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PROPAGANDA ART  
*From the 20<sup>th</sup>  
to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

Jonas Staal

Propaganda Art  
From the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

PROEFSCHRIFT  
ter verkrijging van  
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,  
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,  
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties  
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klokke 15:00 uur

DOOR  
Jonas Hendrik Staal  
geboren te Zwolle  
in 1981

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Nato Thompson, schrijver en curator, New York

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**INTRODUCTION:  
MY NAME IS JONAS  
STAAL, AND I AM  
A PROPAGANDA  
ARTIST**

BECOMING A PROPAGANDA ARTIST  
 PROPAGANDA RESEARCH  
 PROPAGANDA WORK  
 METHODOLOGY OF ARTISTIC RESEARCH  
 CHAPTER OVERVIEW  
 “WE”

BECOMING A PROPAGANDA ARTIST

My name is Jonas Staal, and I am a propaganda artist.<sup>1</sup> This is not a confession, although it can easily come across as one. Why? Because the notion of propaganda art has itself been subject to propaganda, which tells us that propaganda art can only be one-dimensional, totalitarian, and at permanent risk of serving to legitimize crimes of genocidal proportions. Whether in the context of a journal article, or a review at art school: being labeled a propaganda artist is never a formal description, but by definition a negative judgment that expels the artist and artwork in question to the dark histories of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships.

I know this from first-hand indoctrination. Arriving at art school at the age of nineteen, it was quickly made clear to me that the purpose of art was to hold up mirrors to the world and show the ambiguity of the human condition. Everything could be questioned and all taboos could be broken, except one: not just to reflect on the world, but to aim to change it. Art that served political messages was the equivalent of “advertisement” or “activism,” and both were considered derogatory terms. Politics consisted of tedious and banal daily governance, best narrated by an increasingly sensational mass media. We, as artists, were supposed to elevate ourselves beyond such temporary current affairs. We were to dedicate ourselves to the ambiguities and anxieties of the human condition. The idea of changing the world was left to demagogues and idealists, whereas our task was to reflect upon it.

Around us, the world changed but the art school did not. When the Twin Towers collapsed, a large screen was set up in the media department. I witnessed students applauding when the buildings came down while they commented on the rather poor camera work. When the Dutch populist right-wing leader Pim Fortuyn was murdered one year later, we told each other “good riddance,” although we had no idea about his political platform or the reasons for his widespread support. If we voted at all, we voted for the left, without giving much thought to it. In retrospect, I would say that our attitude was itself the product of a deep propagandistic logic. The idea that art needs to be outside politics to be art is exactly what has led not only to its powerlessness, but also to its cynicism and devastating neoliberal nihilism.

When I finished my studies in the Netherlands and the United Sta-

<sup>1</sup> I borrow this phrasing from Stephanie Bailey, who at the *Synapse 2: Rethinking Institutional Critique – A View from the South* conference in Athens on Apr. 16, 2016 opened her closing remarks with the sentence: “My name is Stephanie Bailey, and I’m a neoliberal.” Evidently, Bailey was not saying that she wanted to be a neoliberal, but that, in her current predicament, she could not but acknowledge how the condition of neoliberalism structured and acted in her practice.



tes, I moved to the harbor city of Rotterdam. With its center bombed by the Nazis, Rotterdam is the result of an exceptional urban experiment that provided the first large-scale experience with post-war modernist city planning in the Netherlands. A variety of plans was executed simultaneously. If you ask a citizen of Rotterdam to tell you where the center is, the chances are high you will get about five different answers, as there are about five different places that could be considered its “center.” The late Fortuyn was a Rotterdam citizen, and had managed to mobilize its workers into massively abandoning the former ruling Labor Party. Fortuyn’s anti-immigrant message resonated in this city, where more than fifty percent of residents had a migrant background, recruited in Turkey and Morocco as “guest workers” to take on unwanted jobs during the city’s post-war reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> The presumption that these migrant workers would return “home” proved mistaken – home was now the Netherlands. In time, the lack of infrastructure provided by the political and business elites to support these migrant communities would prove disastrous. Already in the 1970s Rotterdam witnessed race riots in its Afrikaanderwijk neighborhood – shamelessly named after the first generation of Dutch colonizers in South Africa – when white workers literally threw migrant workers out of their houses.

Fortuyn’s murder in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks formed a fundamental breaking point in Dutch 21st-century society, even though the fact that his killer had been a white animal rights activist did not match with the underlying desire to frame migrant communities – Muslims in particular – as a new existential threat to the “West.” This would change on November 2, 2004, when the anti-Islamist filmmaker and polemicist Theo van Gogh was murdered by Mohammed Bouyeri, a member of the later blacklisted Hofstad Group organization. Van Gogh’s collaboration with Dutch–Somali MP Ayaan Hirsi Ali of the liberal-conservative VVD on their film *Submission* (2004) had been Bouyeri’s trigger. He argued that the Dutch “masters” had found in her “an ally in their crusade against Islam and Muslims.”<sup>3</sup> Bouyeri’s murder of Van Gogh would subsequently lead to the rise of the Dutch ultranationalist movement, which today has equivalents all over Europe.

2 Inge Jansen, “Volgend jaar is de helft allochtoon,” *NRC Handelsblad*, Feb. 20, 2015, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2015/02/20/volgend-jaar-is-helft-allochtoon-1467853-a573815>. Considering that this is a thesis on propaganda, it is relevant to highlight the highly problematic Dutch use of the word *allochtoon*, meaning as much as “of foreign soil.” This, however, doesn’t stop people from applying it to Dutch citizens even when they are born in the Netherlands. This has led to necessary debates that have introduced the alternative designation of “Dutch citizens with an immigrant background.”

3 The original quote in Dutch is as follows: “U steekt uw vijandigheid tegen de Islam niet onder stoelen of banken en hiervoor bent u door uw meesters beloond met een zetel in het parlement. Zij hebben in u een medestander gevonden in hun kruistocht tegen de Islam en de Moslims.” Source: R. Peters, addendum to specialist report “De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling van Mohammed B.” (2003–2004), p. 35.

In the aftermath of Van Gogh’s murder, Hirsi Ali’s fellow VVD MP Geert Wilders left his party, arguing that it was incapable of responding accurately to the existential threat of Islam. Through his own Freedom Party (PVV) – of which he is the sole member – he has called for the prohibition of the Quran and headscarves, closing down all mosques, pre-emptively bombing Iran, and building a Dutch-style Guantánamo Bay prison. Wilders’s proposals led to threats on his life and his being surrounded by permanent state security, but also rallied millions to his support. This resulted in his informal participation in the Rutte I government of 2010–2011.<sup>4</sup> But most of all, Wilders changed the vocabulary and identity of Dutch politics. The myth of the country’s liberal-democratic “tolerant” profile was shattered. Instead, a fundamentalist interpretation of the freedom of speech opened the way for blatant and systemic racism, not just propagated by the ultranationalist parties, but also formerly progressive ones.<sup>5</sup> Wilders’s dark vision of a renewed “clash of civilizations” between the “democratic” West and “backward” East turned into the dominant political narrative that it still is today. Through his alliances with Marine Le Pen’s Front National in France, Belgium’s Flemish Interest, the Italian Lega Nord, and Austria’s Freedom Party, Wilders became one of the leading figures of a new “Nationalist International.”<sup>6</sup>

This thesis deals mainly with the analysis of propaganda *art* in the 21st century. It therefore seems crucial to emphasize that the Dutch “clash of civilizations” narrative is grounded in the body of a murdered *artist*: Theo van Gogh, great-grandson of Theo van Gogh, the brother of painter Vincent van Gogh. As clear from his last book, *Allah Knows Better* (2003), Van Gogh was an artist who supported the policies of George W. Bush and applauded the invasion of Iraq; he wallowed in anti-Semitic remarks, and spouted his blatant Islamophobia in obscene tirades against public figures, such as Dutch Labor Party repre-

4 This was known in Dutch as a “gedoogconstructie,” which means in this case that the official government coalition consisted of the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), while Wilders’s Freedom Party (PVV) formally remained in the opposition, but with the pledge to support core policies the three parties had agreed on. This made Wilders’s party a de facto part of the ruling government.

5 During Wilders’s closing statement during his court case for inciting hatred and violence in 2016, the politician quoted the former Labor party leader Diederik Samson and Labor chair Hans Spekman, who had claimed Moroccan–Dutch had an “ethnic monopoly on violence” and that “Moroccan’s are to be humiliated.” The fact that the Labor party, which used to rely in a large part on an electorate with a migrant background, had moved so far to the right due to influence of Wilders thus turned into a key argument for the politician’s demand for acquittal. See: Geert Wilders, “Laatste woord Geert Wilders – Rechtbank 23 november 2016,” *Website Freedom Party*, Nov. 23, 2016, <https://pvv.nl/36-fj-related/geert-wilders/9369-laatste-woord-geert-wilders-rechtbank-23-november-2016.html>.

6 These parties are allied in the European Alliance for Freedom faction in the European Parliament, termed by the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25) a “nationalist international.” See: DiEM25, “DiEM25’s European New Deal: A Summary” (2017), [https://diem25.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/170209\\_DiEM25\\_END\\_Summary\\_EN.pdf](https://diem25.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/170209_DiEM25_END_Summary_EN.pdf).

sentative Fatima Elatik.<sup>7</sup> He was an artist that I ideologically oppose in every possible way. His murder, just like the murder of the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists on January 7, 2015, in Paris by Islamic State affiliates, is a form of existential censorship. But we should also refrain from relativizing Van Gogh's call for the illegal invasion of Iraq and the hundreds of thousands of civilians that were murdered as a result, when assessing the cultural and artistic inheritance he left behind.

The fact that the rise of ultranationalism was facilitated by the body of a dead artist also contributed to my own politicization and evolution into a propaganda artist. The doctrines of art with which I had been educated and which claimed that the only way to be an artist was not to desire to change anything politically became untenable. And did Van Gogh and his allies – Fortuyn, Hirs Ali, Wilders – not engage in a full-scale *culture* war? Even Wilders himself would transform into an artist of sorts, when he followed up on Van Gogh and Hirs Ali's *Submission* with his own blatantly racist and anti-Islamic film pamphlet *Fitna* (2008). These artworks perpetuated the new cultural mythologies of our time, that it was possible to return to a fictional democratic Dutch nation of the past, founded on humanist and Judeo-Christian principles, free from Islamic influence.<sup>8</sup> Even though ultranationalism strongly relies on cultural mythology and visual representation to propagate its core narratives, somehow we as artists were supposed to stay at a distance in order for our work to remain art, while our artistic competences were appropriated right before our eyes. This was the fundamental contradiction faced by engaged artists in the early 21st century in the Netherlands. Our politicians were turning increasingly into dubious artists and obscure actors – even filmmakers – but we, as artists, were not supposed to intervene for the sake of art's perceived purity.

It increasingly became clear to me that exactly this narrative was the real propaganda at stake. Propaganda art was not the problem; it was the *propaganda against propaganda art*. The construction of reality was to be left to the adults in the room.<sup>9</sup> Artists were supposed to be beautiful and shut up, summarized in the famous dictum *Sois belle et tais-toi*. But the reality that we were told to stay clear of included the Dutch

7 Van Gogh famously referred to Muslims as “goat fuckers” in the post-September 11 era: “Ever since 9/11, you know, the knives have been sharpened and the Fifth Column of goat-fuckers is marching forward relatively unhindered.” Original quote in Dutch: “Sinds 11 september, u weet wel, zijn de messen geslepen en marcheert de Vijfde Colonne van de geitenneukers betrekkelijk ongehinderd voorwaarts.” Source: Theo van Gogh, *Allah weet het beter* (Amsterdam: Xtra – Rechtdoorzee Mijl op 7, 2003), p. 14.

8 In this context, it cannot be emphasized enough that the Dutch colonization of Indonesia had once provided the Kingdom of the Netherlands a territory where the majority of the population was Muslim.

9 A reference to Yanis Varoufakis's *Adults in the Room: My Battle with Europe's Deep Establishment* (London: The Bodley Head, 2017).

support to the bombing of Afghanistan and invasion and occupation of Iraq, later to be expanded into foreign missions to Mali and bombings in Syria. It also included the rise of violent Islamophobia and racism at home. And this new, violent reality was constructed by cultural, if not artistic, warfare. Is the imagination of art, our capacity to think, stage, compose, choreograph, and construct the world differently not of crucial importance for the opposition against the construction of ultranationalist social reality? And should our task as artists, as those who have trained and specialized in *representation*, not be to join forces with those who demand a different conception of society: a society not divided by ethnic or class warfare, but assembled through a common imagination of equity? To contribute to a defiant imagination of a different world, a world as real as we are able to imagine it to be – this is what began to crystallize for me as the clear artistic task ahead. It took the body of a murdered artist for me to realize that these words had to be uttered: *I am a propaganda artist*.

This thesis departs from a single question: *Is the term propaganda still applicable to the 21st century, and if so, what are its implications for the domain of art?* After the research that I conducted for this thesis, I have come to the conclusion that modern and contemporary propaganda can be defined as a *performance of power*. Performance here has a double meaning. The first is performance as “enactment,” in the practical sense that powerful infrastructures such as the mass media or military-industrial complex are able to enact (perform) power to shape reality. The second is performance in the context of performance art and theater, where we speak of a bodily and often imaginative enactment. This is a performance not only of power as it exists, but as we could imagine it to be. Performance is not merely an aspect of propaganda, it is what defines propaganda: propaganda *is* the performance of power. We will thus not speak of the “performance of propaganda”, but of propaganda *as* a performance, which contains both a political and artistic component. When I claim that the aim of such a performance is to construct reality, that does not mean that propaganda equals reality, but that it aims to shape and form reality as such. For example, the War on Terror – which we will discuss at length in the third and fourth chapter – might have started as a representation of a new “clash of civilizations.” But the strength of its propaganda ensured that this representation became a material reality, whether in the form of military invasions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, or in the form of the massive erosion of civil rights in the name of “national security” in the western world. Propaganda makes use of representation, but its core aim is to alter material reality as such.

As we will see throughout this thesis, what we call reality from the modern age to the contemporary, includes a plurality of propagandas, each of which aims to inscribe their interests into our present and future. The uncontrollable interaction between these different propagandas, in combination with complex social, economic and ecological processes, is what defines reality. Never does a single propaganda define reality as a whole, for nearly always competing propagandas exist, even if they are more liminal or embedded in a given regime of power. Of course, this leaves the question if there is such a thing as reality *unaffected* by propaganda. Philosopher Jacques Ellul for example argues that small communities, separated from what he terms “technological society,” are amongst the last to withstand the effect of propaganda. But in this thesis, we will see how modern and contemporary propaganda have impacted many “autonomous” communities, and how these communities in their turn, have developed alternative propagandas in response. My research is directed at the dominant propagandas that have enormous impact on the construction of our present-day reality, and on the question what alternative propagandas are emerging which aim to challenge and change its narratives. In other words, I aim to discuss not the world as it “is”, but as it is *made* and *changed* through propagandas and propaganda art.

Propaganda art is the result of a process through which the performance of power manifests itself in the domain of form: the visual construction and composition of our reality.<sup>10</sup> The aim of propaganda is to construct reality according to the interests of specific power structures. Structures of power can be extremely oppressive in nature, think for example of what we will discuss as the “expanded state” in the War on Terror, the merger of public and private infrastructures – state and corporate power – that operate largely outside of democratic control. But power structures can also be the result of emancipatory ideals and aims, as is the case with a variety of popular movements and alternative forms of governance, from the worldwide Occupy movement to the stateless democracy established in Rojava (Northern Syria). In other words, just like power structures are different, so is their performance as propaganda and propaganda art. As a result, I argue that we should always speak of propaganda in the plural: *propagandas*. Hence propaganda art differs depending on which performance of power it is defined by and the kind of reality it aims to construct. The point is not to reject the notion of propaganda art as such, but to reject *specific forms*

<sup>10</sup> We will discuss the notion of morphology through the work of Judith Butler in more detail in the third and fourth chapters of this thesis. See also: Jonas Staal, “Ideology = Form,” e-flux journal, No. 69 (Jan. 2016).

of *propaganda art*, while investing in others, depending on the kind of reality we aim to construct. Simply put, artists instrumentalized in the War on Terror produce a form of propaganda art that is distinctly different from artists involved in popular movements that oppose the War on Terror. Their different claims and understanding of power generates different morphologies – different artistic forms.

In the following sections I will summarize the research methodology and historical narrative that led to these conclusions, but allow me first to elaborate how my own artistic practice has led to, and has further been shaped through this research. For this is not a thesis by a political scientist or an art historian. It is a thesis *on propaganda art by a propaganda artist*. As such, this thesis may be considered the result of *artistic research*, a term to which I will return below. The present document is unthinkable without my intimate experiences with researching and developing artworks within different structures of power. To understand the specific knowledge that I add to this research through my own artistic practice, as well as my biases and blind spots, it is therefore crucial to explain clearly what *kind of propaganda artist* I consider myself to be.

## PROPAGANDA RESEARCH

My increased politicization in the period after 9/11 attacks, the start of the War on Terror, and the rise of the ultranationalist movements in the Netherlands and Europe have defined the foundation on which I have articulated my own practice as a propaganda artist. My aim has been twofold: to *research the instrumentalization of art as propaganda* (propaganda research), and to develop *emancipatory models of propaganda art* (propaganda work).<sup>11</sup>

The focus of my propaganda research has been on the way in which *dominant* structures of power, such as ultranationalist movements, contemporary forms of high finance capitalism or authoritarian regimes of different forms and kinds, perform power as art with the aim of constructing reality after its own interests.

A concrete example departing in the Dutch context is the *Freethinkers' Space* (2010) project. The Freethinker's Space was the first exhibition space in parliament founded and curated by Dutch political parties. In 2008, the liberal-conservative VVD and the ultranationalist

<sup>11</sup> An earlier endeavor is my publication *Post-propaganda* (Amsterdam: Fonds BKVB, 2009), which focuses on the post-WWII development of Dutch state subsidies for arts and culture in the context of “democratic propaganda.”

