß, courtesy of Yael Bartana.

the expanded state, just as I have discussed the opposing popular power of mass movements the world over. In the process, I proposed to expand traditional propaganda models that limit our perception of power to ruling elites, to include emerging popular power as well. This allowed me to move from the perspective of the state to that of the politicized citizens within these states. But what about those who are rejected from dominant state ideas altogether: the masses we call the *stateless*?

5

THEATER OF THE STATELESS

Stateless Power

How does one write about the stateless from a perspective of statedness? The *stated*—those recognized, administered, and living in the sphere of relative protection provided by the state—can observe only the condition of statelessness. The knowledge inherent in statelessness is acquired by those who have been forced into the condition of living without or outside the state—not merely resulting in the denial of life-support systems organized by the state, but by being exposed actively to the imposition of state violence—which at present is enforced by the dominant state ideas of the expanded state and alt-government. These ideas have amalgamated refugees and migrants under the construction of *Them*, equating threats of terrorism with the threat of migration at large.[1] Of course, in the past eighteen years, as Bob Jessop argues, it has been exactly the axis of the transnational deep state and the homeland security system in the War on Terror that has created the conditions for the forced movement of peoples and the emergence of insurgents in the first place. Multinational capitalism creates the structural precarity that creates the class euphemistically referred to as *economic refugees*, just as the destabilization of regimes through military intervention and proxy-warfare brings about war refugees. Both are the result of political decisions and of an infrastructure, a state idea, that imposes mass precarization and generates a growth of stateless peoples as a result. In that sense, one could say that a substantial

portion of migrants and refugees moves and flees not simply as a result of domestic instability, but because of the global operation of the expanded state: they are not just economic or war refugees, but the refugees of a particular state idea.

Instead of merely analyzing the condition of statelessness, I propose to embark on a different endeavor by trying to learn from the specific knowledge generated by the experience of statelessness and the specific state ideas—or post-statist discourse—that results from it. I will do so by drafting a series of observations, based as much as possible on primary sources produced by the political and artistic practices of different stateless actors themselves.[2] Ould Slahi's *Guantánamo Diary* already provided us with an important starting point to explore the category of stateless propaganda. Essentially, this work could be considered as a form of *stateless realism* that exposes the systemic violence perpetrated in the name of the stated against the stateless. And even in the unbearable conditions of the war prison, Ould Slahi's book narrates attempts to resist its regime. An example is the collective hunger strike he organizes with his fellow prisoners, which can also be considered as a form of performative assembly. Although separated by prison walls, the choreography of the hunger strike—the parallel act of forcing the body to strike—connects the extreme precarity of its participants to an articulated collectivity. It is a collective act of self-recognition as a stateless community.

Such collective acts of resistance and self-recognition challenge the idea that statelessness is equivalent to powerlessness. Obviously, different degrees of statelessness are defined by different forms of precarity, such as the possibility to be deported, imprisoned, tortured, and murdered at any moment in time. But the political assembly in the form of the hunger strike nonetheless lays claim to a collectivity through self-recognition, while also bringing forward collective demands to be recognized by others. *Guantánamo Diary* exposes the violence enacted upon bodies declared stateless in the war prison, and as such inherently demands civil society to undo the injustice perpetrated in

its name. So, while the power of the stateless might be extremely compromised through systemic oppression, it should not be disregarded. It is not only human rights lawyers and NGOs that can speak on behalf of the stateless; the stateless assemble and articulate collective political demands themselves. The subaltern speaks.[3]

Of course, the stateless community that can be addressed in the case of Ould Slahi's work is specific to the conditions of Guantánamo Bay. There is no singular condition of statelessness but rather a variety of overlapping ones. These depend on the demand of the stateless to be recognized by an existing state, the demand of the stateless to create a state of their own, and the demand of the stateless to define statelessness as an alternative to the state altogether. Within each of these conditions there are certain gray zones. For example, a member of a separatist stateless movement might still hold a passport of the state they are fighting against while receiving no protection from it whatsoever. On paper they are still *stated*, although this statedness is symbolic at best, and barely functional in reality. Instead, we might have to think of the difference between the stated and the stateless by asking, building on the work of Rastko Močnik, "*How much?*" How much statedness? Or how much statelessness?

Stateless propaganda art is a category through which we can analyze how overlapping conditions of statelessness each bring about specific forms. A morphological reading of stateless propaganda art is a way to deepen understanding of these alternative formations of stateless power. It will also provide an understanding of how the micro- and macro-performative scales of propaganda operate in stateless power. In the case of Ould Slahi, for example, the micro-performative acts of resistance in the war prison are translated into his work of stateless realism, aimed at triggering macro-performative processes by engaging civil society to pressure governments to undo oppressive behavior. His assembly within the war prison aimed to trigger a larger assembly through alliance with civil society at large. This

is different from popular propaganda in that the popular mass movement has a macro-performative scale of its own—the mass itself, which has a capacity to appear in public and to impose the emerging power of its interconnected bodies vis-à-vis an oppressive regime. The stateless, in the case of Ould Slahi, lack this same privilege of direct appearance and visibility, and therefore the macro-performative scale of propaganda is yet to be enabled.

This discussion and analysis of forms of stateless propaganda art is not aimed at downplaying the brutal lived experience of stateless humans in any way, but is instead undertaken to acknowledge the fact that stateless peoples are political subjects. While the stated should take collective responsibility to undo the systemic violence imposed on the stateless, a necessary process of learning from these political subjectivities is needed. To do so is to grasp something of the history of the world—and the manifold visions of worlds to come—according to the stateless.

A Labyrinth for the Stated

The Amsterdam-based refugee collective We Are Here consists of more than two hundred undocumented migrants and refugees—some of whom have resided in the Netherlands for more than fifteen years—but whose procedural options have been "exhausted" [*uitgeprocedeerd*]. They cannot return to their country of origin owing to safety issues or because their countries no longer recognize them, while the Dutch state simultaneously refuses them citizenship.[5] Being in limbo forces them into the domain of statelessness, or more precisely, existing between states. Neither the state of origin nor the hosting state is willing to provide them with crucial structures of life support.