Freedom Party responded to a series of controversies of supposedly “Islamic” censorship of artworks by opening their own exhibition space in their party headquarters. Their departure point was that contemporary art institutions, due to their leftist cultural-relativist bias were not capable of protecting the freedom of speech in the context of a renewed clash of civilizations.<sup>12</sup> Instead, their Freethinker’s Space – as a contemporary version of the *Salon des Refusés* – aimed to uphold the liberal-democratic values of the West in the face of increasing Islamic censorship. At the center of the exhibition was the work of Theo van Gogh, whose family and friends attended the opening. And indeed, one can argue that killing an artist – no matter how problematic the context of their work – is a fundamental and existential form of censorship. But alongside the work of Van Gogh there were several other, more peculiar works of art, such as the paintings of Ellen Vroegh. Her work gained notoriety when her painting *Danseuses Exotiques* (2007), which was exhibited in the town hall of Huizen and was an orientalist depiction of nude tropical dancers, was moved due to complaints of a citizen with a presumably Islamic background. In the growing political and media hysteria after the murder of Van Gogh, this act of supposed “censorship” was mediated nationally through the right-wing newspaper *De Telegraaf*, as if removing the work of this amateur painter had in any way the same significance as the killing of Van Gogh. The Freethinkers’ Space thus formed a strange hybrid of art-related media scandals, a staged cultural frontline aiming to reinforce the narrative of a clash of civilizations through art. When the two parties that initiated the Freethinkers’ Space entered government in 2010, the exhibition space was closed, as party representatives claimed that freedom of speech would now be secured through government. Censorship by the leftist elite was no longer to be feared.<sup>13</sup>

My propaganda research consisted of mapping the history of the *Freethinkers’ Space*, the artworks that had been selected, the backgrounds and motivations of the exhibited artists, the admission criteria for work to be exhibited, as well as the artistic background of the curators, in particular Freedom Party MP Fleur Agema and current Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the VVD. This resulted in a publication on the Freethinkers’ Space and an exhibition in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. The museum subsequently purchased the work and as

12 Wilders famously called Dutch contemporary art subsidies a “left-wing hobby,” in other words, a form of leftist state propaganda. Initially the quote was wrongly attributed to Freedom Party ideologue Martin Bosma. See: Jonathan Witteman, “Wie gebruikte de term linkse hobby’s het eerst?” *De Volkskrant*, Jan. 7, 2011, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/politiek/wie-gebruikte-de-term-linkse-hobby-s-het-eerst-a1789750/>.

13 For the history of the Freethinkers’ Space, its participating artists and curator biographies, see: Jonas Staal, *Freethinkers’ Space* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2010).

such continues to maintain the heritage of what I believe is a crucial landmark of ultranationalist propaganda art in recent Dutch history.<sup>14</sup>

The influence of right-wing or ultranationalist contemporary propaganda art in constructing reality was equally at stake in my subsequent project *Closed Architecture* (2011), which comprised research into the artistic background of Freethinkers’ Space co-curator Fleur Agema. Today Agema is second on the list of Wilders’s Freedom Party, but in the early 2000s she studied art and architecture at the AKI Academy of Fine Art in Enschede, where I was educated myself. The contrast between this anarchist bastion of art education where students had applauded the attack on the Twin Towers and congratulated one another upon hearing of Fortuyn’s death and Agema’s later career as one of the key representatives of Dutch ultranationalism could not be more extreme. In the archives of the HKU University of the Arts in Utrecht, where Agema would eventually graduate, I was able to retrieve her graduation thesis from 2004, a 344-page document with the title *Closed Architecture*, containing detailed sketches and descriptions of a new prison model. Agema and myself had lived through a similar educational trajectory, but ended up at radically different sides of the political spectrum: the political artist on one side (myself), the artist-politician on the other (Agema). My propaganda research consisted of a publication, a film, an architectural model, and a theater event in which I reconstructed, as detailed as possible, Agema’s exact prison design, with the aim to analyze the model both in relation to the prison policies of the Rutte I government which was supported by the Freedom Party, as well as an ideological model of her vision of society.<sup>15</sup>

In her thesis, Agema introduces a prison model in four consecutive phases. The first phase is called “The Bunker,” the last “The Light.” Designed through a modular computer-game logic, one could consider these different phases of Agema’s prison to be “levels.” The prisoner – depending on the severity of their sentence – is placed in one of these four levels. Subsequently, depending on good behavior, the prisoner may enter a next level, or is moved back to a previous one. The core idea is that the prisoners must *liberate themselves* through the prison model. In Agema’s vision, this game-like model is to replace the existing prison system, which – in the context of the Netherlands – guarantees that being sentenced to ten years of prison does not suddenly

14 When in 2012 the municipal Democrats 66 politician Rogier Verkroost and Green Party MP Jesse Klaver called for the Freethinkers’ Space to reopen, the project was continued in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, de Appel in Amsterdam, and KuS in Heerlen, where Verkroost, Klaver, Amsterdam Labor Party alderman Carolien Gehrels, and municipal Socialist Party politician Ron Meyer each created their own Freethinkers’ Space. The project, curated by Christiane Berndes and Nick Aikens, was titled *Freethinkers’ Space Continued* (2012).

15 See: Jonas Staal and Fleur Agema, *Closed Architecture* (Eindhoven: Onomatopoe, 2011).

turn into twenty years. In Agema's model, liberation fully depends on the level at which a prisoner is willing to re-engineer their behavior by meeting certain learning objectives. A rejection of the education that would allow passing on to a next level could mean being stuck in the lower levels forever.<sup>16</sup>

Holding the middle between Dante's *Inferno* and Deleuze's definition of the "control society," the first levels of the prison are dark with little room to move, placing the prisoner in full isolation.<sup>17</sup> The second phase of the prison adds an extra window to the cell, its walls turn into a lighter shade of grey, and certain commodities, such as a private shower, become available. By the time the prisoner enters the fourth phase, the prison has completely changed. It is modeled after a suburban middle-class neighborhood, the guards have disappeared, and prisoners live in what look like private apartments. Twenty-four-hour camera protection is installed, and large recreational facilities are introduced. Mimicking a *Truman Show*-type logic, the prisoners might not even be aware that they are *still in prison*. Psychologically, the cameras no longer serve to monitor the prisoner. Instead, they now provide a service *to the prisoner*, protecting them from possible forms of violence or intrusion – very similar to the role that video surveillance has for those predominantly white middle- and upper class-citizens who consider themselves as part of the social "norm." One could ask how different Agema's fourth phase is from the gated communities emerging throughout the Netherlands and all over the world. Agema's model is possibly best understood not as a prison design, but a design of *society as prison*.<sup>18</sup> The ultimate iteration of Deleuze's control society, in which self-monitorization results into a self-regulated citizenry.

Agema's artistic imaginary has become a political imaginary. No longer focused on singular artworks, her emphasis has shifted to designing the infrastructures of power that define society itself. Society as prison is something of a "Total Work of Art" of ultranationalist propa-

16 A repercussion of Agema's model may be found in a proposal of former State Secretary of Security and Justice Fred Teeven (VVD), in which he opted to subject "misbehaving" prisoners to the most austere regime allowed by law. As a Dutch newspaper reported: "A detention plan will be drafted for all detainees, featuring all kinds of behavioral characteristics. Those who end up in jail for the fourth or fifth time will automatically be treated under the most austere regime. The State Secretary 'does not consider it justifiable to continue investing' in repeat offenders. During the drafting of the plan, those convicted for heavy criminal or sexual offenses will be granted less privileges." Kim van Keken and Remco Meijer, "Soberste regime voor gevangene die zich misdraagt," *Volkskrant Magazine*, Jun. 4, 2011, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/magazine/soberste-regime-voor-gevangene-die-zich-misdraagt-a2441131/>.

17 As Deleuze notes: "In the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything – the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation. See: Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October*, Volume 59 (Winter 1992): pp. 3-7, at p. 5.

18 *Society as Prison was simultaneously the title of the theater play developed around a life-sized reconstruction of Agema's prison model in Theater Frascati in Amsterdam, Dec. 21–22, 2011.*

ganda, in which the construction of a completely alternate reality – and the regulation of the behaviors of its citizen-prisoners within it – is the ultimate outcome.<sup>19</sup> Power shapes artistic and architectural forms, in some cases the form of the artwork, in other cases the form of society as such. Thus, the artwork becomes equivalent to the construction of a reality.

The dual operation of propaganda art in both the *form of the artwork* and *infrastructure as form*, was at stake in the *Ideological Guide to the Venice Biennial* (2013), a free smartphone app that I developed with different scholars, designers, and programmers, with the aim of providing insight into the political, economic, and ideological backgrounds to each national pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennial. Founded in 1895, the Venice Biennial was modeled after the World Fair, large-scale events in which predominantly colonial powers displayed their technological and cultural innovations to one another through national pavilions. What is unique in the case of Venice is that contrary to the World Fairs, which take place every so many years in different countries, the Venice Biennial is a World Fair that *never left*. During more than a century, nation-states have bought their own permanent pavilions in Venice, the first being the colonial powers of Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom in 1907.<sup>20</sup> The Giardini, the central location of the Biennial and famous for its display of grand luxury and cultural omnipotence, are the prime real estate location for these national pavilions. A majority of former colonial powers reside here and the spatial organization of these pavilions thus often reflects not of the world order as it currently is, but as they desire it to be. That the national pavilions of Israel and the United States are placed right next to one another may be one of the most concrete examples of the Giardini operating as a phantasmatic representation of this idealized global political order. As such, the national pavilions at the Venice Biennial can be considered as a sort of an *alternative world map*, an allegory of the successful worldwide emergence of the nation-state during the 19th to the 20th centuries, culminating in the ever-expanding infrastructures of the Venice biennial.

19 The Total Work of Art, or "Gesamtkunstwerk," was developed as an artistic concept by composer Richard Wagner in his two 1849 essays *Art and Revolution* and "The Art-Work of the Future," inspired by the Revolutions of 1848: "Only on the shoulders of this great social movement can true Art lift itself from its present state of civilized barbarism, and take its post of honour. Each has a common goal, and the twain can only reach it when they recognize it jointly. This goal is the strong fair Man, to whom Revolution shall give his Strength, and Art his Beauty!" Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works* (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 56.

20 For a more detailed analysis of the history of the World Fair and the Venice Biennial in relationship to the *Ideological Guide*, see: Jonas Staal, "Art. Democratism. Propaganda," *e-flux journal*, No. 52 (Feb. 2014).

The *Ideological Guide* took this notion of the Venice Biennial as an alternative world map as its point of departure, offering users the option to plan routes between pavilions based on geopolitical alliances, such as the G8 or NATO, or military coalitions, such as the Coalition of the Willing that led the 2003 invasion of Iraq. What becomes clear from this spatial and infrastructural analysis is that many of the most powerful alliances can be located back to Giardini, whereas a route based on the Non-Aligned Movement largely includes pavilions outside of this center of global power. In other words, power relations – and *desired* power relations, predominantly serving the policies of the West – are written into the very infrastructure of the Venice Biennial. In that context, the pavilions themselves could be considered as *cultural embassies*, showcasing artworks that benefit the narration of their respective state interests. In the *Ideological Guide* users could further find detailed and critical information about each pavilion: the background of the artists, the curator they worked with, the market value of their work, the galleries that represented them, the ideological and political makeup of the country in question and its implication in political and economic alliances, current conflicts, and more.

The aim of the *Ideological Guide* was essentially to make its users recognize themselves as actors in a larger performance of power. Our bodily presence within the alternative world map of the Biennial affirms the geopolitical power relations that it portrays. Starting one's visit to Venice in the Giardini is a performative affirmation of the central importance of present-day or former European centers of power – China for example, is missing in Giardini – and only a minority of visitor-actors engage in the painstaking work of locating underfunded and marginalized stateless pavilions that are part of the “collateral” program, such as Iraq or Palestine, in the back alleys of Venice. Our movements narrate the desired power relations underlying the alternative world map of the Venice Biennial, our physical enactment re-affirms the world not as it could be, but as dominant structures of power desire it to be. The *Ideological Guide* allows both the infrastructure of the national pavilions and artworks displayed within them to be understood as forms of contemporary Propaganda Art.

These three examples outline what I believe is at stake in propaganda research, namely the *use of art* to map the process in which dominant structures of power are *performed as art*. The core objective is to understand how and through what means and narratives, propaganda art constructs our present-day reality: either through the curation of a propaganda art institution (Freethinkers' Space), the creation of art in the form of infrastructure (Closed Architecture), or a combination of both (Ideological Guide). Propaganda research is evidently not li-

mitted to the representation of nationalist and ultranationalist power structures. Other works, such as *Monument to Capital* (2013) and *Nosso Lar, Brasília* (2014) deal with the performance of power as art in the context of high-finance capitalism and urban development respectively.<sup>21</sup> A crucial dimension of the propaganda research is the fact that each of these projects investigate propaganda art but are also *forms of propaganda art in and of themselves*. Propaganda research by a propaganda artist appropriates one form of propaganda art and turns it into another. In my own practice, I do this with the aim to propagandize an awareness of the role of propaganda art in dominant structures of power that define the construction of our reality.

### PROPAGANDA WORK

In the case of my propaganda work, the focus has been different, namely on the performance of *emerging structures of power* as art, with the aim of constructing reality after the collective interest. One can think here of the role of art within emancipatory political organizations, popular mass movements, or stateless insurgencies. If, as I have just argued, there is a structural relation between power and form, then the creation of art cannot be considered outside of the powers that define its conditions of production, circulation, and presentation. In other words, the counterpoint to an ultranationalist form of propaganda art is not to abandon the notion of propaganda art as such; art must always be understood in relation to specific constructs of power. But there are different forms of power and artists must decide within or in support of what power structures they wish to operate.

In the case of “emerging” forms of power we are dealing with power structures that are not yet fully established, and which are in the process of producing a counter-narrative to dominant power structures. As a result, my propaganda work has taken the shape of direct collaborations with stateless nations, social movements, and pan-European platforms. In each of these specific emerging power structures I have experienced and witnessed how my work was both informed and shaped by these powers, while at the same time contributing to them. A crucial observation regarding propaganda work in the context of emerging forms of power is that art should not be understood merely as an *instrument* of power. Rather, propaganda art in this context acti-

21 The project *Nosso Lar, Brasília* was a multi-year research project on the relationship between spiritism and modernism in Brazilian architecture, and the role of city models influenced by these particular ideologies. It was an early study in artistic research developed during the writing of this thesis, consisting of the positioning of an artwork (the merger of two city models) parallel to an academic study (theorizing what other knowledge the artwork could produce). See: Jonas Staal, *Nosso Lar, Brasília (Rio de Janeiro: Capacete and Heijningen: Jap Sam Books, 2014)*.

vely shapes the process in which emerging power manifests itself into form, and impacts the way in which we understand power through form: not merely as a tool to represent the world as it is, but as a way to present the world as it could be. In other words, art in the context of emancipatory politics is a *transformative* form of propaganda, as it propagates not that what is, but that what is possible if we can *imagine* it to be possible.

A concrete example of this propaganda work is my artistic and political organization *New World Summit* (2012–ongoing), which aims to develop alternative parliaments for stateless and blacklisted political organizations. Involving the domains of art, architecture, and design, the majority of these “alternative parliaments” took the form of temporary architectural installations in theaters, art institutions, and public spaces. They were not conceived to represent existing states but stateless and blacklisted organizations, groups that have been excluded from our current practice of democracy.<sup>22</sup> Created in the age of the War on Terror, the *New World Summit* develops spaces for political assemblies between civil society in whose name the War on Terror has been waged and stateless and blacklisted organizations against whom the War on Terror is waged. In other words, it introduces a space for “performative assembly” as philosopher Judith Butler termed it – what I call “Assemblism” – in which the common interests of both constituencies that might have more in common with one another than with the states that respectively claim to act in their name or fight directly against them can be explored.<sup>23</sup>

The *New World Summit* created a total of five temporary parliaments in Berlin (2012), Leiden (2012), Kochi (2013), Brussels (2014), and Utrecht (2016), one permanent parliament in Rojava (2015–17), two temporary embassies in Utrecht (2014) and Oslo (2016), and for a period of four years, its own school (2013–16). In the process, this “artist organization” – a concept that we will discuss in detail in the fourth chapter – involved more than fifty stateless and blacklisted organizations from all over the world including the Basque Country, Samiland, Somaliland, Ogadenia, Oromia, Azawad, Reboth, Kurdistan, Baluchistan, Southern-Azerbaijan, East-Turkestan, Tamil Eelam, West-Papua, the Philippines and the Aboriginal Nations. Apart from proposing a space of assembly for politicized civil society and stateless and blacklisted people, the *New World Summit* has been also a space of diplomatic exchange through our collaboration with the Unrepre-

22 For more detailed explorations of the concept of blacklisting and its relation to statelessness, see the *New World Summit* reader: Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei (ed.), *New World Summit (Leiden: Utopisch Nest, 2012)*.

23 Jonas Staal, “Assemblism,” *e-flux journal*, No. 80 (Mar. 2017).

sented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), and provided judicial support through our involvement of groups such as the Progress Lawyers Network and the Berghof Foundation. In other words, it aims to operate between the *real* and the *possible*, between concrete support to the struggles of stateless and blacklisted people, and the imaginary of a possible new assembly – across stateless and “stated” people – to emerge.<sup>24</sup>

Instead of investing in strengthening dominant structures of power, the *New World Summit* – through the space of art – has aimed at narrating a *history of the world, according to the stateless*.<sup>25</sup> Not the world as we know it, but the manifold worlds that are struggled for and emerging as we speak. The *New World Summit* may be considered to be the inverse of the Ideological Guide to the Venice Biennial. Whereas the Ideological Guide aimed to show how dominant structures of power narrate themselves through art, the *New World Summit* aims at narrating often invisibilized, emerging forms of power through art. In the case of the Ideological Guide, art is understood as an instrument of dominant power, in the case of the *New World Summit* as the collaboration and assembly of emerging forms of power.

The exchange between the *New World Summit* and the organizations participating in its summits was not limited to mere facilitation. The conceptualization of the alternative parliaments was part of this exchange as well. In the case of the *New World Summit – Brussels*, for example, large-scale maps were developed with each participating organization to depict their claimed territory or the political model they aimed to establish. This resulted in a lengthy communication with the Baluchistan People’s Party (BPP), as their exact claims to ancestral land were disputed within the organization. This led to several border lines being changed back and forth many times over. Another example was the map of the Kurdish Women’s Movement that is active in North- and West-Kurdistan, and who reject the form of the nation-state, instead proposing a form of “democratic confederalism” or “stateless democracy.” This led not to a territorial but an “ideological map.”