Yoonis Osman Nuur, one of the key representatives of the We Are Here collective, emphasized the importance of the collective's name during a speech on its first anniversary. He stated, "We didn't want to be invisible any longer. We wanted the world to know that we are here and that we are lost in between. And

because this is unacceptable, we came together."[6] The members of the group, hailing from various parts of the African continent, are characterized by different political, educational, and religious backgrounds. They are "one" only to the extent that each of them is confronted with the oppressive conditions of statelessness, the denial of being given life support by any dominant state idea. Nuur, like Ould Slahi, addresses the importance of the alliance between documented and undocumented peoples—between the stated and the stateless—when he says, "Changes will come about through the people who are protesting with us. We have to bond with them because we need the support of Dutch citizens."[7]

The strength of the state lies in its capacity to make the stateless invisible. The strength of the stateless, in this particular example, is to make themselves visible in order to bring forward their demand for recognition within an existing state. First, they must be recognized through civil society, and from civil society recognition will subsequently come through the state. As Nuur explained, "by calling attention to the fact that we are living on the streets and in temporary shelters, we made visible the problems that we are confronted with on a daily basis."[8]

In the case of We Are Here, this process of *visibilization* has taken on particular artistic and cultural forms, which are the direct result of their precarious legal (or rather, "illegal") status. While statelessness excludes its members from working and gaining access to social security and education through threat of incarceration or instant deportation, it does not limit them from creatively expressing themselves. In other words, creative expression is not considered to be a form of labor, and thus does not threaten their status in their quest to obtain citizenship.[9] As a result, the artistic community of the Netherlands and We Are Here assembled to organize a variety of artistic interventions, exhibitions, concerts, and even theater pieces as a means to gain further visibility and leverage as stateless citizens of the Netherlands. For example, the action *WE ARE HERE* (2013) consists of large-scale mobile letters that mimic the red and white corporate

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Alexander Nieuwenhuis, We Are Here et al., *WE ARE HERE,* 2013, mobile letters. Photo: Manette van Ingeneren, courtesy of Alexander Nieuwenhuis, We Are Here, Manette van Ingeneren.

city-branding "I Amsterdam." Adopting the branding of Amsterdam is a tactic of appropriation that performatively inscribes We Are Here into the identity of the city. A similar strategy is employed through *We Are Here FC* (2017–ongoing), a project co-initiated with Katarína Gališinová, which takes the form of a soccer club comprised of We Are Here members. These approaches to employing artistic strategies to envision new forms of political recognition and agency further resulted in Nuur to join forces with Öğüt to declare We Are Here an "undocumented political party" during a session in the municipal house of Amsterdam.[10] As the *We Are Here Manifesto* (2013) states, "We enhance our visibility through unification, protests, a media campaign, lobbying, and other means."[11]

The theater play *Labyrinth* (2015) is among the most important examples of the collective's artistic work. It was created by We Are Here in collaboration with German theater director Nicolas Stemann, the We Are Here Cooperative support network, and Frascati Theater in Amsterdam. *Labyrinth* is based on a radical reversal of roles. Visitors are handed a file on the Somalian refugee Mohammed Hassan Abdi, born in the Bay region where the fundamentalist Al-Shabaab organization is in control. After being asked to leave their personal belongings upon entering, visitors are moved through a labyrinth of rooms created from a patchwork of fabric sheets, similar to the improvised residences of the We Are Here members. In every room they encounter a key "actor" from the asylum process—which each of the We Are Here members have been subjected to on countless occasions—reenacted by the members themselves. With only the limited information in the file at their disposal, the audience is then interrogated about their new identity as Hassan Abdi.

Representatives of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Dutch Repatriation and Departure Service, as well as police officers and judges, are played by We Are Here members, who make the audience of *Labyrinth* acutely aware of the aggressive level of cross-examination operating within the

WE ARE HERE
WE DEMO TRATE FOR OUR FUTURE, LIVES, SOLUTION FOR ALL REFUGEES

5.2

We Are Here, We Are Here Cooperative, and Nicolas Stemann, *Labyrinth*, 2015, Frascati Theater, Amsterdam. Photo: Katarína Gališinová, courtesy of We Are Here, We Are Here Cooperative, Nicolas Stemann, Savannah Koolen, and Katarína Gališinová.

immigration process. Any contradiction in a statement, a wrong answer, or even a joke, can mean expulsion from the labyrinth. The script of the play is structured on the perverse legislative reality of stateless peoples facing the stated. The radical role reversal in which the stated enter is an attempt to further the cause proclaimed by Nuur—to strengthen the alliance of the documented and the undocumented, the stated and the stateless—by assembling those in whose name immigration policies are enacted, together with those who are subjected to those policies.

The methodology of *Labyrinth* shows a strong overlap with Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), in which he argues, "The oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both."[12] Interestingly enough, in the case of *Labyrinth,* We Are Here seems to challenge and simultaneously follow Freire's script. They temporarily "oppress" the participants in their play by placing them in a state of subjection, although—and as a key point of difference from the actual asylum procedures that We Are Here members are subjugated to—the stated participants can walk out of the procedure at any time. The fact that visitors have the capability to grant the members of We Are Here temporary power over them is in itself a performance of the power of the stated over the stateless.[14] Nonetheless, the power of the oppressed, in this case We Are Here, lies in the fact that they, in Freire's words, "unveil the world of oppression and through . . . praxis commit themselves to its transformation."[13] We Are Here decides the dominant "theme" of *Labyrinth*, and involves the audience as co-investigators of their oppression, therefore aiming to change this reality by assembling the stateless and the stated. It is this praxis of mutual liberation from an oppressive state idea—instigated through conditions set by the oppressed, not the oppressor—that Freire claims as fundamental to the pedagogy of the oppressed.

Labyrinth had an enormous impact both by involving audience participants in its cause—many of whom were policy makers—and through its broad visibility in Dutch mainstream media. Together with many other cultural projects, this effectively led to the narration of a history for We Are Here members in the Netherlands, creating grounds to argue that they have become so rooted in a society—to which they have made substantial and visible cultural contributions—that citizenship has become graspable for some.[15] This was the case for Nuur, who was granted residency status in 2017. This example of stateless propaganda art originates from the initiative of stateless people seeking alliances with stated artists and cultural workers. Their performance is characterized by severely limited access to power, and the use of their bodies as one of the few tools available to articulate the claim that they are *here*. By effectively deploying their bodies they succeed in establishing a political collective with one another (self-recognition) and simultaneously assemble with the stated (recognition by others), thus increasing their limited power through further visibilization. This is a process in which the micro-performative scale of propaganda, similar to the example of Ould Slahi, strives to extend to a macro-performative scale. This assembly, performed through *Labyrinth,* is the basis for the articulation of a new community and the construction of a new reality.

The Art of Creating a State

The overlap between stateless peoples demanding recognition within an existing state and the demand to create a state of their own becomes apparent in the case of the Ogadenian members of We Are here who, in Ethiopia, were involved in struggles of independence before they were forced to flee. Here we can think of various other examples of independence struggles, such as the Basques in Spain, the Palestinian people still living under Israeli occupation, or the Azawadians in Mali. These are peoples that

through different degrees of oppression are stateless within a state, or stateless as a result of the occupation by another state.