In the case of the *New World Embassy: Azawad* and *New World Embassy: Rojava*, such collaborations went even further. Aimed at developing a form of “stateless diplomacy,” the design of these embassies were conceptualized and approved in lengthy discussions with the res-

24 With the term “stated” I refer to those administered in the context of the state, versus the stateless who are not. I will further discuss this term in the third and fourth chapter. I further discussed the particularities of what to be considered as stated and stateless in relation to the Islamic State, see: Jonas Staal, “Empire’s Double: The Many Pavilions of the Islamic State,” *e-flux journal/Supercommunity* (Jul. 2015).

25 This was the point of departure of the *New World Summit – Brussels* (2014) that took place in the Royal Flemish Theater (KVS) in Brussels, Sep. 19–21, 2014 under the title “Stateless State.”

pective representatives of the stateless nations in question. While this may be interpreted as an instrumental role of art in relation to politics, I would – from my personal experience – describe these collaborations as forms of *mutual instrumentalization*. The New World Summit is instrumental for the creation of forms of mediation that support the narratives of stateless and blacklisted organizations. But conversely these organizations are instrumental for the New World Summit to rethink the role of art, architecture, and design through alternative (art)historical narratives that can challenge the dominant, statist conception of art. Through these collaborations, my team and I became aware of the long history of art and culture in stateless political struggles. Due to the absence of an independent state structure their histories and languages were memorized and transferred from one generation to the other through art – visual symbols, music, literature, theater. Instead of being an instrument of the state, in these cases art can be considered as an *alternative to the state*; a cultural body that defines a “people” or “nation,” and as such strengthens and legitimizes their claim to self-determination in the form of a state or autonomous region.<sup>26</sup>

This profound role and agency of art within stateless political struggles was most apparent in the New World Summit’s collaboration between the Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava. Rojava, an autonomous region in northern Syria that we will discuss at length in the final chapter, was declared a stateless democracy by an alliance of Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, and other people from the region.<sup>27</sup> On invitation of Saleh Muslim, co-president of the Rojavan Democratic Union Party (PYD), I traveled in December 2014 with my New World Summit team to the region with the aim to document the process of building stateless democracy and to interview artists involved in the process. However, a proposal of our host, Minister of Foreign Affairs Amina Osse, turned this into yet another project, when we started conceptualizing a new parliament for the stateless democracy of Rojava, not a temporary, but a permanent one.

More than in any other collaboration this work of New World Summit was shaped through the ideas and practices of its collaborator. Commissioned by Osse, the design of what would become the *New World Summit – Rojava*, locally referred to as the “People’s Parliament of Rojava,” was discussed with all local communes for approval, and the building and design process would include exchange with local artists, engineers, and builders. Our aim was to represent, through the

26 I have discussed this on several occasions as the “art of the stateless state,” see: Jonas Staal, “Ultranationalism and the Art of the Stateless State,” *e-flux journal*, No. 57 (Sep. 2014).

27 My first political and cultural inquiry into stateless democracy was Jonas Staal, “Stateless Democracy,” *e-flux journal*, No. 63 (Mar. 2015).

parliament, the model, and ideals of stateless democracy by following the decision-making processes of stateless democracy. Osse and my team approached the notion of Rojavan ideology as a material form – we approached ideology as a morphology. Of all the works of the *New World Summit*, this one is the most crucial for understanding the exact interchange between emerging power and artistic imaginary in exploring the possibility of a transformative propaganda art.

Osse’s idea that it was to become a public parliament – the parliament as a public space – cannot be separated from Rojava’s claim to recuperate democracy’s origins as found in the form of the *agora* of ancient Greece. The parliament’s circular shape derives from the form of the local communal assemblies, which often take the shape of informal circles. It dislocates power from a clear center in favor of an egalitarian social composition in which the distance between participants has been equalized. The large canvasses that cover the parliament’s roof are hand-painted fragments of flags representing organizations that play a key role in the Democratic Self-Administration, together giving shape to a new “confederate” whole. Revolutionary practice and revolutionary imaginary created the ideological design of the parliament through art. Its morphology is ideology materialized, emerging power becoming form. The People’s Parliament of Rojava is a spatial manifesto, it is a sculpture of an emerging power in the making, and it is a space to transform these imaginaries into concrete daily practice. It brings into being what historian Henk te Velde has called “the theater of politics,” connecting the history of political performance with art, and the theater with the parliament.<sup>28</sup>

The work of the New World Summit also shows a series of structural imbalances and inequalities. Not only am I inheritor of the Dutch colonial empire – whose heritage drives many stateless insurgencies up until today – but also much of the funding and cultural infrastructure that is available to me as a Swiss–Dutch artist is unavailable to my collaborators. Aiming to overcome the imbalances between the stated and the stateless does not change the fact that such historical and contemporary inequalities are present in the process. Nonetheless, I would strongly oppose the idea that the blacklisted and the stateless should be reduced to a position of powerlessness and victimhood. Yes, statelessness includes brutal oppression and downright murder of people

28 Henk te Velde, *Het Theater van de Politiek* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2003). Another relevant study in this regard was developed by architect Francis Cape, who analyzed the role of the bench in different communalist groups in the United States. The “utopian bench” in his analysis becomes the visual and ideological foundation for communalist politics: the surface on which we organize and articulate what a community is, should or could be. Francis Cape, *We Sit Together: Utopian Benches from the Shakers to the Separatists of Zoar* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013)



and erasure of their histories, but as Rojava has shown me, statelessness through stateless democracy can in many ways also be claimed as a power in its own right.

These examples outline what I believe is at stake in propaganda work, namely to actively participate in the performance of emerging power as art. The core objective is to understand how and by what means, narratives, and forms propaganda art can contribute to the construction of reality through the demands of emerging powers. The examples of my own propaganda work highlight the relationship between particular forms of emerging power and the way they make new artistic and political forms possible: the stateless parliament, the stateless embassy, the stateless school.

The New World Summit is, however, not the only example of my propaganda work in relation to emerging power. Another one is my collaboration with former Labor alderman of art and culture Carolien Gehrels and artist Hans van Houwelingen in the form of our *Allegories* project (2011–ongoing), in which we aimed to create new coalitions between artists and progressive politicians. Another case is my work in the *New Unions* campaign (2016–ongoing) within the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25), which aims at establishing a new Pan-European democracy.<sup>29</sup> Each of these projects attempts to connect the imagination of emancipatory politics with an emancipatory art, to translate emerging structures of power into new emerging forms of propaganda art.

#### METHODOLOGY OF ARTISTIC RESEARCH

Above I have laid out the basic conditions of the methodology of artistic practice applied to this thesis. I believe this methodology is best explained through the following equation :

$$\textit{propaganda} = \textit{power} + \textit{performance}$$

This means that I define propaganda as a performance of power with the aim to construct reality for its interests. Propaganda equals the performance of power, but the aim of constructing reality does not equal propaganda to reality as such: reality includes a plurality of competing propagandas, although one propaganda might have *more* impact on reality than another. My aim is to trace and apply the role of propaganda art in this process, both as an instrument of dominant power and

<sup>29</sup> I describe the New Unions campaign and the political concept of “transdemocratic unionizing” that resulted from it in: Jonas Staal, “Transdemocracy,” *e-flux journal*, No. 76 (Oct. 2016).

as a transformative practice that translates emerging power into new artistic forms. My methodology may in that sense be understood as a comparative study and practice, that begins from the claim that different powers perform themselves as different propagandas and different forms of propaganda art.

Part of this thesis starts from propaganda research, and another part from propaganda work. The research component of this thesis can be best explained through my proposition to define propaganda as a “performance of power.” To arrive at this proposition, I departed from a multidisciplinary body of existing propaganda studies that has been developed in the domains of politics, the military, sociology, psychology, and mass media, among others. This is even more so the case in relation to the term “art,” in which case I rely on art historical sources, many of which are from the field that I have termed “Popular Art History,” on which I will elaborate in the final chapter.

But the aim of this thesis, to expand a 20th-century definition of propaganda and propaganda art into the 21st century, cannot rely on existing research alone, partly since the very term “propaganda” – as I will explain in the first chapter of this thesis – has fallen largely out of use in favor of terms such as “advertisement” and “public relations.” My approach to this terminological problem has been twofold. First, I introduce literature and research of authors who, although outside the field of propaganda studies, address issues pertinent to the study of propaganda in the 21st century. Second, I have relied on my own projects and experience as a propaganda researcher and propaganda artist to gain an understanding of the process through which contemporary power is performed as contemporary art. This means that my own experience as a propaganda artist has resulted into an attempt to define several categories of contemporary propaganda art, employing sources – artists, theorists, philosophers – that have so far been excluded from the domain of propaganda studies proper. In some cases, I discuss artists and movements of whose existence I was unaware until the moment I conducted my own fieldwork as a propaganda artist in contexts such as the Philippines, Azawad, and Rojava.

The scope of this thesis is broad. It aims to redefine modern propaganda and modern propaganda art, and to expand these definitions into the field of contemporary propaganda and contemporary propaganda art. This broad scope may lead to question the core of the “knowledge” that underlies my artistic practice. There have been far more detailed works written on the role of propaganda in the First and Second World War, on Adorno’s concept of the cultural industry, or the employment of modern art as a weapon of the Cold War – all topics that I will discuss in this thesis. But my modest contribution, I

hope, has not been to rewrite histories already written, but to propose *categories of propaganda art* that can be applied to understand propaganda and propaganda art in the context of our 21st century. These are categories that may contribute to future histories of contemporary propaganda art. In this respect, my paradoxical and hybrid role as an “artist–historian” hopefully has contributed to the expansion of existing propaganda studies by means of an equal emphasis on research and practice.<sup>30</sup>

This touches on the field that has become known as “artistic research,” and the possibility for artists to participate in practice-based PhD programs. I have been a researcher in one such program and this thesis is its result. If the faculty of humanities were not already scorned by the exact sciences, then the introduction of artistic practice into the university has made sure of it. From an academic perspective, there is an ongoing discussion about what “knowledge” art adds to existing fields of research, such as art history. From an artistic perspective, there is an ongoing question as to why art should enter a space of discursivity at all, with the argument that art deals with experiences and sensibilities are contrary to those of science. I would like to share three aspects of my understanding of artistic research in this context that also apply to this thesis, namely *writing as artistic tool*, *history as material*, and *world-making*.

Writing as an artistic tool has a history of its own in the form of artist manifestoes, statements, and polemics, in which artists intervened into the narratives created around their work by critics, historians, and politicians. In the case of the movement known as Institutional Critique, of which I will discuss some proponents in this thesis, a form of “parallel academia” came into being, in which artists narrated the unacknowledged histories and interests – political, economic, ideological – that define the canon of modern and contemporary art. In that sense, artistic research, and the particular knowledges it produces in the visual, discursive, and performative fields were a reality far before they became partially instituted in the university in the form of artistic research. In that light, there is no necessary conflict between the discursive and the visual. Rather, there might be a difference in the *objective* of the discursive output of an artist.

This touches upon the notion of history as a material. Progressive historians will always emphasize that writing about history also means making history. What is described as history and what is not actively

30 Note that throughout this thesis, I will reference the political or advisory work of several propaganda researchers, to emphasize that there is little neutrality in describing propaganda. Theorizing propaganda also inevitably means to propose and engage with models for its practice.

shapes our understanding of it, and is what makes history paradoxically into a contemporary practice. History is, at the very least, as true to the past as it is to the interests of the present. In the case of artistic research, this notion of history as material is even more prominent. The artist narrates the history in which he or she is participating at the very same time. In that sense, artistic research is the domain of propaganda studies par excellence, as it highlights the influence of a particular artistic interest in relation to the way a historical narrative is constructed to serve a contemporary objective.

Finally, writing as artistic tool and history as material, together translate into an objective of artistic research that is particular to my own practice, namely world-making. It was Upton Sinclair, who will frequently appear in this thesis, who called upon artists not to make art in the world as it is, but to “make a world.”<sup>31</sup> Like progressive historians, artistic research in this case rejects the very notion of history as a frozen *tableau*. In the way that we narrate history, and through the potentials that we unleash by narrating history as a contemporary practice, we make new engagements with our present and futures possible. Writing as an artistic tool means to interrogate, challenge, and activate history as a material not merely to describe the world as it is, but the world as it could be: the world as it *could be* imagined, changed, and made.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

This thesis consists of four chapters on propaganda and propaganda art that cover the period of the First World War to the present day.

In the first chapter, *Modern Propaganda*, I will trace the notion of modern propaganda through the work of Philip Taylor, Garth Jowett, and Victoria O'Donnell from the beginning of the First World War, when the first modern propaganda bureau – Wellington House – was established in the United Kingdom. I will emphasize the importance of the British colonial empire in building the technological and industrial infrastructure that made propaganda both possible and necessary, as well as the fact that the birthplace of modern propaganda was not a so-called “totalitarian” state, but a modern democracy. The efforts of Wellington House to employ propaganda to get the neutral Americans to join the war against the “Huns” – a derogative term used for the

31 We will discuss Sinclair's work in more detail in the second and fourth chapter of this thesis. The notion of “world-making” as a verb resulted from a conversation with Maria Hlavajova, see: Maria Hlavajova in conversation with Jonas Staal, “World-making as commitment,” in *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989*, ed. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, 2016), pp. 667–77.

Germans – will be helpful to understand democratic propaganda as a largely covert operation that attempts to maintain the idea of an open and free society while altering information at its foundation. Through the work of Michael Sproule, I will try to reconstruct how after the First World War such covert operations of democratic propaganda sparked a debate in the United States on the question whether democracy and propaganda are reconcilable. This will allow me to introduce key proponents of propaganda studies such as Walter Lippman, Edward Bernays, and Harold Lasswell. After the Second World War, the use of both covert and overt propaganda by Nazi Germany indefinitely discredited the term propaganda. Nonetheless, several thinkers and researchers, such as Theodor Adorno, Jacques Ellul, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, would continue to explore the term, not only in relation to dictatorships, but also to modern democracies. I conclude that modern propaganda is not exclusive to totalitarian regimes, but is inherent to all modern societies, no matter the structure or ideology of the state. This of course does not mean that all forms of propaganda are the same. In the same way that power structures differ from each other, so do different forms of propaganda. I will therefore, following Ellul, speak of “propagandas” in the plural. The propaganda model theorized by Chomsky and Herman will prove crucial throughout the later chapters, as they introduce a series of “filters” to understand the process through which dominant monopolies of power aim to manufacture consent among a given population. By combining their model with theoretical insights of other scholars such as Ellul, I will propose a definition of propaganda as a “performance of power” that aims to construct reality after its own political, economic, and ideological interests. In the case of *modern* propaganda, this relates specifically to the deployment of massive technological and industrial capacities which, from the First World War onward, could construct reality on a worldwide scale. This brings me to conclude that *modern propaganda is the performance of power in modern society*.

In the second chapter, *Modern Propaganda Art*, I will apply this definition of modern propaganda to the domain of art. Through the work of Jacques Louis David, Immanuel Kant, and Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, I show how the notion of modern art is the product of a series of political upheavals from the French Revolution onward, which have defined our current understanding of art’s “freedom” and “autonomy.” The paradox is that what we consider autonomous art today is itself the result of the revolutionary politics of the past. I will try to clarify this claim by proposing three different models of propaganda art in relation to three specific power structures. In the context of the Russian Revolution I will propose the term *Avant-Garde Propaganda*

*Art*, in the context of 20th-century dictatorships I will propose *Totalitarian Propaganda Art*, and in the context of the United States during the Cold War I will propose *Modernist Propaganda Art*. For each of these models, I will try to show how different power structures have been performed as art. For example, in the case of Avant-Garde Propaganda Art I will argue through the work of Vladimir Lenin and Anatoly Lunacharsky that the Soviet Union’s early claim to define its own revolutionary modernity approached modern propaganda as a form of mass education in the process of establishing an egalitarian society. This has an enormous impact on artists, and constructivists and productivists began to include forms of technology and mass communication into their artistic practices. In the case of Totalitarian Propaganda Art, I will show through the works of Andrei Zhdanov, Boris Groys, and Igor Golomstock how many of such revolutionary ideals were subsequently co-opted by brutal authoritarian regimes, in which art was reduced to its former role as instrument of ruling powers, such as in the case of Stalin’s

socialist realism. At the same time, I will propose the term Totalitarian Propaganda Art as a propagandistic instrument itself, which aims to define propaganda art as the sole property of totalitarian ideologies, while effacing the historical role of modern democracy as the origin of modern propaganda. In the case of Modernist Propaganda Art, I will trace the role of American modernist art, such as abstract expressionism as theorized by Clement Greenberg, as an instrument of the Cold War. Propagated by means of a clandestine CIA operation in Europe, as analyzed in detail by Frances Stonor Saunders, its aim was to emphasize the contrast between the “free,” non-figurative art of the West and the doctrinal aesthetics of socialist realism created behind the Iron Curtain. The framing of a non-propagandistic modernist art proved to be the ultimate form of democratic propaganda; modernist art is still celebrated as a symbol of the free West today. Theorizing these three specific power structures in relation to their performance as art allows to differentiate different propagandas and different models of propaganda art, which brings me to conclude that *modern propaganda art is the performance of power as art in modern society*.

In the third chapter, *Contemporary Propaganda*, I will explore to what extent the central characteristics of modern propaganda are applicable to the 21st century. I will expand Chomsky and Herman’s propaganda model and its limited focus on dominant structures of power to consider other emerging formations of power that provide alternative forms of propaganda. For example, the War on Terror has been one of the most influential factors that define the conflictual arena of the contemporary, which can be analyzed through Chomsky and Herman’s

propaganda model. But I will also focus on the role of popular mass movements and stateless peoples that oppose this War on Terror, or are (in)directly targeted by this war, which Chomsky and Herman have not taken into consideration in their propaganda model. The “reversed propaganda model” that I propose is not focused on filters, but on collective demands articulated by popular mass movements and stateless peoples. Rather than operating as a form of elite control, I will argue that the inverted propaganda model opens the possibility of egalitarian or collective propagandization for the collective interest. In the case of *War on Terror Propaganda*, I will try to show through the work of Joseph Masco how the accelerated and interconnected domains of politics, economy, science, and the military–industrial complex have become implicated in an “expanded state,” a state that operates largely outside of democratic control and engages in a war against forms of threat production – forms of terror – that are in part a product of its own making. In the case of *Popular Propaganda*, I will trace through the work of Judith Butler the process in which popular mass movements develop alternative and collective formations of power having the popular assembly as their point of departure. In the case of *Stateless Propaganda*, I will trace – as far as my own blind spots allow – alternative forms of assembly through the work of Mohamedou Ould Slahi, which departs from the recognition of statelessness as a political condition. In the process of discussing the proximities and oppositions between these three forms of contemporary propaganda, I will not only emphasize their different performativities and claims to different understandings of power, but also their *creative* capacities, their aim to perform power and imaginative competences to create vastly different realities as a result. This brings me to conclude that *contemporary propaganda is the performance of power in contemporary society*.

In the fourth and final chapter, *Contemporary Propaganda Art*, I will apply this definition of contemporary propaganda to the domain of art. I will emphasize in the process how the changing character of propaganda from the modern to the contemporary also changed the definition of art as such, increasingly expanding its reach into the domain of contemporary mass media and technology. I will clarify these different formations of propaganda art through the three main agents of the contemporary defined in the third chapter: the War on Terror, popular mass movements and stateless peoples. With each of these actors, I will try to show how different power structures in the contemporary – whether in the form of established or emerging forms of power – are performed as art. In the case of War on Terror Propaganda Art, I will show through the work of Steve Bannon, Trevor Paglen, Stephen Eisenman, and Coco Fusco, among others, how a variety of media, reaching from

spectacular forms of theater, cinema, visual art, video games, and even alternative forms of abstraction, has been employed to manufacture ever increasing forms of terror that legitimize the War on Terror and protect the interests of its stakeholders. In the case of Popular Propaganda Art, I will introduce through the work of Upton Sinclair, Alice Guillermo, and Claire Bishop artists who have contributed to its performative practices of assembly, and who have tried to contribute to their demands of an alternative egalitarian society that opposes the divisions promulgated by the War on Terror. Examples range from artists and art groups active within popular mass movements, such as Not An Alternative, Matthijs de Bruijne, and Decolonizing Art Architecture Residency, to artists who have created their own alternative models of political organizations, such as Ahmet Ögüt and Tania Bruguera. In the case of Stateless Propaganda Art, I will discuss how different formations of statelessness – from the demand to be recognized by the state to the desire to create a state of one’s own or even reject the notion of the state altogether – have resulted in artistic practices that aim to recognize statelessness as a power in and of itself. From refugee collective We Are Here and the work of Mazou Ibrahim Touré’s Artist Association of Azawad to the work of Abdullah Abdul and the Rojava Film Commune, we will see how these artists and art groups contribute to the construction of reality departing from various conditions of statelessness. This process of tracing specific power structures in their performance as art allows us to distinguish different propagandas and different models of propaganda art, which brings me to conclude that *contemporary propaganda art is the performance of power as art in contemporary society*.

“WE”

On a final note, the reader will notice that starting from chapter one, this thesis is written from the perspective of a “we.” That is not a royal “we,” and it doesn’t lay claim to a constant agreement between writer and reader. Rather, this “we” is a we-in-the-making.<sup>32</sup>

This thesis proposes a discursive space of assembly around the notion of propaganda art, which might make a modest contribution to redefining the meaning of both propaganda and art in the 21st century, and, more importantly, put such a new definition of contemporary

32 The fear of positioning a “we,” a claim to a collectivity or the need for one, and the neoliberal propaganda that fuels this fear, is well summarized by Jodi Dean: “Collectivity is undesirable because it is suspected of excluding possibilities, effacing difference, and enforcing difference, and enforcing discipline. “What do you mean ‘we?’” is one slogan of this suspicion, typically lobbed into contexts and discussions deemed insufficiently attentive to the specificities to each person’s experience.” Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (London/New York: Verso, 2016), pp. 67–68.

propaganda art to use. With this thesis, I thus hope to strengthen a collectivity that recognizes the importance of propaganda art for the construction of our shared reality, and the question of what kind of reality we desire to create.

Naturally, this thesis, written by a propaganda artist on propaganda art, is itself a work of propaganda art. It is a work of propaganda art that, in the tradition of conceptual art and institutional critique, appropriates the form of academic writing, including its entire scholarly apparatus, as artistic material. Te Velde has described this as a particular ambiguity regarding the role of art in propaganda art. Propaganda art, in his view, does exactly what the artist states that he or she will do – in my case, writing a thesis on propaganda art, or develop a parliament commissioned by a stateless nation – while at the same time doing *more*.<sup>33</sup> This “more” is defined not just by what we perceive visually as the art work, but by what such an artwork aims to bring into existence: the construction of a different reality. Just like the many propaganda artists that the reader will encounter in the following chapters, this propaganda artist aims to construct reality anew, or at least start a discussion on how we might assemble in order to do so.

Not to speak as a we-in-the-making would be a betrayal of this objective, and of my claim at the very beginning of this introduction: my name is Jonas Staal, and that I am a propaganda artist.

<sup>33</sup> Noted from a personal conversation with Henk te Velde and Sven Lütticken, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, Jun. 2, 2017.



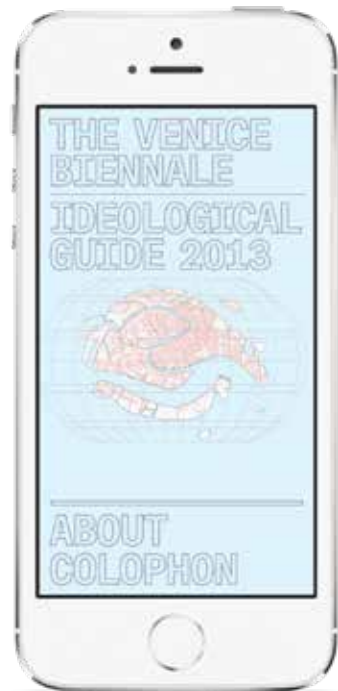


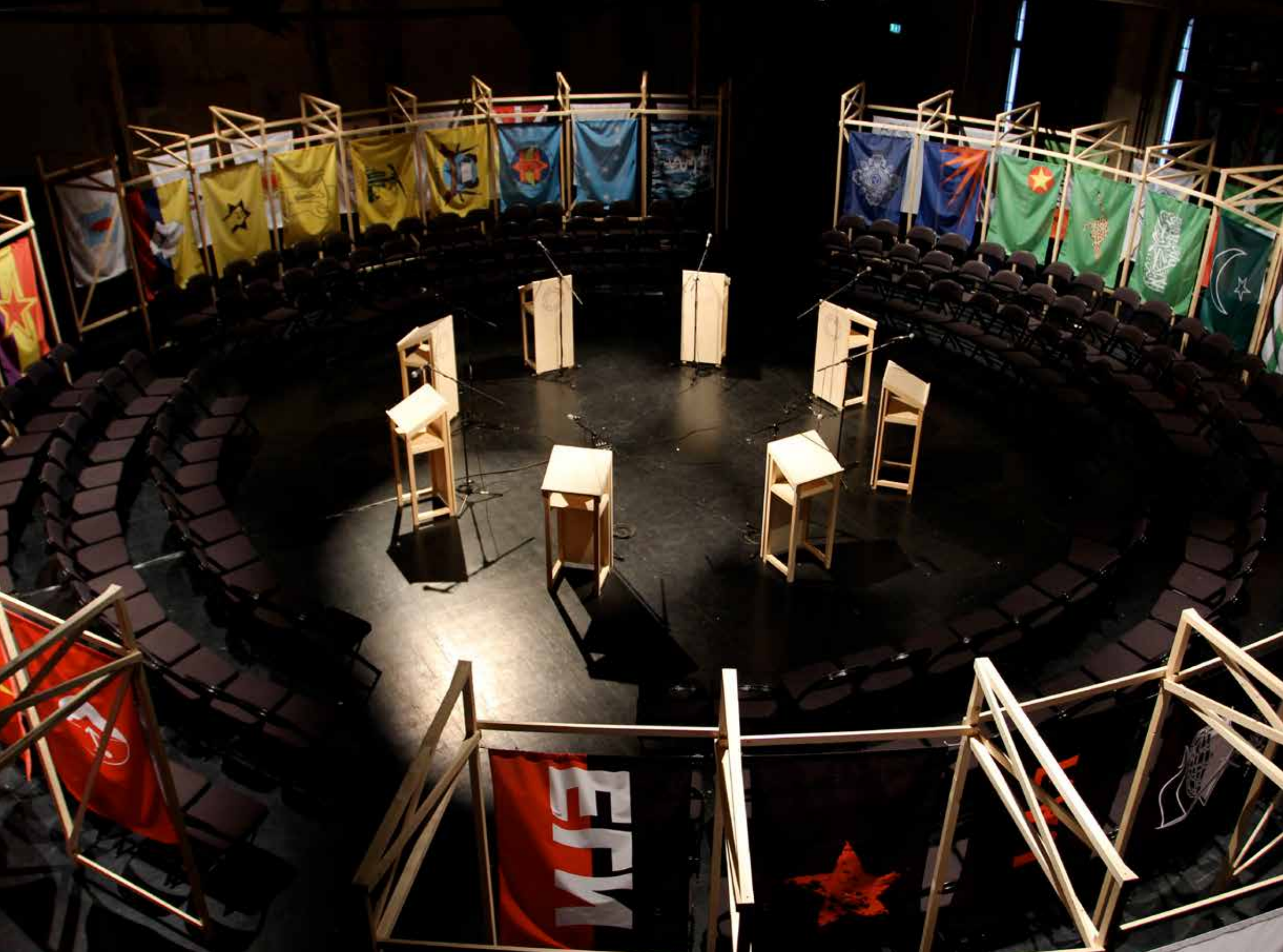








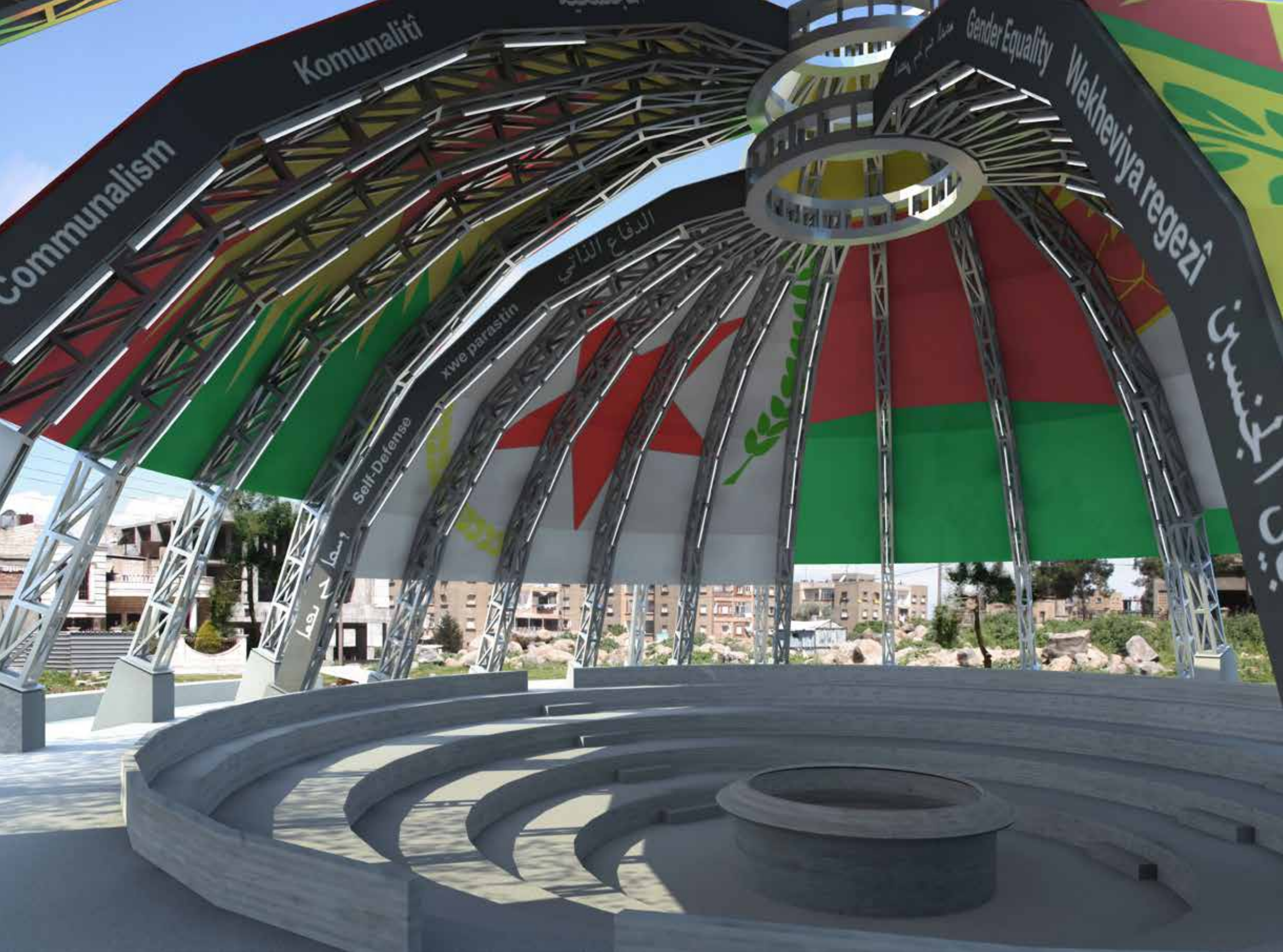












Communalism

Komunaliti

Gender Equality

Wekheviya regezi

Self-Defense

Xwe parastin

الدفاع الذاتي

جێنێسی





p. 38-39

*New World Summit – Rojava* (2015-17), in collaboration with the Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava, Digital drawing

p. 40-41

*Freethinkers' Space* (2010), based on a concept of VVD and PVV  
Installation view in Dutch parliament, The Hague

p. 42-43

*Freethinkers' Space* (2010), based on a concept of VVD and PVV  
Installation view in Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

p. 44-45

*Closed Architecture* (2011), based on a concept of Fleur Agema, Digital drawing

p. 46-47

*Closed Architecture* (2011), based on a concept of Fleur Agema, Digital drawing

p. 48-49

*Ideological Guide to the Venice Biennial* (2013)

p. 50-51

*New World Summit – Berlin* (2012)  
Installation view in Sophiensaele Theater, Berlin

p. 52-53

*New World Summit – Brussels* (2014),  
Royal Flemish Theater (KVS), Brussels

p. 54-55

*New World Embassy: Rojava* (2016),  
in collaboration with the Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava, Installation view, Oslo City Hall

p. 56-57

*New World Embassy: Rojava* (2016),  
in collaboration with the Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava, Oslo City Hall

p. 58-59

*New World Summit – Rojava* (2015-17), in collaboration with the Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava, Digital drawing

p. 60-61

*New World Summit – Rojava* (2015-17), in collaboration with the Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava, Construction view, Derik, Cezire canton



# CHAPTER I: MODERN PROPAGANDA

- 1.1 WHAT IS PROPAGANDA?
- 1.2 MODERN PROPAGANDA
- 1.3 DEMOCRACY AND MODERN PROPAGANDA
- 1.4 PROPAGANDA AS PERFORMANCE
- 1.5 CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the concept of propaganda in popular discourse is ill-defined and its historical origins have been obscured. In popular opinion, propaganda is nearly always inherently related to dictatorship and so-called totalitarianism, whereas democracy is exempt of propaganda proper. The term recalls images of monumental sculptures of Hitler and Stalin and agitprop posters and paintings depicting hysterically joyous peasants and workers celebrating their leaders and state. When we say, “this is propaganda,” or “that person is a propagandist,” we tend to mean manipulation, lies, deceit, bringing to mind the persecution of minorities and images of concentration camps and gulags. And at the same time, propaganda is considered somewhat old-fashioned; as if it can only refer back to totalitarianism, rather than to contemporary politics. When the term is applied in newspapers or television items, it is in majority to regimes such as Turkey, Russia, or the so-called Islamic State; forms of governance and political organization whose histories in respectively the Ottoman Empire, Soviet Union or religious fundamentalism are associated with aggressive expansion, histories of mass persecution, and terrorist campaigns. While one can certainly make the argument that propaganda plays a key role in these different examples, the assumption that they are the ones who use propaganda and democracy does not, seems highly problematic. Rather, we will develop the argument that we are dealing here with different *propagandas* in the plural.<sup>1</sup>

When propaganda is occasionally applied to democracies, for example in case of the 2003 invasion in Iraq led by the United States based on the false argument that it possessed weapons of mass destruction, there is still a sense that “our” propaganda is or should be of a better kind than the aggressive agitprop of the past.<sup>2</sup> The 2016 election of Donald Trump as president of the United States and his overt attack on independent media and the judicial system has created something of an exception. His claims that critical media belong to the domain of “fake news” and his administration’s own counter-arguments in the

- 1 The idea that propaganda should be understood in the plural is taken from the philosopher Jacques Ellul’s *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* (1962). We will discuss Ellul’s work in more detail later on this chapter.
- 2 In a study on mass media during the War on Terror, Anthony DiMaggio remarks that “American corporate media has overwhelmingly taken the position that the U.S. presence in the Middle East is driven by a noble effort to promote self-determination, human rights, justice, and democracy. Although those Iraqis who resist American occupation are attacked in papers like the *New York Times* for relying on “propaganda that has helped fuel the insurgency throughout Iraq,” the propaganda of the American media and government are ignored. It is not considered propaganda, but rather “conventional wisdom” [...].” Such democratic propaganda, DiMaggio concludes, is the result of the fact that “government and media propaganda have always been essential in efforts to convince citizens within democracies of the veracity of officially espoused war aims. The war in Iraq is only the most recent in a longstanding effort on the part of the government and the media to portray the U.S. as unconditionally committed to spreading justice, freedom, human rights, and democracy throughout the globe.” See: Anthony Dimaggio, *Mass Media, Mass Propaganda: Examining American News in the “War on Terror”* (Lanham/Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), pp. 22, 162.

form of “alternative facts” invoke textbook methods of authoritarian propaganda which have been termed as part of a “post-truth” era of politics.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, opposition politics, established media, as well as befriended nations remain hesitant to use the term propaganda for fear of being biased or losing support in the US sphere of influence.<sup>4</sup>

Far more comfort in using the term is shown in relation to one of the last remaining communist states in the world, such as the North-Korean regime of Kim Jong-un. Documentary film makers 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 the regime boasts through eerie propaganda about its military force, the leadership cult displayed in its media, and public sculptures and posters, and the massive musicals that celebrate the nation and its dynasty.<sup>5</sup> But the North-Korean regime is also portrayed with a lot of irony, for the Western democratic citizen smirks about the idea that “they,” the poor North-Korean subjects of an archaic communist state, could really believe in the lies fed to them.<sup>6</sup> Traveling exhibitions of 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, but they seem more like mockeries, a strange variation of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibitions set up by the Nazi regime.<sup>7</sup> These exhibitions strengthen the idea that “we,” the West, can see

3 The concept of “post-truth” was selected as word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries in the light of the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States. In this regard, Benjamin Tallis writes that “[Donald] Trump, [Boris] Johnson, [Michael] Gove, [Vladimir] Putin and other post-truthers [...] play to a widespread and increasingly cynical, anti-expert and supposedly anti-establishment and anti-authority mood, but one that clearly also still craves leadership and ambition.” See: Benjamin Tallis, “Living in Post-truth: Power/Knowledge/Responsibility,” *New Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East-European Politics and International Relations* Vol. 24, No. 1 (2016): pp. 7–18, at p. 9.