The case of Azawad is of particular interest here as it relates to the relatively recent achievement of creating a newly independent nation-state through an alliance of Kel-Tamasheq (Tuareg), Arab, Fula, and Songhai peoples in the region of the Sahara and the Sahel.[16] That this nation-state came into being in the twenty-first century does not discount the long history preceding this moment. For prior to its formation the Kel-Tamasheq people revolted against the French occupation from the end of the nineteenth century onward and also opposed their integration into the new French-backed state of Mali, which had itself been the result of national liberation.[17] The Kel-Tamasheq struggles for self-determination manifested in 1960, 1963, 1990, and 2006 through armed rebellion, followed by the actual, albeit temporary, realization of an independent state of Azawad in 2012. It was then that the National Liberation Movement of Azawad (MNLA) declared Azawad's independence, backed by highly trained Kel-Tamasheq fighters who had deferred from the crumbling al-Qadhafi regime, effectively expelling the Malian army from their lands in the Sahara and Sahel. This caused a crisis as extremist Islamist groups such as Ansar Dine and Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb quickly filled the power vacuum that resulted from the revolution. Consequently, this saw the return of the French and their allies to the region in an effort to support the Malian state in stabilizing the conflict.[18]

From 2012 onward, during the years of Azawadian independence, Moussa Ag Assarid, a writer and international representative of the MNLA, explained that "the peoples organized in the MNLA are still hesitant about the idea of independence, the idea of a state, for it is a form that we have never known to be ours."[19] This is of particular relevance, as it explains the changing understanding of statelessness for the Kel-Tamasheq people. The Kel-Tamasheq were originally a nomadic people and, in that

5.3

Moussa Ag Assarid, *The Revolution Is Without Frontiers*, 2012, courtesy of Moussa Ag Assarid.

context, the notion of *statelessness* did not mean much, as there was nothing to call a *state* in the first place. It was rather through the process of French colonization and the creation of the state of Mali that the terms *stateless* and *state* became relevant in the articulation of their demand to regain some of the freedom held before colonization. As Ag Assarid explains, in 2012 the very conception of an Azawadian state—especially in the harsh conditions

of the scarcely populated region of the Sahara and Sahel—still had to be imagined by its population. A striking photo from Ag Assarid's series *The Revolution Is Without Frontiers* (2014) of a hand-painted sign displaying the yellow, green, red, and black colors of the new Azawadian flag embodies the challenge of state creation in the region. In his photo, we witness the brownish-yellow sand of the open horizon of the desert, not a person or building in sight, only the sign that attests to a "bare state" in construction.[20]

In this context, the work of the artist Mazou Ibrahim Touré, an MNLA militant of Songhai and Kel Tamasheq descent, proves crucial. As the founder of the Artist Association of Azawad, the artist, calligrapher, and producer of radio programs has been responsible for all banners, slogans, and symbolic depictions of the new state since the start of the Azawadian revolution. After explaining simply that "he saw the situation of [his] people, and realized that they needed an artist,"[21] he has adorned the streets of the MNLA-controlled city of Kidal with his slogans (the most famous one being "Azawad, Mali No!"), murals of the Azawadian flag, peace signs, and public monuments constructed from the limited amount of available scrap metal, which includes remnants of weaponry from the independence struggle. In some cases, existing infrastructures are reappropriated by the artist, like the road signs that used to refer to Malian cities that have now been repainted to direct only to the state of Azawad. Touré uses a similar strategy with old monuments and traffic circles installed by the Malian government, which are repainted in the colors of the Azawadian flag and transformed into new monuments and landmarks of independence.

Within the sober environment of Azawad, the impact of Touré's colorful trilingual work—all slogans are written in Tamasheq, Arabic, and French—should not be underestimated. This stateless propaganda art is not primarily aimed at outsiders in order to gain recognition for the Azawadian project. Instead, as Touré explains,

> The first thing is not to wait until others recognize you—other states, in this case. The first thing is to be confident of oneself, to understand that you represent something, because if you have not accepted and internalized that, then others will never recognize you. The recognition of others, *Inshallah* [God willing], will come as result of our belief.[22]

Touré's double role as radio producer and agitator at rallies of the MNLA forms a crucial part of the choreography in which this process of self-recognition takes place. Music is an important part of this process as well. The work of the Kel-Tamasheq band Tinariwen [Deserts] can be heard constantly on the radio channel and is distributed via Bluetooth from the phone of one MNLA militant to another. Having achieved world fame with their liberation songs, Tinariwen unifies not only the Azawadians on their land but also its diaspora, through building greater knowledge of Azawadian language, history, and struggle through its own strand of cultural diplomacy.[23]

The diverse practice of Touré and his Artist Association of Azawad, whose work, in contrast to Tinariwen, consciously limits itself to the Azawadian territory, is aimed at a collective self-performance—an enactment of a state to come, or better, a state that is present insofar as its diverse peoples can imagine, recognize, and enact it. To become stated in this context does not mean to be recognized by others, but to recognize oneself as a citizen of Azawad and not as a precarious citizen of Mali. Touré's stateless propaganda art is aimed at creating the symbols, slogans, and monumental landmarks that allow this process of assembly and self-recognition to be performed collectively and with the aim of establishing a new reality. In this case, the self-recognition of the stateless is the foundation of a new condition of statedness. The manifold micro-performative scales of propaganda—ranging from the different peoples that gathered in the MNLA, its tribal structures, and ancient confederacies—are to be assembled and allied to a point at which they can enable a

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Murals by Mazou Ibrahim Touré in Ménaka, Azawad. From the series Jonas Staal, *Anatomy of a Revolution: Azawad,* 2014.

macro-performative scale of action as the unified, independent, self-recognized state of Azawad.

This process of self-recognition, the creation of a new national culture vis-à-vis the oppressor culture, is a key aspect of the writings of Frantz Fanon, particularly in his work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Fanon, who was an important inspiration to Freire, argues that “colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a

people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it."[24] The erasure of native culture in the form of language, symbols, social and political organization, and self-sufficiency is subsequently aimed at "driv[ing] into the native's head the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality."[25]

It is in this light that we might gain a better understanding of Ag Assarid's explanation of a hesitance among his fellow people to demand a state of their own, and of Touré's investment in the process of collective self-recognition through his artistic and cultural work. Without the confidence and understanding of one's own cultural history, a culture that needs to be translated into a new national culture, and that seeks independence, cannot succeed. It is this transition from cultural history, to colonized culture, to a new national culture, that is at stake in the struggle of decolonization and independence.

In Touré's stateless propaganda art we thus encounter an attempt to both reconstruct precolonial history and construct a new national culture. He takes up a role that Fanon describes as an "awakener of the people," recovering the colonized past and constructing a liberated present.[26] Touré's self-described "poetry of the revolution" aims to simultaneously imagine, self-recognize, and enact the desired cultural framework of the Azawadian nation-state.[27]

Museum of the Stateless

Stateless propaganda art results from stateless formations of power and different demands of self-determination, ranging from gaining recognition within an existing state to creating a state of one's own. However, I will move on from here and instead dedicate the last segments of this chapter to more the radical demand of the stateless to define statelessness as an alternative to the state

altogether. We find examples of a claim to stateless politics as a form of liberation and not of oppression throughout different histories of anarcho-libertarianism or libertarian-socialism, with the most known example being the 1936–1937 Spanish Revolution, in which a communalist stateless project of self-governance emerged in Catalonia during the civil war.[28]

A contemporary and sustained example that will be of main interest here is the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria in Rojava, West Kurdistan, which was declared autonomous by a coalition of Kurds, Arabs, and Assyrians in the midst of the civil war in 2012. As had happened in Azawad, a long struggle preceded this moment. The partition of the region following the First World War had led to the fragmentation of the Kurdish nation across four different states—Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran—whereby the Kurds faced severe oppression within each, resulting in the foundation of the Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in 1978 in Bakûr, North Kurdistan (southeastern Turkey), led by Abdullah Öcalan. The PKK declared Kurdistan as an "inter-state colony" and called for revolution to "establish an independent, united and democratic Kurdistan."[29]