4 We find exception in the case of Jason Stanley, author of *How Propaganda Works* (2015), who writes in a *New York Times* op-ed that “Denouncing Trump as a liar, or describing him as merely entertaining, misses the point of authoritarian propaganda altogether. Authoritarian propagandists are attempting to convey power by defining reality. [...] This campaign season has been an indictment of our understanding of mass communication.” See: Jason Stanley, “Beyond Lying: Donald Trump’s Authoritarian Reality,” *The New York Times*, Nov. 4, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/05/opinion/beyond-lying-donald-trumps-authoritarian-reality.html>.

5 Good examples in this regard are Discovery Channel’s “Children of the Secret State” (2001), National Geographic Explorer’s “Inside North Korea” (2007), and Álvaro Longoria’s “The Propaganda Game” (2015) in which reporters place a strong emphasis on large scale sculptures of then North-Korean leader Kim Jong-il and his father Kim Il-sung, the mass musicals organized by the regime, and what many reporters consider the staged ghost town of its capital Pyongyang – all standard parts of their brief visitor’s tours, time and again described by reporters as totalitarian or dictatorial “propaganda.”

6 Wolf Blitzer, a well-known reporter for CNN’s *Situation Room*, for example, has covered a wide array of news items on the North-Korean regime, in which he displays a continuous mockery by implicating the last name of its current leader – Kim Jong-un – in a series of puns; for example in headlines such as “*un*-seen threat” or “*un*-der fire.” Blitzer’s obsession with the regime goes hand in hand with the ironic mockery of the archaic communist state.

7 Referring here to the famous *Entartete Kunst* exhibition, the display of “degenerate art” set up by the Nazi regime that opened on July 9, 1937 at the Archaeological Institute in Munich. The exhibition was intended to show the “cultural decay” of the era before the Foundation of the Third Reich. Six hundred and fifty paintings were on display, including work by Max Beckmann, Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, and Edvard

through the obvious propaganda schemes, while “they,” poor subjects of archaic communism, live in a manufactured world of lies and deceit.<sup>8</sup> Rather than being displayed as propaganda for the North-Korean regime, they are displayed as propaganda for what democracy *is not*.<sup>9</sup>

The role of images – artworks ranging from painting to sculpture, monuments, and films – play an important role in the way propaganda is identified. Throughout this thesis, we will attempt to examine how modern and contemporary propaganda manifests in- and can be traced through art. But the aim of this first chapter is to track down the origins of the concept of modern propaganda, and to explore the relationship between propaganda and democracy, well before the very notion of totalitarian propaganda in relation to the regimes of Hitler or Stalin came into being. We will see that whereas the different manifestations of modern propaganda depend on the regime – on the *kind of power* – they enact, they have been continuously part of to the lives of citizens in highly industrialized countries from their very inception, and that they are therefore not the exclusive property of dictatorships.<sup>10</sup> Modern propaganda has served democracies just as well, to maintain the idea that their citizens are beyond the realm of propaganda, which they, as educated and conscious citizens with access to open and free media, are supposedly able to recognize immediately as archaic models of manipulation.

What we will argue throughout this chapter is that 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 modern propaganda. Rather than discussing propaganda as something that disappeared with the fall of the Nazi regime or the Soviet Union, we will thus attempt to trace modern propaganda as part of the emergence of modern society, as much more closely linked to the political model of democracy than one might like to imagine. As we

Munch, surrounded by photos of physically or mentally disabled people. Joachim Von Halas (ed.), *Hitler’s Degenerate Art: The Exhibition Catalogue* (London: Foxley Books Limited, 2008).

8 An example was the exhibition “The World According to Kim Jong-Il,” exhibited in the Kunsthal in Rotterdam, Netherlands, from June 12 to August 29, under the catchphrase “Never before shown North-Korean art,” before touring further around the world. It consisted of about 150 gouaches and 135 paintings on canvas. The exhibition design mimicked the agitprop aesthetics of the objects on display.

9 A more detailed study by Jane Portal forms a relevant exception. Although keeping in line with the general characterization of North-Korea as a “totalitarian” regime – mainly based on the work of Igor Golomstock, which we will discuss in the next chapter – she also points out to a broader vocabulary in North Korean art and crafts, among others in the form of more traditional contemporary landscapes in colored ink, glass, and porcelain works, and the curious and undertheorized practice of painterly depictions of antiquities and archeological findings. See: Jane Portal, *Art Under Control in North Korea* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).

10 It is important to mention here that citizens of countries with lower industrial development have also been made familiar with modern propaganda, often as the *targets* of industrialized states, whether through neocolonial practices or warfare. This *secondary* experience of industrialization has just as well generated particular articulations of modern and contemporary propagandas – such as Stateless Propaganda – which we will address in the third chapter.

will see throughout this chapter, propaganda studies, different from mainstream media, largely agree that there is not only an important historical relationship between democracy and propaganda, but also that there is no reason to presume that any modern society – no matter its form of government – operates beyond the realm of propaganda.

It is important to emphasize here that exploring the relationship between democracy and propaganda does not mean that democracy can be equated with dictatorship. Rather, we will see that 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 the same way, that it serves the same purpose, or that it is necessarily an “evil” phenomenon; but rather that we should understand it as an inherent part of modernity. Furthermore, our use of the word “democracy” will be a critical one. Historically, democracy’s egalitarian ideals did not stop the Athenian agora, Enlightenment age, or present-day Western democracies to be implicated – if not the instigators – of colonialism, slavery, and brutal warfare. Democracy has always applied only to a relatively limited class of designated privileged citizens. The contemporary existence of parliamentary democracies, from Putin’s Russia to Erdoğan’s Turkey, or Trump’s United States, has not stopped their authoritarian leaders from taking control; in many cases, dictatorships can very well operate with a democratic front.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, we should keep in mind that the rise of ultranationalist and even fascist parties in 21st-century Europe takes place within systems of parliamentary democracy; from the Orbán regime in Hungary to that of the Polish Law and Justice Party and the near win of the presidency by the Austrian Freedom Party in 2016, a party that was originally founded by Nazis. In all these examples, authoritarian leaders gained power through elections without having to overthrow an existing regime.<sup>12</sup> The model of parliamentary democracy also has largely failed

11 The argument that authoritarian regimes today might work best with a democratic front and limited – yet functioning – democratic institutions, mirrors Slavoj Žižek’s claim that capitalism might function much better in the context of former communist states than in liberal-democratic ones: “[T]he weird combination of capitalism and Communist rule, far from being a ridiculous anomaly, proved a blessing (not even) in disguise; China developed so fast not in spite of authoritarian Communist rule, but because of it.” The endeavor here is to challenge presumed oppositions between authoritarianism and democracy on one hand, and authoritarianism and capitalism on the other. In the case of regimes such as that of Turkey and Russia, they seem to be able to encompass both authoritarianism, democracy, and capitalism. See: Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London/New York: Verso, 2010), p. 156.

12 One could term such regimes as forms of “elective dictatorship,” originally introduced by the conservative Lord Hailsham in relation to what he regarded as the increasing power invested in British government instead of parliament during a 1976 BBC lecture. A *Guardian* editorial recently re-introduces this concept of elective dictatorship in relation to the 2017 referendum issued by the Erdoğan regime in Turkey with the aim of introducing a presidential system.

in applying checks and balances to the 2008 economic crisis, leaving a majority of speculators and bankers unprosecuted, and millions of middle and lower-class peoples in often livelihood-threatening crises. In other words, calling oneself a democracy or modeling institutions after what we associate with democracy does not necessarily say much about the actual democratization of society. The point here is that we should de-mythologize democracy in the process of exploring its relation to propaganda. Democracy can often not be equated with authoritarianism or dictatorship, but in some cases it most certainly operates as a front for them. As such, the evaluation of projected democratic values and their real-time practice should always remain part of critical case-by-case analysis.

The aim of this chapter will be to start tracing the origins of the term propaganda and examine its different understandings in the work of journalists, historians, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, public relations counsels, and military leaders. We will observe in the process the intertwinement between modern democracy and modern propaganda, and discuss the reason of propaganda’s exclusion from contemporary democratic discourse. Our objective in this historical exploration of propaganda will not be to narrow down the term to democracies or dictatorships, but rather to define modern propaganda as a *performance of power* that applies to all industrial and post-industrial modern societies alike.

We will discuss the term “performance” – a word that intimately connects the fields of art and politics – in more detail at the end of this chapter through the work of Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman. For now, we will be using the term as an equivalent of “enactment.” When we speak of “power” in the context of propaganda, we refer to structures of power with various components. A structure can consist of an actual “infrastructure,” i.e., the material dimension in the form of concrete industries, the military industrial complex, and so on: infrastructures with a capacity to construct our reality to the point of life and death. Naturally, there are aspects of power that cannot be grasped in a purely material sense: lobbyism or even rhetoric, are crucial tools in the social sphere to gain access to infrastructures of power or even to activate them. We will touch upon these different material and immaterial aspects of structures of power by means of concrete examples in this chapter.

See: Scott Prasser, J.R. Nethercote, and Nicholas Aroney, “Upper Houses and the Problem of Elective Dictatorship,” University of Western Australia Press, 2008 and “The Guardian View on Turkey: Beware an Elected Dictatorship,” *The Guardian*, Jul. 17, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/17/the-guardian-view-on-turkey-beware-an-elected-dictatorship>.

## WHAT IS PROPAGANDA?

There is a certain consensus among propaganda scholars that human-kind has propagandized its emerging structures of power from the very beginning of its existence, although this means we must retroactively apply the term. For example, the British communication historian Philip M. Taylor analyzed the history of propaganda, tracing it back to developments before the term itself became used: from cave paintings as the earliest means to impress a set of symbols and ideas upon a community, to Ulysses' wooden horse used by the Greeks to convince the Trojans of their retreat; from the martial poetry of Sparta's Tyrtaeus arousing soldiers to battle to Aristotle's art of rhetoric; from Caesar's dictate to have his portrait placed upon all Roman coins to the Pope's promise for remission of sins for those joining the massive war campaigns of the Crusades; and from Martin Luther who nailed his ninety-five Theses to the castle of Wittenberg's church door in 1517 to the Counter-Reformation that brought the Jesuits to effectively professionalize its propagation of faith through printing press and massive campaigns.<sup>13</sup> Throughout, Taylor's examples feature the term propaganda referring to the performance of power through symbols, rhetoric, literature, currency, religious symbols, and scripture. In all cases, these are examples that are concerned with establishing and spreading – propagandizing – emerging structures of power.<sup>14</sup>

Another overall consensus amongst propaganda researchers is that the actual origin of the specific term is rooted in the sphere of religion. While we might argue that humans have always propagandized in one way or another, until the sixteenth century the word propaganda was mainly confined to the field of biology, referring to the reproduction of plants and animals.<sup>15</sup> Its introduction as a term that comes closer to our present day use dates to 1622, when Pope Gregory XV established the sacred congregation "De Propaganda Fide" with the task to spread the Roman-Catholic faith amongst non-believers, followed by Pope Urban VIII, who subsequently established the "Collegium de Propaganda" to train missionaries in 1627.<sup>16</sup>

According to sociologist Erwin W. Fellows, who investigated the di-

13 Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 20, 25, 27, 33, 41, 97, 110–11.

14 We find similar assessments of such historically retroactive reading of the history of propaganda in many other studies, such as in Edward Bernays's preface to his work *Crystalizing Public* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1961), pp. iii–Ivi, and in Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell's chapter "Propaganda through the Ages," in *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 47–98.

15 Erwin W. Fellows, "Propaganda: History of a Word," *American Speech*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Oct. 1959): pp. 182–89, at p. 182.

16 *Ibid.*



fferent uses of the term from this foundational moment onward, its first appearance in the English language dates back to 1718, and up to halfway nineteenth century it would continue to be used in a specific, religious framework. Fellows observes that a political and military use of the term becomes common practice, when in 1842 the *American Dictionary of Science Literature and Art* explains propaganda as “Derived from this celebrated society [for propagation of the faith], the name propaganda is applied in modern political language as a term of reproach to secret associations for the spread of opinions and principles which are viewed by most governments with horror and aversion.”<sup>17</sup>

The negative connotation of the term, according to Fellows, might have to do with Protestant hostility against Catholicism in Northern Europe and the United States. But the word propaganda would not be used extensively in this way until the First World War of 1914–18, when propaganda became associated with mass psychological and often covert warfare. Fellows therefore concludes that “[i]n the case of propaganda [...] we have an instance of shift in meaning from a religious to a military and then to a political context, during a period of less than two hundred years. This shift may reflect a change in the institutional locus of power, from Church to State.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, propaganda is not only the process in which power is performed in a given society, but the term itself is shaped by shifting formations of power structures, in this case from the religious to the political.

To the importance of religion and politics in the process of the emergence of modern propaganda, we should add the importance of industrialization. The First Industrial Revolution took place roughly from halfway the 18th to halfway the 19th century: a period that, beginning in Britain, saw the inventions of “the spinning jenny, the steam engine [and] coke smelting,” which resulted in “factory textile production, the shift to coal and coke in the iron industry, and the perfection of the steam engine.”<sup>19</sup> Whereas the First Industrial Revolution was characterized by important technological innovation, the term “Technological Revolution” is generally applied only to the Second Indus-

17 Ibid., p. 183.

18 Ibid., p. 188.

19 Robert Allen emphasized the social conditions and political system that contributed to the Industrial Revolution, amongst others in the form of the parliamentary control over the executive, the protection of individual property, maintenance of high wages, and a legal system that benefited private investment in the larger context of the state’s mercantile and imperialist policies: “How did England maintain a high wage despite rapid population growth, while continental wages fell even though the population grew little? The possibilities [...] include: the replacement of absolutist by representative government in the seventeenth century, the enclosure of the open fields, the productivity advantage associate with the new draperies, the growth in intercontinental trade consequent upon the British empire, and the [low] price of energy.” Robert C. Allen, *The Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 123.

trial Revolution, which refers to the period roughly starting in the mid-19th century and culminating in the First World War: a period which, throughout the industrialized world, saw the rise of new technologies such as “electricity, the internal combustion engine, the production of petroleum and other chemicals, telephones and radio.”<sup>20</sup> Electricity had an enormous impact on the process of factory electrification and thus on the creation of the conditions for mass production, as well as on the development of modern science and mass media.

Whereas the notion of modern history or modernity generally relates to the European period after the French Revolution, I apply the notion of the “modern” in “modern propaganda” specifically in terms of the late-modern period which started with the First and Second Industrial Revolution. Taylor speaks of the era of this Technological Revolution also as the “Communications Revolution,” because of the enormous scale and scope through which technology began to interconnect populations of the world in an unprecedented manner. The First World War would push the limits of this Communications Revolution to even greater extends through the emergence of modern propaganda, a process that would continue throughout and after the world wars. Later on, we will see how propaganda studies gave several other names to the type of society that emerged through the industrial revolution, such as “Technological Society” and “mass society.” We ourselves will simply maintain the term *modern society*.

The First World War introduced a war between the minds and hearts of the peoples of industrialized countries, rather than a mere battle between nations within geographically defined areas. Mass communication created the possibilities and need for influencing and shaping public opinion and governmental direction on an unprecedented scale. It is at this juncture that we encounter fundamental differences as to the definition and function of modern propaganda. Before discussing these differences in more detail and within their proper historical context, I will provide a brief overview to grasp the main points of contention.

In his book *Secrets of Crewe House* (1920), Canadian newspaper magnate Sir Campbell Stuart, who ran propaganda operations from the British Crewe House propaganda bureau during the First World War – which superseded the first propaganda bureau, Wellington House, which we will discuss in more detail in the next section – defines propaganda as “the presentation of a case in such a way that others

20 Andrew Atkeson and Patrick Kehoe discuss specifically what they call the “productivity paradox” of the Second Industrial Revolution, with which they refer to the initial slow diffusion of new technologies due to the difficulty of adaption to the industries at hand. Andrew Atkeson and Patrick J. Kehoe, “Modeling the Transition to a New Economy: Lessons from Two Technological Revolutions,” *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Mar. 2007): pp. 64–88.

may be influenced. [...] Except in special circumstances, its origin should be completely concealed”<sup>21</sup> with the aim “to reveal to the enemy the hopelessness of their cause and case and the inevitability of Allied victory.”<sup>22</sup> In contrast, we may refer to the writings of George Creel, a journalist who became the head of the Committee on Public Information – also known as the “Creel Commission” – which operated parallel to the British one as the propaganda bureau of the United States during the First World War. In Creel’s book *How We Advertized America* (1920), he chooses to speak of “advertising” rather than “propaganda,” and in relation to the work of the Committee on Public Information he claims that “Our effort was educational and informative throughout, for we had such confidence in our case as to feel that no other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of facts.”<sup>23</sup> According to Creel, the CPI’s domestic and foreign aim was “to preach the determination and military might of America and the certainty of victory, but it was equally necessary to teach the motives, purposes, and ideals of America so that friend, foe, and neutral alike might come to see us as a people without selfishness and in love with justice.”<sup>24</sup> Between Stuart and Creel, we see that their framing of propaganda widely differs: between propaganda as a necessarily concealed operation to influence opinion and the idea of propaganda as a public information service of facts.