Of great importance for the Rojava Revolution is the emergence of the Kurdish women's movement within the PKK. Cofounder Sakine Cansız explained that her party had been "giving an ideological struggle from the very beginning against denial, social chauvinistic impression, primitive and nationalist approaches."[30] Imprisoned in Turkey since 1999, Öcalan built on their critiques of the patriarchal state through combining them with his own part political, part mythological strand of Mesopotamian history as well as aspects of the writings of eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin.[31] He concluded that, "The male monopoly that has been maintained over the life and world of woman throughout history, is not unlike the monopoly chain that capital maintains over society."[32] In 2005, he declared the struggle for an independent Kurdish nation-state to be over. Instead, he proposed a "non-state social paradigm" called "democratic confederalism."[33]

This proposition of stateless democracy was part of his vision of a "democratic socialist civilization," a "democratic modernity."[34]

When, in 2012, the Assad regime was forced to the south to fight the Islamic State, the Kurds and their allies seized the chance to declare their lands autonomous. An alternative constitution, called "The Social Contract," was cowritten by all peoples living in the region, which essentially translated stateless democracy into practice.[35] It predominantly invests power in the local self-governing communes within the Rojavan cantons instead of its overarching administration, implementing a quota of 40 percent women's participation in political life, establishing male-female co-presidencies for all political organizations and recognizing a plurality of languages and religions within a secular system of self-governance. Front lines were set against the Assad regime and the Islamic State by the independently organized People's and Women's Protection Units (YPG/J). In this radically reversed model of power, the smallest entities in societies (the communes) have the most executive power, whereas overarching governing structures (the trans-cantonal organization) have the least. What this means is that the micro- and macro-performative scales of the performance of power are internally reversed—the microscale is simultaneously the macro scale and vice versa. This power reversal shows a resemblance to the models of avant-garde and popular propaganda discussed in previous chapters, yet in the case of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, it has gone one step further in being concretely instituted on an administrative level.

Educational institutions are at the core of disseminating the ideas of stateless democracy, among which is the Star Academy in Rimelan. It develops the field of *jineology*, best translated as "science of women," in an attempt to rewrite history from the perspective of the colonized classes of women, stateless peoples, and minorities.[36] In jineology, oppression is no longer identified through the lack of the state but is instead identified as an inherent part of the state paradigm as such. What is at stake is thus

not merely a military and territorial struggle but an ideological one, which the Rojavans refer to as the importance of "changing mentality."[37] The revolution is not aimed at just seizing but at rearticulating the formation of power and infrastructure through stateless democracy. That is the case for the political, economic, and educational system, yet it is possibly expressed most visibly in the context of Rojava's stateless propaganda art. How does this model of nonstate democracy and its internal reversal of power translate to the performance of power as art? Or, in other words, how is this political revolution equally a cultural revolution?

In many examples of Rojava's stateless propaganda art, the overlap with the work of Touré and his Artist Association of Azawad is striking. Similar to Azawad's state-in-the-making, one encounters in Rojava's stateless democracy the continuous presence of the yellow-red-green colors of its flag, often painted on discarded barrels to define its outer borders, or checkpoints for its people's army. Old monuments, fountains, and statues of Hafiz al-Assad, Bashar al-Assad's father, have been thrown off their pedestals, repainted in the colors of Rojava, and adorned with images of Rojavan martyrs. Essentially, these are visual and artistic strategies of repurposing the structures of the old regimes into new ones to create the symbols and reference points of a new political space in the form of stateless democracy. As in Azawad, popular slogans such as "Resistance Is Life," "Women, Life, Freedom," and "Martyrs Never Die"—the last one echoing the famous slogan of the Palestinian liberation struggle—cover former regime buildings. The trilingual representation of the slogans in Kurdish, Assyrian, and Arabic also bring to mind Touré's trilingual banners.

Just as Azawad has the Artist Association, Rojava has the network of Tev-Çand cultural centers. The network reaches from Rojava's small cities to its villages, providing cultural education to its youth in the field of music, theater, and visual art. Also, as in Azawad, music is notably present in the curriculum. As Kurdish culture has long been suppressed, clandestine songs

have been the carrier of Kurdish history, struggle, and language. With several radio and satellite TV channels at Rojava's disposal, music is a popular means to communicate the ideals of stateless democracy and mobilize Rojavan constituencies for the ongoing fight at the front lines. As Nesrin Botan, a vocalist for the musical group Koma Botan, explains:

> We have an important role in the revolution. . . . This revolution gives us the opportunity to express our culture, art, and folklore that used to be suppressed. We are now working hard for our culture and identity. . . . Like a musician receives education from school, our fighters learn the art of fighting in the People's Protection Units. Like a teacher of art, our warriors show performance on the battlefield.[38]

The work of the Rojavan artist Abdullah Abdul is particularly relevant for an analysis of the differences between the stateless propaganda art of those who aim to create a state of their own and those who reject the state altogether. Abdul's work explores the notion of statelessness through his construction of a contemporary museum of lost history. He works in a small studio next to a Tev-Çand center, and a substantial part of his source material relates to the nearby archeological site of Urkesh, the remnants of an ancient kingdom. Formerly under the control of the Assad regime, Abdul explains that for a long time the Rojavans "did not know whether Urkesh was part of our history or of another civilization."[39] Under the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, the site is recognized as the heritage of Hurrians, Kurds, and other peoples who lived in the Mesopotamian region. With many of Urkesh's treasures residing in Assad's museums or in museums overseas, Abdul endeavors to reconstruct this heritage. As a gesture of recuperation, he uses the Tev-Çand as a space to exhibit his clay and stone sculptures, modeled on actual archeological findings and in part on Mesopotamian mythology. He argues:

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An old fountain of the Assad regime in Qamishli has been turned into a monument to the Rojava Revolution, painted yellow-red-green—the colors of the Movement for a Democratic Society (Tev-Dem)—carrying several martyr portraits of deceased revolutionaries from its protection units. From the series Jonas Staal, *Anatomy of a Revolution: Rojava*, 2015.

5.6

Studio of Abdullah Abdul and Masun Hamo in the Tev-Çand of Amude, Rojava, 2015. Photo: Jonas Staal.

> Everybody knows that our culture and history are stolen, but I do not want to visit empty museums and cultural centers. That is why I make these sculptures. We [Abdul and his fellow artist, Masun Hamo] donated these sculptures to the Tev-Çand, so everybody who visits here can be reminded of our heritage.[40]

Often using materials recovered from the surroundings of Urkesh, Abdul's sculptural work is hard to distinguish from archeological findings. His technique of scratching and sanding clay and stone suggests a long passage of time between the creation of the original object and its present-day exhibition. This is the case in his collaboration with Masun Hamo entitled *Women from Rojava* (2014). From a distance the work looks like two stones, placed soberly on the floor, leaning against a pillar and a wall of the Tev-Çand. On closer inspection, the contours of women's faces appear upon the seemingly ancient surfaces. The resemblance of Abdul's work to archeological findings is so striking that it is difficult for his pieces to leave the Rojava region as Iraqi border patrol and customs would confiscate the works, suspecting them to be actual historical objects. This exemplifies the complex layering in his work. One could argue that his works are archeological falsifications, but it is actually the staging of history that forms the core of this artistic endeavor. The aesthetic representation of history in the form of archeological heritage defines his conceptual approach, material, and style.