In the development of propaganda studies after the First World War, mainly in the United States, we subsequently see a continuing divergence in the analysis of propaganda within different scholarly disciplines. In response to censorship practices of the American Committee for Public Information during the First World War, journalist and writer Walter Lippmann, in his book *Public Opinion* (1922), claims that “[i]n order to conduct a propaganda there must be some barrier between the public and the event. Access to the real environment must be limited, before anyone can create a pseudo-environment that he thinks wise or desirable.”<sup>25</sup> While Lippmann essentially warns of propaganda due to its creation of “pseudo-environments” benefiting the propagandist, a follow-up on his book by public relations founder Edward Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923), gives a much more positive reading of the possible use of propaganda after the war. Bernays criticizes the treatment of propaganda as a “vaguely defined evil”

21 Sir Campbell Stuart, *Secrets of Crewe House* (London/New York/Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921), p. 1.

22 Ibid., p. 9.

23 George Creel, *How We Advertized America* (New York/London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1920), pp. 4–5.

24 Ibid., p. 237.

25 Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), p. 43.

and argues that “there is probably no single profession which within the last ten years has extended its field of usefulness more remarkably and touched upon intimate and important aspects of the everyday life of the world more significantly.”<sup>26</sup> Between Lippmann and Bernays we witness a difference in analysis of propaganda that derives from their various interests in the concept: for Lippmann, it concerns a limitation of his capacity to effectively control power as a journalist, whereas for Bernays, it forms an essential part of his livelihood as a public relations counsel.

Political scientist Harold Lasswell would become one of the leading post-World War I propaganda theorists, starting with his book *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), in which he, expanding the importance that Lippmann and Bernays placed on public opinion, claimed that “Propaganda is concerned with the management of opinions and attitudes by the direct manipulation of social suggestion rather than by altering other conditions in the environment or in the organism”<sup>27</sup> with the “chief function [...] to demolish the enemy’s will to fight by intensifying depression, disillusionment and disagreement.”<sup>28</sup> Lasswell thus emphasizes the importance of the psychological aspect of propaganda within a pre-existing societal context.<sup>29</sup>

The rise of National-Socialism in Germany in many ways intensified the emphasis on the shaping of public opinion and psychology as the main domains for defining the function of propaganda, as Nazi propaganda aimed not at merely influencing public opinion, but at creating completely new organizational models in order to ensure the conditions of a total propaganda equal to its desire of a total war.<sup>30</sup> Essentially, Nazi propaganda aimed at performing power to construct a completely new reality. Convinced of the idea that the Germans lost the First World War due to the sophistication of British propaganda – which in itself is a propagandistic argument – Adolf Hitler wrote in his book *Mein Kampf* (Volume I published in 1925, Volume II in 1926) about propaganda’s importance not merely in a psychological sense,

26 Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, p. 12.

27 Harold Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (New York: Peter Smith, 1938), p. 12.

28 Ibid., p. 214.

29 This would be further elaborated by social psychologist Leonard W. Doob, who in his book *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Techniques*, argues that there are both intentional as well as unintentional forms of propaganda: “In intentional propaganda, the propagandist is aware of his interested aim; in unintentional propaganda, he does not appreciate the social effect of his own actions.” Leonard W. Doob, *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Techniques* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), p. 89.

30 This notion of total propaganda, which we encounter later on in the work of Jacques Ellul, resonates with the famous speech that Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda of the Nazi regime, gave at the Berlin Sportpalast on February 18, 1943, in which he – in the light of the Soviet threat on the Eastern front – asked his audience: “Do you want total war? Do you want it, if need be, even more total and radical than we are capable of imagining it today?” Joachim Remak (ed.), *The Nazi Years: A Documentary History* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1969), pp. 91–92.

but also in an organizational one: “When propaganda has filled a whole people with an idea, the organization, with the help of a handful of people, can draw the consequences.”<sup>31</sup> This emphasis not just on the psychological, but also organizational and infrastructural dimension of propaganda, can be found also in the work of sociologist and philosopher Theodor Adorno, who, in exile from the Nazi regime in the United States, had been engaged in exchange with some of the American propaganda researchers. Adorno, in his essay “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda” (1951), wrote that “[i]t 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.”<sup>32</sup> So whereas Hitler believes propaganda supports and develops through new organizational models, Adorno claims that these organizational models pre-date the Nazi regime and are rather located in the origins of mass culture as such.

Adorno’s insight that apart from the importance of a psychoanalytic reading, the concept of modern propaganda is also rooted in the conditions of mass culture – i.e., the economic, political, and media conditions that resulted from the industrial revolution and its technological achievements – is taken as the foundation of post-World War II propaganda theory by philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul. In his book *Propagandes* (1962), he argued that “[p]ropaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization.”<sup>33</sup> But this organized group, Ellul simultaneously emphasized, is increasingly located in the technological and mass character of society itself, of which propaganda is essentially the “sociological phenomenon,” resulting in a situation in which propaganda “no longer obeys an ideology” except for the maintenance of technological mass society itself.<sup>34</sup> A similar, although more structural analysis, can be found in the work of linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky and media analyst Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), in which they proposed a model of propaganda analysis of mass media that should address its conditions of ownership, financial interest, and government dependency – in

31 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Vol. II (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1941), p. 851.

32 Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London/New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 150.

33 Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* (New York/Toronto: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 61.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 196.

short, its reliance on structures of power that have been monopolized by an elite of stakeholders. We will refer to such structures of power under severely limited elite control as “monopolies of power.” In the words of Chomsky and Herman: “[T]he U.S. media do not function in the manner of the propaganda system of a totalitarian state. Rather, they permit – indeed, encourage – spirited debate, criticism, and dissent, 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.”<sup>35</sup> Similar to Adorno and Ellul, Chomsky and Herman thus define modern propaganda as a result of the monopolization of power in mass technological society, rather than being the “invention” of a specific type of regime. Chomsky and Herman add to this definition by means of a comprehensive data analysis, to come to a more precise understanding of the process in which monopolized power is performed in a given society with the aim of constructing reality after the interest of its elites: this is what in their eyes should be understood as modern propaganda.

By introducing the concept of “manufacturing of consent,” Chomsky and Herman essentially anchor their own work in the early, post-World War I American propaganda theory, as the concept had first appeared in the 1922 work of Lippmann, in a chapter entitled “The Manufacture of Consent.” In the following section, we will explore why and how the First World War defined a concept and practice of modern propaganda that has remained of such importance until our present day, and how it influenced the work of propaganda theorists in the decades in between.

Before engaging in a more detailed understanding of these at times wide array of definitions of modern propaganda from the First World War onward, let us make one observation based on this first summary that will remain of importance throughout this chapter:

- Definitions of modern propaganda arise from widely different backgrounds, ranging from government (Stuart, Creel), journalism (Lippmann), public relations (Bernays), political science and psychology (Lasswell), philosophy and sociology (Adorno, Ellul), and media theory and linguistics (Chomsky and Herman). Based on this we may observe that both the study and practice of propaganda is highly interdisciplinary in nature.

We will now start by revisiting the foundational moment of modern

35 Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 302.

propaganda in the context of the First World War to understand how these diverging definitions of propaganda came into being.

## 1.2 MODERN PROPAGANDA

Philip Taylor, who served frequently as a British military advisor on communications,<sup>36</sup> perceived the rise of modern propaganda to be simultaneous to what he termed the Communications Revolution. This, in turn, created the conditions for a new kind of warfare that he referred to as a form of “total war,” in which whole peoples, not just professional military, form a new international front line.<sup>37</sup> In Taylor’s view, the manifestation of modern mass media formed a key component of the Communications revolution, which he illustrated through three key events in the year 1895. That was the year Lord Northcliffe founded the *The Daily Mail*, the first newspaper for mass circulation in Britain; it was the year the first commercial screening of the cinematograph by the Lumière brothers in Paris took place; and finally, it was the year Guglielmo Marconi organized the demonstration of the use of wireless telegraphy on Salisbury Plain:

In one remarkable year, therefore, the principal means of mass communication – press, radio and film – came into their own and the communications revolution made a quantum leap. It was the convergence of total war and the mass media that gave modern war propaganda its significance and impact in the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup>

Similar to Taylor, communication historians Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell emphasize the importance of these major historical shifts in communications technology at the outbreak of the First World War when they speak of “the potent combination of the perfect social, political, and economic conditions with the newly established power of the mass media.”<sup>39</sup> More than other nations that would become implicated in the First World War, Jowett and O’Donnell explain, the British were forced to use these new communication tools, as there was far from an overall consensus among its population on the need to enter the war, and “Unlike the other major powers on the continent, Britain did not have universal conscription into the army, and thus the decision to mobilize its armed forces was more of a political one than in France or Germany.”<sup>40</sup>

Modern propaganda thus began when increasingly international

<sup>36</sup> Obituary of Philip M. Taylor by J.R Gair on the website of the University of Leeds, 2010, [http://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/obituaries/2010/taylor\\_philip.html](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/obituaries/2010/taylor_philip.html).

<sup>37</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day*, p. 173.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>39</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), p. 208.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 209–10.

forms of military warfare converged with the increasing international presence of mass media. This convergence is marked by a particular moment in time, when on August 4, 1914, the British ultimatum to the Germans ended. The first act of war by the British was performed by their cable ship *Telconia*, cutting of the submarine cables linking Germany with the United States. Both Taylor and Jowett and O'Donnell describe that moment as a key to understanding the new conditions of warfare under the Communications Revolution. Although covert communication and information manipulation are as old as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, one could argue that it was at this moment, in which controlling means of mass communication at such enormous scale constituted the first act of war, that modern propaganda was born. The performance of power can be argued to be as old as humanity. But the level at which modern propaganda has proven capable of constructing reality to the point of worldwide wars, separates it from what Taylor explores as "pre-modern" propaganda.

Different from Germany's decision to immediately pour overt propaganda materials into the United States to win them over to their cause, the British devised a far more sophisticated and covert model of propaganda. In that light, Taylor observes that propaganda "is not just a question of what, how, why and when you say something, and to whom, but also of what you decide to leave out. In propaganda, omission is just as significant as commission."<sup>41</sup> What made the cutting of the submarine cables by the British crucial in this regard was exactly their investment in the capacity "to monitor and control the flow of raw information at as many points between source and target possible."<sup>42</sup> It is from this perspective that we should value, Taylor claims, the nineteenth-century development of the British global cable communications system, the so-called All Red Line. This network had been the inheritance of the British colonial Empire; its government had supported the work of private companies to establish the cables to monitor and control its colonies.<sup>43</sup> The All Red Line as such was built upon and through the conquered land of colonized peoples, and subse-

41 Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 45.

42 Ibid.

43 Daniel Headrick and Pascal Griset provide a detailed account of the history of the Imperial "All Red Line," explaining both the technical complexities of its creation in the late 19th century, but also the structural financial support of the British government for private companies establishing the network. Daniel R. Headrick and Pascal Griset, "Submarine Telegraph Cables: Business and Politics, 1838–1939," *The Business History Review*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (Autumn 2001): pp. 543–78. A full chronology of the construction process of the All Red Line was assembled by George Johnson in 1903, explaining the importance of the All Red Line as it "bring the ends of the earth within speaking distance of each other, and knit all men of British blood, the whole world over, into a national union as effective as now prevails within the British Islands themselves." See: George Johnson, *The All Red Line, 1903: The Annals and Aims of the Pacific Cable Project* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), p. 486.

quently would serve as a system of mass communication. The cutting of the cable between Germany and the United States essentially meant that all German news and information had to use indirect cable routes through Scandinavia and the Iberian peninsula. Britain's first act of war was therefore nothing less than the establishment of an enormous information filter between the Germans and the Americans, through which it would be able to conduct its own propaganda, made possible through the infrastructural inheritance of its colonial Empire.

Taylor emphasizes that modern propaganda manifested within one of the first modern democracies in the world, where voting rights already existed for a substantial part of the male electorate. In 1916, military conscription would be introduced for the first time and this essentially made the road to a full male electorate inevitable. The emergence of mass media involved British citizens further in both a military and a political sense, and by the end of the war the Representation of the People Act of 1918 would include practically all men in the voting process, and began to include women for the first time as well – although it would take until 1928 before voting rights would include the full female electorate.<sup>44</sup> This emphasis on the particular political model within which modern propaganda arose, is relevant for three reasons. First, that modern propaganda did not emerge from so-called totalitarianism or dictatorship, but from the political model of democracy, one close to what we today would understand as parliamentary democracy. Second, that the nature of this democracy was rooted in a colonial Empire, and that its capacity of industrial development and the creation of the international cable network allowed for the capacity to create and control information in modern communication and warfare. The third is that democracy was important as part of the self-image of Britain as a civilized and enlightened Empire, and as such had great impact on the kind of propaganda they were developing during the war. What we will briefly explore now is how, apart from the control of the cable networks, the British gave form to the notion of a *democratic propaganda*.

To sell the hesitant British people 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 1914–17, supervised by writer and Liberal MP Charles Casterman at Wellington House in Buckingham Gate. In 1918, all propaganda efforts of the British were centralized under the Ministry of Information, including Crewe House which had superseded Wellington House and was led by Lord Northcliffe, pioneer of English popular journalism, and – as mentioned earlier – owner of the *Daily Mail*.

44 Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 2–3.

Wellington House operated under such conditions of 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 elites, such as policy makers, academics, teachers, business, and newspapermen. Well aware of the mixed sentiments that existed in the United States with regard to its former ruler, the reasoning behind this secrecy was that the American public would be weary of the British calling upon their sympathies directly. Therefore, Wellington House disseminated materials that were not directly identifiable as propaganda, but which “took the form of reasoned, almost quasi-academic, explanations of the issues involved, with the facts – even if not all the facts – presented in an objective manner and with measured argument.”<sup>45</sup> This form of so-called “grey” or even “black propaganda” was distributed through commercial publishing houses, and at the founding meetings of Wellington House prominent academics and writers such as the likes of H.G. Wells attended.<sup>46</sup> By June 1915, “Wellington House had produced some 2.5 million propaganda items in 17 languages and just over 4000 photographs a week.”<sup>47</sup>

In order to produce this amount of imagery, so-called war artists were involved, and Wellington also produced a documentary film, *Britain Prepared* (1915), and commissioned the film *The Battle of the Somme* (1916).<sup>48</sup> This cultural output, however, was important but not the prime task of Wellington, which maintained covert operations in the US and other allied and neutral countries that needed to be brought to support the British war effort.

There were several events that benefited the British enormously in their conduction of its propaganda campaigns. The German invasion of Belgium on August 4, 1914 had triggered far more resistance from within the country than expected, and the German retaliation against the Belgian population was effectively used by the British to shape the image of the barbaric German “Hun”: originally the designation

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> H.G. Wells was one of the British signatories of a pamphlet that appeared in the American press, strongly pitching the British cultural elite against the Barbaric threat of the Germans after their invasion in Belgium: “Whatever the world-destiny of Germany may be, we in Great Britain are ourselves conscious of a destiny and a duty. That destiny and duty, alike for us and for all the English-speaking race, call upon us to uphold the rule of common justice between civilized peoples, to defend the rights of small nations, and to maintain the free and law-abiding ideals of Western Europe against the rule of ‘Blood and Iron’ and the domination of the whole Continent by a military caste.” “Famous British Authors Defend England’s War,” *New York Times*, Oct. 18, 1914.

<sup>47</sup> Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century*, p. 38.

<sup>48</sup> James Fox in this regard mentions how the involvement of Wellington House with the arts to use “exhibitions to distribute its message,” and the overall interest of the UK government in the role of culture in bolstering national identity, even resulted in establishing completely new institutions: “Museums came to be viewed as so central to national identity during the war that the government even formed its own such institution as a result. In March 1917 the War Cabinet approved the decision to form a National War Museum.” James Fox, *British Art and the First World War 1914–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 68.

of a nomadic people that for a short time had controlled large parts of Europe in the first centuries CE, which were now turned into the equivalent of a “barbaric” conqueror.<sup>49</sup> 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 seeming objectivity, the report described German atrocities based on witness accounts of Belgian refugees, with an emphasis on war crimes perpetrated against the citizenry and 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.”<sup>50</sup> Graphic descriptions of group rape, random executions, and forms of torture are amongst the “testimonies” in the report, such as the following one:

23rd August. I went with two friends (names given) to see what we could see. About three hours out of Malines we were taken prisoners by a German patrol—an officer and six men—and marched off into a little wood of saplings, where there was a house. The officer spoke Flemish. He knocked at the door; the peasant did not come. The officer ordered the soldiers to break down the door, which two of them did. The peasant came and asked what they were doing. The officer said he did not come quickly enough, and that they had “trained up” plenty of others. His hands were tied behind his back, and he was shot at once without a moment’s delay. The wife came out with a little sucking child. She put the child down and sprang at the Germans like a lioness. She clawed their faces. One of the Germans took a rifle and struck her a tremendous blow with the butt on the head. Another took his bayonet and fixed it and thrust it through the child. He then put his rifle on his shoulder with the

<sup>49</sup> The origin to the use of the Hun derives from what is known as the “Hun Speech,” delivered by German Emperor Wilhelm II on July 27 1900. In his farewell to the German expeditionary corps that went off to fight the Boxer Rebellion in Northern-China, he said: “Should you encounter the enemy, he will be defeated! No quarter will be given! Prisoners will not be taken! Whoever falls into your hands is forfeited. Just as a thousand years ago the Huns under their King Attila made a name for themselves, one that even today makes them seem mighty in history and legend, may the name German be affirmed by you in such a way in China that no Chinese will ever again dare to look cross-eyed at a German.” See: Wilhelm II, “Hun Speech,” *German History in Documents and Images*, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=755](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=755), translated from original German in Johannes Prenzler (ed.), *Die Reden Kaiser Wilhelms II in den Jahren 1896-1900*, 2nd volume. (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam jun., 1904): pp. 209-12.

<sup>50</sup> O.M. Viscount Bryce et al., *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1915), p. 50.

child up it, its little arms stretched out once or twice.<sup>51</sup>

Translated in thirty languages, this official report, which would largely be debunked by journalists and propaganda theorists after the war, provided an effective framing of these “Hunnish” atrocities and made frontpage news all over the world, not the least in the United States.

Only a few days before the Bryce Report was published, on May 7, 1915, German U-boats had sunk the RMS Lusitania ocean liner traveling from New York to Liverpool. Had the outrage about this attack on a commercial liner not already been enormous, now the event could be framed further through the Bryce Report: as yet another barbaric act of the Huns. The fact that the Germans had warned the ship publicly not to travel through the British waters, which had been declared a war zone, and that the commercial liner was most probably carrying ammunition to serve the war effort of the British, proved futile “facts” in the light of one hundred and eight American citizens that died as a result of the attack and the larger outrage caused by the atrocity stories.<sup>52</sup> One horror story began to amplify the other, and the propaganda frame was set: the struggle was between enlightened democratic civilization on one hand versus barbaric conquest of the “Huns” on the other. This propaganda frame of a clash of civilizations will be revisited throughout this thesis, from the Cold War to the War on Terror. American President Woodrow Wilson declared war on April 6, 1917. Although the propaganda work of the British cannot be given the weight of being the single reason for bringing the United States to its side, it most certainly provided the legitimizing framework by effectively portraying and manufacturing evidence of German deceit and atrocities that would help the American people to support Wilson’s military involvement.