By using the Tev-Çand as a museum, Abdul introduces a distinct model of stateless propaganda art that constructs and stages a cultural history of the stateless. This is an image of the stateless not as those bereft of the state, but as those who, through ancient confederal structures, were from their very origin stateless. Abdul's museum therefore claims Rojava not as a break in the history of the state, but as a continuation of the history of the stateless. His museum is both historical and contemporary, as it displays the ancient and contemporary in the making. Just as stateless propaganda art operates in a radical reversal of macro- and micro-performative scales, it also fundamentally reorganizes

5.7

Abdullah Abdul and Masun Hamo, *Women from Rojava*, 2014. Photo: Jonas Staal.

the very categories of time in which it operates. In Abdul's work, past, present, and future are defined as radically equalized.

The Cinema of the Commune

The construction of reality through the paradigm of stateless democracy is also at stake in the work of the Rojava Film Commune in the city of Qamishlo. Founded in 2015, the organization consists of filmmakers and educators, who collectively declared in their first communique:

> We shall not allow the cinema to be simplified to become an industrial tool, or a consumable and exhaustible object. The squares of our villages will become our culture and art centers. Our factories and our restaurants will become cinema halls. Our vibrant streets will be our film sets.[41]

The Rojava Film Commune articulates an understanding of cinema along similar lines to the ideal of communal self-governance espoused by stateless democracy. In their case, it is not focused on a redistribution of political power, but on a redistribution of the means of cultural representation. As Diyar Hesso, a filmmaker, teacher, and one of the main organizers of the Rojava Film Commune, explains, "The first thing in a revolution is that society needs to reorganize itself. And this is how the revolution affects the arts: the arts themselves are reorganized."[42] The redistribution and production of culture in the broad public realm are the commune's point of departure. Hesso, further elaborating on the commune's artistic approach to the notion of stateless democracy, argues:

> If you look at the history of art from the perspective of statehood, we see the emergence of an art that I would call 'unrealistic.' With that I mean that we see ourselves faced with an art that is consciously separated from societal developments, what is called 'art for art's sake.' In the context of the Rojava Revolution we aim to develop a realistic art that is of a specific use, one could say a 'useful art.'[43]

With this notion of realism, Hesso refers to what he describes as a "reality rooted in this society," namely the "imagination and dreams of the revolution."[44] This relates to Guillermo's definition of revolutionary realism, a reality that is in the making through concrete political and cultural struggle. What Hesso calls "art for art's sake" would be unrealistic in this framework as it denies such revolutionary imagination, instead turning into what the communiqué refers to as an "industrial tool" in support of capitalist modernity's hegemony over present-day reality. With his proposition of a "useful art," which is reminiscent of Bruguera's work, we have to define *use* as the capacity of art to contribute to the construction of a new reality. Its usefulness is thus not literally that of a technical tool or consumable object, but the capacity to transform an imagined reality into an actual one. In Hesso's words, "Our cause is society's cause; but not the society that is already present, the society that we're constructing as we speak."[45]

The first major focus of the Rojava Film Commune is the history of popular cinema. Members of the commune travel to cities and remote villages to mobilize children and workers to attend film screenings. The goal is to educate Rojavans on popular cinema so that the films of the Commune are able to resonate with its population, placing a particular emphasis on the education of younger generations. The second focus of the commune is educating new filmmakers and producing Rojavan cinema. Film Commune members like Hesso and other key organizers, such as Onder Çakar and Şéro Hindé, teach their students the importance of art production within revolutionary situations by using examples from the French and Soviet revolutions.[46] In the past, the Assad regime controlled all means and channels of artistic production and distribution. Ever since the beginning of the Rojava Revolution, however, hundreds of journalists, television teams, and filmmakers from abroad have visited the region to report on the uprising, meaning that few if any of the international productions were actually in the hands of the Rojavans

5.8

Filmmaker and teacher Khwshman Qado leads a teaching session at the Rojava Film Commune in Derbisiye, Cezîre Canton, in the autonomous region of Rojava, 2015. Photo: Ruben Hamelink.

themselves. With a logic similar to that of the foreign looting of cultural heritage, there has been a looting of contemporary culture by foreign actors who influence disproportionally the means of cultural production and representation in Rojava. The Rojava Film Commune aims to reverse this process by developing a practice of film through the distinct condition and worldview of stateless democracy, and in doing so returning production to the hands of Rojavans themselves.

The first feature film by the commune, directed by Şéro Hindé, is *Stories of Destroyed Cities* (2016), comprising three chapters,

each situated in a different Kurdish city: Sinjar (Iraq), Kobanî (Syria), and Ceza (Syria). In Kobanî, a boy collecting scrap metal to buy candy with his friends encounters various ghosts of the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ), as well as civilians who were martyred during the siege of the city by the Islamic State. Here, the famous slogan "Martyrs Never Die" is translated into a script, in which those who sacrificed their lives for the liberation of the city remain part of its mental architecture. In Ceza, a sheepherder is seen going about his daily routine, although a shadow hangs over the life he shares with his wife owing to their martyred son. Only when they retrieve his photograph from their destroyed house and bury it do they find the heart to truly continue their lives. Most impressive, though, is the film's opening sequence in Sinjar. We see nothing but destroyed houses, burned-out schools, ravaged shops. No humans are in sight, but with each subsequent shot of the torn infrastructure of the city we hear voices. A man asks a barber to trim his beard, a father comes home to his children, a woman informs a salesperson about a dress in a shop, a teacher tells her pupils of the city's history. . . . The voices could be those of the ghosts that once lived in these destroyed cities, but they could also be the ghosts of the future who will live here once again. Just as cities need to be reconstructed materially, they also need to be reconstructed culturally. And it is exactly that crucial labor of cultural reconstruction that *Stories of Destroyed Cities* puts into practice. The contrast this provides to the cultural plunder of the cameras of Vice and BBC, which zoom in on composed English-speaking Rojavans mixed with footage of frontline firefights, could not be stronger.[47] The film commune ends the looting, and assembles the ghosts of past, present, and future in the process of constructing their revolution's new reality.

The Film Commune's work shows how the reorganization of culture alongside the reorganization of society takes place. Its aim is not simply to make art, but to create the infrastructures through which a different cultural production and representation becomes possible. As a result, the commune invests as much in

5.9
Film still Şéro Hindé, director, *Stories of Destroyed Cities*, 2016. Courtesy of Şéro Hindé–Rojava Film Commune.

creating a public as in regaining control over and redistributing the means of cultural production and representation among the Rojavan population. Just as the reversal of the macro- and micro-performative scales of propaganda has fundamentally altered the redistribution of power in Rojavan society, the Rojava Film Commune has altered the redistribution of the means of cultural representation and production in the process of constructing a new reality.

When Theaters Become Parliaments

Stateless propaganda art results from specific conditions of statelessness, aimed at performing demands for a reality in which the stateless are recognized within an existing state, the stateless

realize a state of their own, or the stateless reject the state altogether. It aims in different ways at self-recognition and recognition by others, starting from the (often severely limited) power located in the body of the stateless. In some cases, this power is performed by the stateless as a means to generate visibility in the eyes of the stated (those who seek recognition in an existing state), or in some cases as a means to radically separate themselves from an existing state or the notion of the state altogether (those who create a state of their own, or reject the state in its entirety). In discussing stateless propaganda art, we thus witness a shift from the demand to be recognized within an existing state idea, to developing one's own state idea, and finally, to introducing paradigms that bypass the very ideological and infrastructural dimension of what we have come to know as the state altogether.

Stateless propaganda art can be analyzed through the educational, cultural, and artistic work developed in liberational practices, such as those of Fanon, Freire, and Boal, whether it relates to the pedagogy of the oppressed that serves to create alliances between the stateless and stated, the creation of new national culture separated from an occupying state, or a pedagogy of the stateless, which starts from the liberational dimension of statelessness. In all these examples, the aim is to construct reality on the basis of different conditions of statelessness.

In both the case of Abdul's work and that of the Rojava Film Commune, we witness a constant interplay between the specific structures of power brought about through the model of stateless democracy and its stateless propaganda art. As much as Rojavan society is in the process of construction, so is its art. While Abdul attempts to create a cultural continuity between stateless Mesopotamian history and stateless democracy, the Rojava Film Commune attempts to reorganize the means of cultural production and representation in the service of a revolutionary realism by juxtaposing stateless democracy's culture with the history of cinema that resulted from capitalist modernity. In both cases, we

observe an attempt to break with a past represented by the state, while reengaging a neglected past in the form of stateless history.

The radical reversal of traditional power structures, allocating macro-performative agency to the micro-performative scale, and vice versa, shows overlap with the objectives of avant-garde and popular propaganda art. But Rojava's stateless propaganda art also differentiates itself quite evidently, as it does not predominantly seek to compose a people but works from the recognition of a social composition already present—namely, that of statelessness. Rojava's stateless propaganda art starts from self-recognition by the stateless community to become stateless on one's *own* terms. The various new institutional bodies and infrastructures—from women's academies to cultural centers and film communes—embody that reality, building forth on the paradigm of Öcalan's democratic modernity. The opening of Jinwar in 2018, the Village of Free Women, is the latest landmark in that process.[48] Organized under women's law, Jinwar provides safe spaces for women and children, develops cooperative agricultural models, houses workshops, and runs its own academy on the foundations of Jineology. It further aims to include its own arts and medical centers, with the overall objective of becoming fully operative on solar energy alone. Designed by the Hêvî Foundation, the triangular shape of the village has an egalitarian setup that brings to mind historical modernist landmarks such as the capital city Brasília, though consciously scaled down to the size of the commune. This even influences the placement of buildings, which are composed as if participating in an assembly themselves. Here the political model of stateless democracy and its infrastructure merge completely.

At the symbolic core of the interplay between Rojava's stateless democracy and its stateless propaganda art is the People's Council of Qamishlo. Situated in an old theater of the Assad regime, the stage continues to be used for musical and artistic events, while simultaneously serving as a platform for local communes in their daily practice of self-governance. The staging of a

5.10

Construction of Jinwar, Village of Free Women, 2018. Photo: Ossama Muhammad.

Her Tişt Jibo Jiyan
Avakirina Civakek D

5.11

Candidates from neighborhood councils and cooperatives present themselves to become co-chair of the People's Council of the city of Qamishli. From the series Jonas Staal, *Anatomy of a Revolution: Rojava*, 2015.

new political reality intersects with the staging of its new artistic productions. The theater stands as a space of both artistic and political imaginary, a space in which the performance of politics and art coexist. As discussed, Augusto Boal, following Freire, coined the concept of the *theater of the oppressed*, a practice of theater in which passive spectators are transformed into active spect-actors, embodying the politicization of the oppressed as actors and creators of their own fate. Calling the theater a space for the "rehearsal for the revolution," Boal claimed that "truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theater so that the people themselves may utilize them."[49]

In the case of Rojava, we are faced with an as-yet-unknown outcome of a politics and art in the making, something we, in Boalian terms, would have to term a *theater of the stateless*. It is a space of communal performance that does not use the theater to "rehearse" the revolution, but to concretely conduct it; a communal performance that no longer starts from the counterpoint of state oppression, but that attempts to claim the very condition of statelessness as the starting point of a new reality under construction. It is through stateless propaganda art and its revolutionary realism that we can witness hints of what future this society and culture might bring.

CONCLUSION

The interwar period ignited the field of propaganda studies, particularly in the United States. After the world wars, various thinkers and researchers tried to grasp the scale and scope of the propaganda infrastructures of dismantled dictatorships, but as time progressed, the notion of propaganda and propaganda art was sealed in a time capsule labeled "totalitarianism."

In this book I have tried to show that this capsule largely holds artifacts of various forms of overt propaganda, ranging from Nazi films to socialist realist paintings, forms that apparently arouse us no longer and to which we believe we are immune today. But since the first modern propaganda bureau, which manifested in a modern, imperialist democracy, covert propagandas have shaped our world in forms and ways that we still cannot fully grasp. Our lack of understanding is one of the core reasons that such forms of propaganda remain effective, not just as resonances of our past but as continuously operational in our present.

Today, we define art as that which is ambiguous, that which asks questions and holds up mirrors to the world. Art can challenge everything and break all taboos, except one: it cannot take an actual political position in the world with the aim of changing it. In that case, we declare the artwork dogmatic, one-dimensional, and pamphletic. We deem it propaganda. By this reasoning, propaganda is all that art is not. The artist is ordered to "shut up and be beautiful," to question the world, but to leave world-making to unknown others.

Of course, this doctrine of artistic neutrality is itself a form of propaganda. The supposedly universalist art of the abstract

expressionists was a powerful propaganda weapon in the Cold War, just as the art we consider "entertainment" today plays a key role in the never-ending War on Terror. And indeed, these covert art forms are ambiguous—we think we see an abstract image, but in actuality we witness a figurative representation of the doctrine of capitalist democracy. And under the guise of entertainment we are ideologically resensitized to become a new civil frontline against the threats of an ever changing *Them*. Art is, or can be, highly ambiguous, but that ambiguity is far from politically innocent. For contemporary liberal and capitalist democracies, the "myth of neutrality" is the perfect vehicle for shaping attitudes and beliefs, because it is precisely when we think we are free of propaganda that we are most susceptible to it.[1] Reactivating the field of propaganda and propaganda art studies as a contemporary practice would provide a crucial tool for navigating the covert dimensions of propaganda today. But it is simultaneously a tool for exploring the radical politicized ambiguity in overt emancipatory propaganda art. The category of a "people-in-the-making," central to popular propaganda art, for example, is extremely hybrid, conflictual, and transformative; it changes through assemblist practice and the artistic morphologies of embedded and organizational art. In a similar way, the process of self-recognition central to stateless propaganda art opens categories of belonging and identity that bypass the capitalist and patriarchal state as the hegemon of identity formation.