With the weakening of the German army and major unrest within the country, armistice was declared November 11, 1918 and maintained until the signing of the peace treaty with Germany on June 28, 1919. And whereas in Britain the activities of the propaganda bureaus would largely cease, their experiment with Wellington House and subsequently Crewe House would only prove to be the beginning of modern propaganda wars on an even more major and sophisticated scale, both during war and in peacetime. With the British propaganda bureaus disbanded, the scope of their operations and creation of falsehoods, especially with regard to alleged German war crimes, became public knowledge. A war that cost the lives of millions proved to

51 Ibid., p. 51.

52 Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century*, p. 39.

be based, in part, on sophisticated covert management of information and blatant lies. The modern propaganda effort in defense of democracy would prove to undermine the very legitimacy of democracy as such. In the next chapter, we will see how this sparked the beginning of public and academic debates on the importance of propaganda, and, more specifically, the question how these processes of manufacturing public opinion could ever be reconciled with the ideals of an informed and transparent democratic society.

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 as the result of a propaganda defeat. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler even recalled his personal encounter with British propaganda and its demoralizing effect on German troops.<sup>53</sup> Hitler’s anger at what he considered the failure of the German propaganda effort while fighting at the front was compensated by what he claims to have learned from the propaganda efforts of the British: “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.”<sup>54</sup> The German propaganda effort, Hitler claimed, failed due to the lack of a single, unified message:

[T]he war propaganda of the British and the Americans was psychologically right. By introducing the German as a barbarian and a Hun to its own people, it thus prepared the individual soldier for the terrors of war and helped guard him against disappointment. The most terrible weapon which was now being used against him then appeared to him only as the proof of the enlightenment already bestowed upon him, thus strengthening his belief that his government’s assertions were right, and on the other hand it increased his fury and hatred against the atrocious enemy.<sup>55</sup>

Hitler’s contempt for what he claimed to be the German scientific approach to propaganda, was expressed most strongly regarding what he considered the self-imposed guilt on the country after the war, claiming that “it would have been far better to burden the enemy entirely with this guilt, even if this had not been in accordance with the real facts, as was indeed the case.”<sup>56</sup> 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, where he further develo-

53 Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, pp. 187–88.

54 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 228.

55 Ibid., pp. 234–35.

56 Ibid., p. 237.

ped his theory on the importance of propaganda in relation to political organization. He saw propaganda not just as a message of persuasion, but as an effort to completely change organizational structures of society and reality as such, starting with the party aim to take over the government:

Propaganda [...] needs not to rack its brain about the importance of each individual it enlightens, about his ability, achievements, and understanding or of his character, while the organization has most carefully to collect from the masses of these elements those who really make possible the victory of the movement. Propaganda tries to force a doctrine upon an entire people; organization embraces in its frame only those who for psychological reasons do not threaten to become a brake to a further spreading of the idea. 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.<sup>57</sup>

Propaganda and organization, Hitler thus concludes, exist in a mutual relationship. Apropos, Jowett and O'Donnell observe how "the enemy's successful use of propaganda itself was used as a form of propaganda," as it allowed for British propaganda itself to become a scapegoat for the German military loss: it had not been a failed military effort, but a failed communication effort that led a heroic people to perish.<sup>58</sup>

Before engaging in a more detailed analysis of the impact of British propaganda on the rise of the field of modern post-WWI propaganda studies and its practice, let us make the following two observations regarding our concise summary of the British propaganda effort:

- The British propaganda effort, according to communication historians such as Taylor, and Jowett and O'Donnell, shows us that the technique of modern propaganda is inherent to both the development of modern democracy and of the Second Industrial Revolution – also termed the "Technological Revolution" or the beginning of the "Communications Revolution." Modern propaganda was geared at involving mass public opinion and this was possible due to the emergence of mass media. The possibili-

ty of such mass communication on an international scale formed the inheritance of the British Empire and its effort to control its colonies;

- The British propaganda effort further shows us, as Taylor concludes, that modern propaganda did not originate in so-called totalitarian regimes, as is commonly thought, but in British democracy. Its initial aim through Wellington House was to create a largely covert model of propaganda, and to promote the image to its own people and the Americans as a free, open government, fighting for democracy in the face of the brute atrocities enacted by the German "Huns."

Let us now continue to explore how the British propaganda operation impacted the discussions on modern propaganda after the First War, not in the least in the United States, which had been the main target of the propaganda efforts of Wellington House. A specific emphasis will be placed on the way in which these discussions focused on the question whether modern propaganda could co-exist with the ideals of open, democratic government.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 850.

<sup>58</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, p. 211.



## 1.3 DEMOCRACY AND PROPAGANDA

Communication historian J. Michael Sproule researched both the use of propaganda from the American side during the First World War, and, more specifically, the debates on the use and abuse of propaganda after the war that would give rise to the field of modern propaganda studies. In his study, he emphasizes that, more than in the British post-war context, the American discussion on the compatibility between propaganda and democracy formed one of the key points of debate.

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), under the directorship of journalist George Creel. Different from the propaganda effort of the British, the output of the CPI was generally of a more overt nature known as “white propaganda,” predominantly directed at domestic public opinion. This also explains Creel’s own characterization of the bureau not as a propaganda effort, but as a form of public information provision. Sproule described its efforts in different fields, ranging from the distribution of “Fifty million pamphlets,” the wide-spread “trolley posters illustrating all manner of ways that the ordinary citizen personally could help win the war” prepared by the Division of Pictorial Publicity, and its league of war artists, as well as an active liaison with commercial movie studios.<sup>59</sup> “[L]eading directors such as D.W. Griffith and major producers such as Carl Laemmle helped rally the new medium of film to Wilson’s cause,” resulting in propaganda classics such as Griffith’s *Hearts of the Worlds* (1918) depicting the war crimes of Germans in French villages, and Rupert Julian’s *The Kaiser, The Beast of Berlin* (1918).<sup>60</sup> The depiction of the German leadership as “beasts” in the output of the CPI clearly echoes the success of Wellington House’s frame of the barbarian “Hun.”

One of the most innovative contributions of the American propaganda effort were the “Four Minute Men,” a program developed in late spring 1917, consisting of “75,000 CPI-sponsored local speakers [which] were mounting the stages of America’s movie palaces in a program of oratory orchestrated from Washington.”<sup>61</sup> The efforts were effective in turning citizens into what Sproule calls “quasi-official agitators,” and even when the armistice was declared, it was hard to bring expurgation to an end:

59 J. Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 10–11.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

61 *Ibid.*

Despite the CPI's almost immediate disbanding campaigns against the so-called anti-Americanism of dissidents continued, not only in Congressional hearings on German propaganda but also when revulsion towards symbols of Germany was transferred to the Bolsheviks. This strange transmutation by which Commissar replaced Kaiser as the target of national ire eventually became known as the great postwar Red Scare [the fear of communist infiltration after the 1917 revolution in Russia, JS]. The panic reached its high point in late 1919 and early 1920.<sup>62</sup>

These descriptions are evidence of the strength that the framing of the barbaric "Hun" had on the public consciousness. But while the propaganda machineries of the British started to be dismantled, Sproule describes how "American disillusionment with the propagandas of the Great War began in Europe, where the sentiment spread among American troops that atrocity stories had been false concoctions and that the Germans had behaved no worse than any other combatants."<sup>63</sup> Phillip Gibbs, a prominent British war correspondent, expressed regret at having been complicit in the distortion of the narration of the war, and now began to lay bare the horrors at the frontline of combat, not in the least on the "anger of the Tommies themselves [a popular description of British soldiers, JS] at home-front propaganda that emphasized atrocities and sanitized the experience of war."<sup>64</sup> Gibbs observed the hollow falsity of atrocity stories, and he pointed out the contradiction posed by Britain's propaganda of saving "little Belgium" and its simultaneous crushing of independence efforts in Ireland. The American war correspondent George Seldes in his turn was so disillusioned with British and American propaganda, that he was actually surprised when some of the German atrocity stories proved to be true.<sup>65</sup>

Accusations on the side of manipulation in American propaganda and censorship, received reply from Creel in the form of his book *How We Advertised America* (1920), describing the work and intentions of the CPI: "It was the fight for the *minds* of men, for the 'conquest of their convictions,' and the battle-line ran through every home in every country."<sup>66</sup> He regarded critiques of censorship as false, and claimed the voluntary nature of self-censorship of those involved in the bureau's efforts to propagate its "stainless patriotism and unspotted Americanism." The work of the CPI, Creel concluded, was an effort of

62 Ibid., p. 15.

63 Ibid., p. 16.

64 Ibid., p. 17.

65 Ibid.

66 Creel, *How We Advertised America*, p. 3.

providing public information, not devising propaganda:

It is the pride of the Committee, as it should be the pride of America, that every activity was at all times open to the sun. No dollar was ever sent on a furtive errand, no paper subsidized, no official bought. From a thousand sources we were told of the wonders of German propaganda, but our original determinations never altered. Always did we try to find out what the Germans were doing and then *we did not do it*.<sup>67</sup>

In the case of Creel, his emphasis on the support of private initiatives and organizations, ranging from newspapers to artists contributing to war exhibitions, explained his description of the work of the propaganda bureau as the "world's greatest adventure in advertising,"<sup>68</sup> and showed how in the last two centuries shifting powers from church to state in the development of propaganda were supplemented by a third power, as an inherent part of the importance of industrialization: that of private business and marketing. Exactly this third power of private business entering the sphere of politics was at stake in what Sproule explains as the movement of "muckrakers" – what we today would refer to as "activist" journalists – who rose to fame in the Progressive Era in America preceding the First World War. The muckrakers aimed at exposing corruption in government and private business, and the reliance of one upon the other. Creel himself, before joining the Ministry of Public Information, had been such a muckraker journalist, investigating and critiquing a grant by the Rockefeller Foundation that had been used to study the causes of industrial unrest.<sup>69</sup> Sproule considered these muckrakers as the first manifestation of propaganda critique in the United States, even before the term propaganda itself would gain notoriety after the First World War.

Another important influence on the post-WWI discussion about the social influence of modern propaganda was the work that had been done in the fields of sociology and psychology. The way in which crowds had been mobilized to serve the war effort made the study of "group psychology" all the more poignant. Important to mention in this context is French sociologist and social psychologist Gustave Le Bon, who had become an influential figure in this debate owing to his book *Psychologie des Foules* (1895). Le Bon analyzed the unconscious actions of crowds and studied what he regarded as different types of

67 Ibid., p. 13.

68 Ibid., p. 4.

69 Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, pp. 22–52.

crowds, categorized in “heterogeneous crowds” such as street crowds, juries, and parliamentary assemblies and “homogeneous crowds” such as sects, casts and classes.<sup>70</sup> Le Bon’s concept of the crowd would influence the widely used notion of the “herd,” which he describes as an “unstable flock”<sup>71</sup> consisting of a “swarm of isolated individuals.”<sup>72</sup> According to Le Bon, such a flock or swarm assembled in a crowd is characterized by certain dynamic psychological characteristics, as its assembly amplifies “their heroism, their weaknesses, their impulsiveness, and their violence.”<sup>73</sup> Such characteristics in the context of the crowd are never stable, and Le Bon considers the ease with which a crowd can be influenced as a proof of its barbaric nature. In the crowd, Le Bon saw the loss of individual thought almost as a form of collective hypnosis. It is easy to read in this description the shift of an ordinary public transforming into quasi-official agitators under influence of propaganda as mentioned by Sproule.

In his post-war book *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (1921) neurologist and founder of the field of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud – whose work would have similar impact on propaganda studies to that of Le Bon – critically examined the latter’s work on the formation of the crowd. It is important to mention that although the English translation of the book mentions “group psychology,” the term “Massenpsychologie” is better translated as “mass psychology.” The difference in terminology would be that the “crowd” refers to an unorganized assembly or gathering, whereas the “group” presupposes an element of organization. In the case of the “mass” or “masses,” we could still be dealing with both crowds and groups, but in a far larger scale, possibly with an overall organizational model or organizational element in place. Freud, as we will see, speaks of the masses as a constellation that is not without an organizational component, mostly in the form of a leader figure.

While Freud generally approved Le Bon’s analysis, he also critically observes that “If the individuals in the group [*Masse*] are combined in a unity, there must surely be something to unite them, and this bond might be precisely the thing that is characteristic of a group.”<sup>74</sup> Freud asks, for example, if a crowd indeed acts as if hypnotized, who then is

70 Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), pp. 165–66.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 229.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

74 Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psycho-analysis, 1949), p. 7. Again, we see that, in original German, “group” is mentioned as *Masse* (crowd): “Wenn die Individuen in der Masse zu einer Einheit verbunden sind, so muß es wohl etwas geben, was sie einander bindet, und dies Bindemittel könnte gerade das sein, was für die Masse charakteristisch ist.” See: Sigmund Freud, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (Leipzig/Vienna/Zürich: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1921), p. 7.

the one hypnotizing them? In other words: what is the role of the leader figure, the hypnotizer? Freud adds that “in a group the individual is brought under conditions which allow him to throw off the repressions of his unconscious instincts,”<sup>75</sup> and, as a consequence, this can lead to “high achievements in the shape of abnegation, unselfishness, and devotion to an ideal. While with isolated individuals personal interest is almost the only motive force, with groups it is very rarely prominent.”<sup>76</sup> Freud thus complicates the image of the crowd as an instant hysteric and dangerous “barbaric” entity, incapable of any good, but instead breaks with such abstraction by analyzing its organizational model through the figure of the leader, and simultaneously highlights the potential transformative capacity of a mass in terms of transcending individual self-interest.

We will see how, in the approach to the question of the effects of propaganda, the opposing views between the crowd as a “swarm of individuals” and the mass as a collective formation deriving from specific, individual libidinal desires, marks a significant difference in the perception of the agency of the human subject.<sup>77</sup> Is the human capable of individual and mass intelligence, and could it thus operate within a properly democratic framework; or is the human by definition shaped by uncontrollable desires and influences, which, both for the individual and for the mass, demand structural direction and control to maintain a secure society? One could say that herein lies the essence of respectively the progressive and conservative world views that would define different conceptions of modern propaganda after the First World War.

As a result of the work of journalists that exposed the falsehoods of propaganda from both the British and American side, the early 1920s saw a rise in debates in the United States on the supposed power of propagandists over public affairs. A key exchange in this debate took place between the American philosopher John Dewey and writer Walter Lippman, the latter being a former muckraker journalist and a repentant public supporter of American involvement in the First World War. Whereas Lippmann considered the media complicit in the propaganda schemes of the First World War, contributing to creating “pseudo-realities” that benefited the propagandist, Dewey, while recognizing this danger, felt this was all the more reason to invest in a critical and

75 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

77 Daniel Pick deepens the relation between the work of Le Bon and Freud, emphasizing the importance of the latter, when concluding that the contribution of Freud’s work lies in the manner that he broke the idea that the individual preceded the group or crowd, and replaces it for a more complex interchange between group and individual formation through libidinal economies: “Before Freud’s account, it can be argued, crowd theory took the individual to precede the group, as concept; after Freud, we are not so sure.” Daniel Pick, “Freud’s ‘Group Psychology’ and the History of the Crowd,” *History Workshop Journal*, No. 40 (Autumn 1995): pp. 39–61.

educational journalism so to keep ruling powers in check. Both, essentially, were invested in the question of the role of modern propaganda in democracy.

What had sparked the debate was Lippmann's book *Public Opinion* published in 1922. In his writing, Lippmann scorned the idea of public opinion as something that results naturally from a given community, claiming that "democracies have made a mystery out of public opinion."<sup>78</sup> For Lippmann, the idea of democracy that was shaped in the Progressive Era could only be sustainable within small communities, whereas the Communications Revolution and its impact on the First World War had proved that such communalism had become completely outdated. Politics, trade, and war had become questions of geopolitics, which Lippmann refers to as the "invisible world," compared to the pseudo-worlds constructed through propaganda. How would the average American, he asked, be capable of making informed judgments through the democratic process when it superseded his or her direct self-interests? Did the invisible world and the construction of pseudo-realities not operate far beyond the realm of power manageable within democracy? As a consequence, Lippmann makes a plea for a more rational understanding of the shaping of public opinion – that which he famously referred to as the "manufacture of consent":

[While] democrats have been absorbed in trying to find a good mechanism for originating social power, that is to say a good mechanism of voting and representation, they neglected almost every other interest of men. For no matter how power originates, the crucial interest is in how power is exercised. What determines the quality of civilization is the use made of power. And that use cannot be controlled at the source.<sup>79</sup>

The real interest of the human, in other words, is to be properly governed, and for government to produce "a certain minimum of health, of decent housing, of material necessities, of education, of freedom, of pleasures, of beauty."<sup>80</sup> Not acknowledging this implies that one's societal development will remain trapped in "the failure of self-governing people to transcend their casual experience and their prejudice," compelled to act without a "reliable picture of the world."<sup>81</sup> This reliable picture of the world, Lippmann concludes, cannot be left in the hands of popular media, as it suffers under the weight of producing news, ra-

78 Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 254.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 312.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 313.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 365.

ther than truths, and is exposed to commercial interests, ranging from sales to acquiring proper advertising. Instead, Lippmann proposes an independent government department that should be brought into life to guarantee the controlled and factual access to public information, untouched by private interests.<sup>82</sup> Only this would allow the best of democracy – the distribution of truthful information – to be preserved in the age of modern propaganda. Dewey disagreed, and responded in his 1922 review of Lippmann's book 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.<sup>83</sup>

Dewey believed that government-sanctioned information, however independent its providers may seem to be on paper, runs exactly the same risks of structuring information and public opinion based on its own interests, and thus, while recognizing the problems of modern propaganda and public opinion in modern democracy, Dewey continues to emphasize the importance of journalism as a "fundamental general education," which, both necessary and difficult to achieve, is exactly the challenge of what he terms as the "enterprise of democracy."<sup>84</sup> Dewey would come to characterize this search as the shift from a Great Society to the "Great Community," essentially declaring democracy as "the community itself," shaped through "symbols [that] produced a mutuality of desire and purpose whereby energies were transformed into shared meanings that provided an alternative to pure force."<sup>85</sup> This shaping of the community could not be formed by voting alone, but needed a collective engagement in the shaping of critical, public opinion through journalism and education.