This book aims to be a modest contribution to the endeavor of reviving propaganda and propaganda art studies, for what we further need are new propaganda schools, or at the very least, propaganda art departments in universities and art academies. We need contemporary propaganda art spaces, as well as popular education in the form of documentaries and publications to collectivize propaganda literacy. If we hold on to the demands of democratization and transparency proposed in this book through the inverted propaganda model, then it is a right of

every member of a community to gain an understanding of the means of production forming our realities.

When we learn to understand our implication in the performance of power—our implication in propaganda—we also understand that the world that we live in is made by human hands, and is not constructed by an abstract, unquestionable, or impenetrable authority. Propaganda and propaganda art designate the field of the means of production through which we construct reality, and this concerns us all. Moreover, these means belong to *all* of us. At present, the ever-expanding global precariat is largely excluded from coauthoring the world, and austerity, global warfare, and climate change will only further deepen the conditions of oppression, racism, and poverty. This, as we discussed, is the result of dangerous formations of elite power—state ideas in the form of the expanded state and the alt-state—that have anchored their interests in politics, the economy, the mass media, the military-industrial complex, and culture. The toxic combination of punitive capitalism, growing authoritarianism, and democratic fascism is life threatening.

This means that reactivating propaganda and propaganda art studies can be only one part of the answer to our present-day crises, conflicts, and deepening precarity. Yes, we need to understand who authors our world in our name, but we also need to gain control over the means of production through which our realities are constructed in order to make new ones. Brexit or the election of Donald Trump could not be stopped by "facts" alone. Understanding that a master narrative is false does not stop it from having effect. It demands a new master narrative of our own: a story about where we come from, who we are, and who we can become. And thus, our new propaganda schools and departments might have to do more than research, analyze, and educate. They will simultaneously have to become tools to reclaim the means of reality production. It is crucial, though, to emphasize that the propaganda of the expanded state and alt-state cannot be countered if we do not challenge the structures

of power that underlie it. To say it simply, we cannot use Bannon's alt-right propaganda model and simply inject it with supposedly "progressive" values. Moralism will not do without fundamentally challenging and redistributing power at its base. Only when power is organized anew can it be performed collectively, as an emancipatory propaganda in leaderful movements and stateless revolution.

Facts need narratives that mobilize and arouse the collective imagination. In this light, and through the inverted propaganda model, I have tried to introduce practices of popular and stateless propaganda art. These artists are not put forward as some kind of exceptional twenty-first-century avant-garde, but as people who, among and alongside the assembling precariat, explore how their artistic competences can contribute to shaping collective demands and to translating them into new forms of worldmaking. I hope that this book has been able to show that while propaganda and propaganda art can indeed take the form of covert indoctrination, manipulation, and misinformation, they can also be forces of mass democratization, mobilization, and transformation. And as such, I hope it will amplify the almost century-old call upon the imaginative power of artists by Upton Sinclair, on visual artists, architects, designers, theatermakers, writers, and poets, to contribute to the rising forces of internationalism against the rising forces of fascism. Obviously, the nature of this internationalism has various ideological iterations today, as we have seen in the Nationalist International that Bannon and his allies are trying to bring about.[2] This shows us that artists and artistic imaginations do not necessarily belong to one side of the political spectrum per se, but that they are instead shaped, formed, and validated through exchange with various structures of power. This implies that artists cannot merely take an aesthetic stance, but need to take a political one as well—as evidenced in this case through popular and stateless power and the new transnationalisms they bring about. Sinclair knew that it will be either

the world *we* make or the world *they* make, and that claim stands today as firmly as it did back then.

This brings me to a final note, regarding that much debated term, declared word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries in 2016: *post-truth*. In Oxford's definition, it is explained as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."[3] Now, obviously, we must fight against misinformation, yet this definition nonetheless poses some real problems. The condescending reference to "emotion and personal belief" is most significant. For example, the facts surrounding climate change are crucial, but facts need narratives to become affective and therefore effective. It is not just a *supplement* to a fact, but an inherent part of a fact becoming a guiding principle in the construction of a new reality. As Lippard's definition of a feminist propaganda art of intimacy made clear, it is the affective dimension that mobilizes people not simply to *know* but also to *act*. And is that not precisely what we have seen throughout the various examples of artistic practices in this book? Whether relating to the refugee crisis, climate change, racism, or precarity, popular and stateless propaganda art contributes to the infrastructures, narratives, and imagination that turn facts into principles to be acted upon.

We should thus challenge exactly what the "truth" we are supposed to return to in post-*truth* is, and who exactly this truth serves. Is the very idea of this return not just a symptom of liberal nostalgia, exactly in the same way that alt-governance appeals to a past greatness, one that never existed in the first place? Democratic fascisms the world over appeal to retro–science fictions, reconstructions of glorified history, projected as our common future where we will once more become great *again*. In the case of liberal nostalgia, what return to normality does it call upon exactly? The disasters of liberal-capitalism and its military and class wars? The rise of the trillion-dollar company and global precarity? Is this the glorified "normal" that we long to constitute

once more? Instead of falling into the trap of this post-truth propaganda, we should act upon Judith Balso's call to "present ourselves to the present."[4] For the truth about post-truth is that there is no norm to return to, there are only various competing realities, each trying to impose its own set of values, beliefs, and behaviors. The task that awaits us now is the construction of a reality based on a transformative, emancipatory politics, in order to take our stance in the propaganda struggle currently at hand, so that, in the words of Octavia Butler's character Lauren Olamina, "Our new worlds will remake us as we remake them."[5]

My proposition therefore is to reactivate propaganda studies on the one hand and explore and develop new forms of propaganda work on the other. Whenever our human community has made significant achievements, they have manifested only when we realized that it is us collectively who decide our destinies. Emancipatory propaganda art precisely exemplifies this most powerful human competence and awareness, whereby we learn that we can become more than the systems that script and direct us, where we recognize how we can collectively author this world anew, where we can work to make a world.

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Chapter 1. Propaganda and Democracy, a Short History

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57. Malzacher, Öğüt, and Tan, 68–71.

58. As mentioned in the introduction, I was one of the co-initiators and organizers of the event. See further http://www.artistorganisationsinternational.org/.

59. Ekaterina Degot, "The Artist as Director: 'Artist Organisations International' and Its Contradictions," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, no. 40 (Autumn/Winter 2015): 20–27

60. See Slavoj Žižek, "Why Are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?," *M'ARS Casopis Moderne Galerije* 3, no. 4 (1993): 3–4. BAVO further expands on the concept of *over-identification* in relation to the contemporary practices of Christoph Schlingensief and Atelier van Lieshout. See BAVO, *Culture Activism Today: The Art of Over-Identification* (Rotterdam: Episode Publishers, 2007).

61. Extracted from a personal conversation with Bridle on the concept of the artist organization, Athens, April 23, 2017.

62. Extracted from a personal conversation with Gouseti on the concept of the artist organization, Rotterdam, September 1, 2018.

63. Just as the precariat is a "class-in-the-making." See Standing, *The Precariat*, 155.

Chapter 5. Theater of the Stateless

1. Slavoj Žižek, *Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and Other Trouble with Our Neighbours* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 110.

2. Many of the cited sources in this chapter are interviews resulting from my artist organization New World Academy (2013–2015), cofounded by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, and its five-part reader series.

3. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 66–111.

4. Rastko Močnik, *Extravagantia II: colonial discourse and Koliko fašizma?* (Ljubljana: Insitutum studiorum humanitatis, 1995).

5. Martijn Stronks, "The Paradox of Visible Illegality: A Brief History of Dutch Migration Control," in *Collective Struggle of Refugees. Lost. In Between. Together.*, ed. Jonas Staal and We Are Here (Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, 2013), 65–76.

6. Yoonis Osman Nuur, "We Exist," in *Collective Struggle of Refugees,* 43.

7. Nuur, 45.

8. Yoonis Osman Nuur, "We Are a Political Group," interviewed by Jonas Staal, *Collective Struggle of Refugees*, 57.

9. This is a juridical perspective elaborated on in the work *X and Y v. France: The Case for a Legal Precedent* (2007–present) by French artists Patrick Bernier and Olive Martin. See Audrey Chan in conversation with Patrick Bernier and Olive Martin, "Artists at Work: Patrick Bernier and Olive Martin," in *Collective Struggle of Refugees,* 91–101. See also Ellen C. Feiss, *A Critique of Rights in We Are Here* (Amsterdam: We Are Here Cooperative, 2015).

10. Yoonis Osman Nuur and Ahmet Öğüt presented their resolution "Political Representation Beyond Citizenship" during the *Beyond Allegories* conference, Amsterdam Town Hall, May 9, 2014.

11. We Are Here, "We Are Here Manifesto," in *Collective Struggle of Refugees,* 23.

12. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 26.

13. Freire, 36.

14. It is important to point out Freire's reservations regarding what he calls the "false generosity" of the oppressor as an expression of their sense of guilt. In a more negative reading, stated collaborators and participants to Labyrinth might—in Freire's words—aim to "preserve an unjust and necrophilic order" while simultaneously "buy peace for himself." Freire, 127.

15. Osman Nuur and Lara Staal continued the work of *Labyrinth* in their project *Europe on Trial* (2018), a people's trial aimed to prosecute Europe for human rights violations, that took place on June 2, 2018, at De Balie in Amsterdam.

16. Berny Sèbe, "A Fragmented and Forgotten Decolonization: The End of European Empires in the Sahara and Their Legacy," in *The Art of Creating a State*, ed. Moussa Ag Assarid and Jonas Staal (Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, 2013), 113–142.

17. See Francis G. Snyder, "The Political Thought of Mobido Keita," *Journal of African Studies* 5, no.1 (May 1967).

18. On the performativity of national symbols in the return of the French army to Mali, see Tom Holert, "National Heterologies: On the Materiality and Mediality of Flags—Mali 2013," *e-flux journal*, no. 52 (February2014):https://www.e-flux.com/journal/52/59923/national-heterologies-on-the-materiality-and-mediality-of-flags-mali-2013/.

19. Moussa Ag Assarid, "We Inhabit the Horizon," interviewed by Jonas Staal, *The Art of Creating a State*, 41–42.

20. This is in reference to Agamben's notion of "bare life." See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (California: Stanford University Press, 1998).

21. Mazou Ibrahim Touré, "I Was Needed, So I Became an Artist," interviewed by Jonas Staal, *The Art of Creating a State*, 92.

22. Touré, 94–95.

23. Abdallah Ag Alhousseini, "Tinariwen's Abdallah Ag Alhousseini Talks about Mali," interviewed by Banning Eyre, *The Art of Creating a State*, 51–68.

24. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 169.

25. Fanon, 169.

26. Fanon, 179.

27. Touré, interview.

28. Murray Bookchin, *To Remember Spain: The Anarchist and Syndicalist Revolution of 1936* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1994). See further Alex Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Saku Pinta, and David Berry, eds., *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Black and Red* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

29. Amil Kemal Özcan, *Turkey's Kurds: A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 87.

30. "The Foundation of the PKK in the Words of Sakine Cansiz," *Kurdish Question,* November 27, 2014, https://www.kurdishquestion.com/oldarticle.php?aid=the-foundation-of-the-pkk-in-the-words-of-sakine-cansiz.

31. See Abdullah Öcalan, *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilisation* (London: Transmedia Publishing, 2007). For Bookchin's elaboration of nonstate confederalist structures of political organization see Murray Bookchin, *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy* (New York: Verso Books, 2015).

32. Öcalan, *The Political Thought of Abdullah Öcalan*, 77–78.

33. Öcalan, 47.

34. Öcalan, 104.

35. Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava, "The Social Contract," in *New World Academy, Reader #5: Stateless Democracy*, ed. Dilar Dirik, Renée In der Maur, and Jonas Staal (Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, 2015), 131–158.

36. -*logy* referring to the Greek *logos* (knowledge) and *jin* referring to the Kurdish word for woman. See further Gönül Kaya, "Why Jineology? Re-Constructing the Sciences Towards a Communal and Free Life," in *Stateless Democracy*, 86.

37. Janet Biehl, "Revolutionary Education: Two Acadamies in Rojava," in *Stateless Democracy*, 213.

38. Interview with Nesrin Botan conducted in the Mitra Hasake cultural center, December 20, 2014.

39. Interview with Abdullah Abdul conducted in the artist's studio in Amude, December 18, 2014.

40. Abdul, interview.

41. "To the Press and Public Opinion," Rojava Film Commune, accessed August 2, 2018, https://www.kominafilmarojava.org/english/profile/.

42. Interview conducted with Diyar Hesso at the Rojava Film Commune, Derbisiye, October 30, 2015.

43. Hesso, interview.

44. Hesso, interview.

45. Hesso, interview.

46. Interview conducted with Diyar Hesso, Şêro Hindê, and Onder Çakar at the Rojava Film Commune, Derbisiye, October 30, 2015.

47. See Vice's *Syria's Unknown War* (2013) and BBC's *Rojava: Syria's Secret Revolution* (2014). A notable exception is *The Sniper of Kobani* (2015) by Reber Dosky, a Kurdish-Dutch filmmaker from Başûr, Southern Kurdistan (Northern Iraq).

48. See JINWAR, accessed October 19, 2018, https://jinwar.org.

49. Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 98.

Conclusion

1. This is in reference to Laura Raicovich's research project *The Myth of Neutrality* (2018–ongoing).

2. The term "Nationalist International" comes from an economic policy paper released by the Democracy in Europe 2025 movement. See DiEM25, *DiEM25's European New Deal: A Summary,* 2017, https://diem25.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/170209_DiEM25_END_Summary_EN.pdf

3. *Oxford Dictionaries, s.v.* "post-truth," accessed October 23, 2018, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/post-truth.

4. Judith Balso, "To Present Oneself to the Present. The Communist Hypothesis: A Possible Hypothesis for Philosophy, an Impossible Name for Politics?," in *The Idea of Communism,* ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso), 32.

5. Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), 358.

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