We see how the different portrayals of the human subject discussed through the work of Le Bon and Freud are also strongly present in this debate. Lippmann's belief that a community's ideas need, one way or another, to be properly manufactured to facilitate participa-

82 Lippmann refers to the key protagonist of such independent government departments as the "disinterested expert": disinterested here meant in the sense of being at a critical distance. *Ibid.*, p. 375.

83 John Dewey, "Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann," *The New Republic*, May 3, 1922, pp. 286–87.

84 *Ibid.*

85 Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, p. 81.

tion in democratic life leans on the idea of the crowd as a scattered and undirected entity; whereas Dewey strongly upholds the idea of the possibility of a mass to be developed as critical democratic force through mass emancipation and education. One could say that Lippman's perception of the community comes closer to Le Bon's notion of the crowd, whereas Dewey's comes closer to Freud's observations on the potentials of the mass.

In great contrast to Dewey's fundamental belief in the need to turn from the discussion of propaganda to developing models of democratic general education, Lippmann's analysis proved greatly beneficial to public relations founder Edward Bernays, a nephew of Freud. Bernays aimed at effectively commodifying the libidinal economy that Freud observed within Le Bon's definition of the crowd in order to manage the horde. In his book *Crystalizing Public Opinion* (1923), published only a year after Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, he attempted to translate the need for establishing new models of social order upon the horde, which he considered incapable of self-governing in the age of mass communication. In response to this incapacity he proposed the "public relations counsel":

Society is made up of an almost infinite number of groups, whose various interests and desires overlap and interweave inextricably. The same man may be at the same time the member of a minority religious sect, supporter of the dominant political party, a worker in the sense that he earns his living primarily by his labor, and a capitalist in the sense that he has rents from real estate investments or interest from financial investments. [...] It is from the constant interplay of these groups and of their conflicting interests upon each other that progress results, and it is this fact that the public relations counsel takes into account in pleading his cause.<sup>86</sup>

Bernays himself had been employed by Creel's Committee on Public Information, and what he referred to as public relations was essentially a proposal to introduce the strategies of propaganda developed during wartime to reshape what he and Lippmann considered the problems of democracy during peacetime: problems that Bernays considered to be the scattered and conflicting interests that defined modern society. But different from Creel, who rejected the very notion of propaganda, Bernays presented himself as something of a "propagandist for propaganda," claiming that modern propaganda was neither good nor evil in

86 Bernays, *Crystalizing Public Opinion*, p. 143.

and of itself, but dependent on its use and intentions.<sup>87</sup> On this transition from wartime propaganda to peacetime propaganda, he remarked in his book *Propaganda* (1928):

[T]he 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.<sup>88</sup>

Bernays embodied the belief that the engagement of private companies and corporations to develop the tools of propaganda for the American participation of the war essentially embodied the solution to the problems of democracy:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute of an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society.<sup>89</sup>

Rather than being in contradiction with democracy, Bernays considered the work of such engineers of public opinion the solution for its problems. Whereas politics called upon the mobilization of the discomforts, anxieties, and passions of the masses – with risk of chaos and revolt – the task of the public relations counsel was to pre-emptively anticipate the desires of the "horde," to provide satisfying and regulated forms of competition and social cohesion through commercial services, entertainment, and commodities. Democracy is concerned with the rule of the *demos*, the people, but Bernays essentially claimed – in complete opposition to Dewey – that the people could not know what they wanted: their self-interest was limited by the pseudo-realities they lived in, and just as Lippmann argued, this makes it impossible for them to separate their private from common interests. The public

87 Mark Crispin Miller, "Introduction," in Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*, p. 15.

88 Bernays, *Propaganda*, pp. 54–55.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

relations counsel, through the invisible government of the state as well as corporate structures of power, 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,”<sup>90</sup> Bernays claimed. And the state needed to learn and adapt to this new invisible government that began its rule in the era of the free market:

Politics was the first big business in America. Therefore there is a good deal of irony in the fact that business has learned everything that politics has to teach, but that politics has failed to learn very much from business methods of mass distribution of ideas and products.<sup>91</sup>

An important contribution of Bernays in this regard was the development of so-called focus groups, which comprised of prototypical consumers – for example, American female caretakers in the household – were interviewed in group sessions, to map out their intimate relations with and possible psychological objections to consumer products. By using focus groups, Bernays for example found out that the lack of success of an all-inclusive baking powder was due to the fact that it instilled a sense of guilt in the caretaker in relation to her family: the lack of labor invested in the product that was already “all inclusive” to start with made her role as a care provider obsolete. A successful resolution was the creation of an all-inclusive backing powder where one only had to add one egg. The emotional investment of the egg – a symbol of birth and care – effectively eliminated the sense of guilt that had been inherent to purchasing a product that threatened to make care labor obsolete.<sup>92</sup> Bernays also did groundbreaking work to create the necessary conditions for the development of consumer needs that had been previously non-existent. Famous is the example of his lobby among architects to include music rooms in their designs of upper-middle-class houses, which effectively influenced the wider sale of pianos. By creating the presumption that a certain standard of living could not do without a specific commodity, he did not just promote the purchase of objects, but of entire, previously non-existent markets.<sup>93</sup>

For Bernays, such campaigns of psychological engineering were in no way conflicting with his definition of democracy. On the contrary:

90 Ibid., p. 120.

91 Ibid., p. 111.

92 See also the essayistic four-part documentary series *Century of the Self* (2002) on the rise of psychoanalysis applied to the field of public relations produced by the BBC and directed by Adam Curtis.

93 Bernays, *Propaganda*, pp. 78–79.

they were ways of satisfying desires of the masses even before they themselves knew what to desire or why. Bernays’s vision of such forms of engineered democracy formed the centerpiece of the New York World Fair, of which Bernays was the public relations director.<sup>94</sup> Entitled “The World of Tomorrow,” the fair featured national pavilions as well as corporate pavilions promoting private interests.<sup>95</sup> 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 “Democracy,” designed by Henry Dreyfuss and crafted in accordance with Bernays’s notion of invisible government. The model embodied something of a corporate-utopian urban infrastructure made possible through the replacement of representative government by the public relations industry. In Democracy’s brochure, writer and cultural critic Gilbert Seldes adopted the tone of real estate promotional materials when he wrote

Democracy is an entirely practical city [...]. And there can be a dozen or a hundred such groups of towns and villages and centers in the United States, each with commercial and agricultural and industrial interests. The government exists to see that these interests harmonize [...]. The City of Tomorrow which lies below you is as harmonious as the stars in their courses overhead – No anarchy – destroying the freedom of others – can exist here. The streets, the houses, the public buildings, the waterways, the parks, and the parking spaces – all are built in relation to all the others.<sup>96</sup>

What Bernays aimed for through his model of Democracy, was basically the replacement of the state by corporations 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. This is crucial to understand the mode of governance of the modern democracy, which in actuality is not a city, but rather a corporation in the form of a city.

94 In an address to the World’s Fair Committee on April 7, 1937 in New York, Bernays explained his vision as following: “This World’s Fair can help make America safe for American democracy in the future. The world will move forward with the World’s Fair. Let us make the values of Americans real to Americans. Let us sell America to Americans.” See: Edward Bernays, *The New York World’s Fair: A Symbol for Democracy* (New York: The Merchant’s Association of New York, 1937). The small booklet was published without page numbers.

95 Trylon and Perisphere and the model for Democracy within, is documented extensively in Stanley Appelbaum, *The New York World’s Fair 1939/1940* (New York: Dover Publications, 1977) and Bill Cotter, *Images of America: The 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2009). See also: Paul Greenhalgh, *FairWorld: A History of World’s Fairs and Expositions from London to Shanghai 1851–2010* (Winterbourne: Papadakis, 2011), pp. 176–84.

96 Gilbert Seldes, *Your World of Tomorrow* (New York: Rogers-Kellogg-Stillson, 1939), p. 15.

Bernays's propaganda work in the realm of politics was not limited to engineering his vision of the future Democracy, but also extended to the export of American democracy in the domain of the military. Apart from his governmental work in the Committee for Public Information during the First World War, his most notorious political involvement was in the overthrow of the democratically elected Guatemalan government of Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, whose 1952 Land Reform program had enraged wealthy planters and United Fruit Company officials. Bernays, who worked as a public relations official for United Fruit Company, effectively devised a campaign branding Guzman as a communist.<sup>97</sup>

In Bernays's conception of modern propaganda we find a strong resonance of the Le Bon's conception of the human. Le Bon frequently features in Bernays's work in relation to his conviction of the need to develop models of group identification and persuasion through the invisible government facilitated by public relation counsels. But the methods employed to do so are strongly tied to the work of Freud, as regards the development of effective strategies of subconscious identification that address the libidinal drives that bring a people to purchase an all-inclusive baking powder, establish a new form of Democracy, or convince the masses of a Guatemalan communist threat to modern American democracy and its companies. More than any propagandist, Bernays articulated an all-encompassing world view ranging from politics to the economy and the military, of which modern propaganda formed the fundament.

Whereas Bernays, compared to Lippmann and Dewey, is himself the unrepentant propagandist, the political scientist Harold D. Lasswell would become the main authority on modern propaganda in the domain of political science, and at a later stage of his life would serve in the Library of Congress in analyzing Nazi propaganda. The major work that brought him to fame was his book *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), strongly grounded in the work of Dewey and Freud. Important was his pragmatic and systematic take on the subject of propaganda in modern democracy. Lasswell argued that "The truth is that all governments are engaged to some extent in propaganda as part of their ordinary peace-time functions. While, therefore, the presumption exists against propaganda work by a democratic government, this statement should not be taken too literally."<sup>98</sup> Rather than claiming that democracy should be protected from propaganda, which

Dewey's analysis seemed more geared toward, Lasswell emphasized the idea that for democratic propaganda "there is nothing to be gained by concealment," claiming that "nothing is lost, if all propaganda operations in neutral and allied countries are carried on openly."<sup>99</sup>

In his analysis of propaganda, Lasswell stressed the importance of understanding the necessary preconditions for propaganda to be of any effect: "Successful propaganda depends upon the adroit use of means under favorable conditions. A means is anything which the propagandist can manipulate; a condition is anything to which he must adapt,"<sup>100</sup> and in this regard he mentions specifically "the communication network, similarities and differences in customs and institutions, interpenetration of population, economic ties, relative military power."<sup>101</sup> According to Lasswell, these conditions were well understood by the British, who were capable of gaining control over the cable network but also had been careful in developing methods of cultural identification toward the Americans. Contrary to the military appeal that the Germans made to the Americans, the "British talked about a war to protect international law and to guarantee the sanctity of treaties, and they fought against a monster, known as autocratic militarism, in the name of democracy."<sup>102</sup> Lasswell argued that effective propaganda meant an effective understanding of its proper conditions, cutting through a variety of domains: technological, cultural, and psychological in relation to its target audience, as well as in military and economic terms. The psychological impact of propaganda, Lasswell claimed, was dependent on the understanding of the societal conditions in which it would operate and cause its effects.

Lasswell, similar to all previously discussed post-war propaganda theorists, took a political position toward modern propaganda, by essentially advocating a democratic propaganda model, while simultaneously developing a model of propaganda analysis. In this light, it is relevant to underline that Lasswell did not seem to consider democratic propaganda as a choice, but rather as an inevitability of the modern age:

Propaganda is a reflex to the immensity, the rationality and willfulness of the modern world. It is the new dynamic of society, for power is subdivided and diffused, and more can be won by illusion than by coercion. [...] To illuminate the mechanisms of propaganda is to reveal the secret springs of social action, and to expose to the

97 Stephen Schlesinger, Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 79–91.

98 Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, p. 14.

99 Ibid., p. 15.

100 Ibid., p. 185.

101 Ibid., p. 189.

102 Ibid., pp. 198–97.

most searching criticism our prevailing dogmas of sovereignty, of democracy, of honesty, and of the sanctity of individual opinion. The study of propaganda will bring into the open much that is obscure, until, indeed, it may no longer be possible for an Anatole France to observe with truth that “Democracy (and indeed, all society) is run by an unseen engineer.”

For Lasswell, propaganda studies itself was the crucial component for coping with the existence of modern propaganda in democracy. It would not disappear through education, as Dewey suggested, but it could be understood through education, and as such be neutralized to a certain extent.

What we essentially see when comparing these different analyses of the conditions, functions, and practices of propaganda, are sets of different political world views. Between Dewey for example, who seeks an educated democracy resilient against propaganda reminiscent of the Progressive Era, and Lippmann who seeks a form of democratic governance that could protect its public from the inevitability of propaganda, we witness two different views concerning the question whether politics is even able to counter the phenomenon of modern propaganda. Lasswell believes in a third way between Dewey and Lippmann in his hope of a transparent propaganda. Sproule nonetheless argues that these quests for a “democratic propaganda,” however passionately debated in the interwar era, would find the more progressive views of a democratic propaganda at the losing end: “Working separately, humanist students of communication produced no theory-praxis synthesis strong enough to compete with the growing measurement-management orientation in social science.”<sup>103</sup> The dominance of quantitative research in the field of propaganda studies regarding group formation and public opinion, was far removed from the political radicalism of a figure such as Dewey, and as such “early socialist flirtations” of propaganda studies would be replaced with “a benevolent liberalism,” bringing Sproule to conclude that “Generally, the measurement-oriented scholars reflected the classic American intellectual stance of wanting to see society made both efficient and democratic.”<sup>104</sup> In sum, propaganda studies and propaganda practices would lean towards the Bernaysian worldview. As Lasswell had observed: modern propaganda thrives using the possibilities of a particular moment in time, and Bernays, more than any other protagonist of propaganda studies, had understood that in both theory and practice.

103 Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, p. 78.

104 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

In 1941, one year after the United States had declared war upon Germany once more, Bernays spoke somewhat mockingly about Lasswell’s analysis of propaganda in the First World War, regarding the work as that of a “social psychologist looking back over past events” in an attempt to “isolate the factors of marketing.”<sup>105</sup> Bernays felt a factual assessment followed by a practical application was far more relevant. The experience from the First World War resulted in an “engineering approach,” which successfully led to the “engineering of consent in a democracy.”<sup>106</sup> These methods were in itself neither good nor bad, but a matter of choice. The United States had to choose the democratic path of the engineering approaches at hand, and for this, a master plan executed by a “psychological staff” was necessary: essentially, a set of public relations counsels for the effective “selling our democratic ideals of freedom, equality and orderly justice.”<sup>107</sup>

As sophisticated as Bernays’s modern propaganda strategies were, the worldview in which he had them operate was simplistic. Good propaganda was democratic propaganda. But the moral and ethical questions and objections of his contemporaries regarding who exactly controlled the public relations councils that were to direct the invisible government were cast aside. The free market and public opinion in its turn would judge the democratic propagandist on the legitimacy of his work. But this of course is a catch 22, as the manufacture of consent in public opinion is exactly the stated goal of the modern propagandist. By the time the Second World War broke out, modern propaganda had become a reality of modern society, and those who effectively practiced propaganda had the upper hand over those attempting to catch up with its effects. The Second World War would, at the same time, come to characterize the term propaganda in popular discourse as the definition of evil in the hands of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, undermining Bernays’s positive reading of the relation between propaganda and democracy.

Before engaging in a more detailed account of the post-World War II discourse on modern propaganda, let us make the following two observations regarding the post-World War I debate on modern propaganda in the context of the United States:

- The post-World War I debates on propaganda in the United States dealt with whether or not democracy was reconcilable with propaganda, in part through the work of Le Bon and Freud that

105 Edward Bernays, “The Marketing of National Policies: A Study of War Propaganda,” *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Jan. 1942): pp. 236–44, at p. 236.

106 *Ibid.*

107 *Ibid.*



questioned the very nature of crowd and mass formations in the process of manufacturing public opinion;

- The post-World War I debates on modern propaganda in the United States went hand in hand with the actual application of new models of modern democratic propaganda: the manner in which Creel House included models of advertising and commercial campaigns in the propagation of the war effort, was further deepened in modern propaganda as a form of public relations combining business and political interests alike in an attempt to engineer modern democracy.

Let us now explore, in the final section of this chapter, how the Second World War affected the discourse on and practice of modern propaganda, in a way which has had a lasting effect up to our present day.

#### 1.4 PROPAGANDA AS PERFORMANCE

Bernays's lessons did not go unnoticed during the propaganda effort of the United States, once it set out for a war against the Nazi regime. Soldiers embarking to Europe received a pamphlet entitled *What is Nazi Propaganda?* (1944), published by the War Department, in which the Disney cartoon character Donald Duck describes the history, function, and effects of modern propaganda.<sup>108</sup> The pamphlet describes the strategies of Hitler and Goebbels in manipulating the German people by mass manifestations that “hypnotized” its attendants, directing the resentments of the people that suffered the consequences of the Versailles Treaty on “trade unions,” “communists,” “democracies,” and, most importantly, the figure of the “Jew” and its league of international capitalism that had sold out the “Aryan” Germans after the First World War.<sup>109</sup> In response to this, the pamphlet argues, a different propaganda is needed, a “counter-propaganda,” 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.”<sup>110</sup>

We observe a Bernaysian touch in the claim that propaganda in a democracy by definition operates differently than the one in a dictatorship, as reflected in the pamphlet’s claims that “democratic countries must present the truth in their propaganda” and that “A free people will soon find out the truth in spite of official suppressions and distortions.”<sup>111</sup> This went even further, when the pamphlet explained that democratic propaganda was developed extensively in the form of public relations after the First World War: “Under the conditions of mass production and mass consumption, techniques of propaganda and public relations have been greatly developed to sell commodities and services and to engender good will among consumers, employees, other groups, and the public at large,”<sup>112</sup> concluding that

national propaganda in the throes of a war is aimed to bolster the security of the non-aggressor state and assure the eventual well-be-

108 Something of a counter-document would be Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart’s study of the imperialist, capitalist and orientalist – if not colonialist – narratives of the Donald Duck comic, first published in 1971 during the popular government of Salvador Allende. Whereas Donald in *What is Nazi Propaganda?* claims to do nothing but “reveal” the propaganda of the enemy, Dorfman and Mattelart introduce an analysis of the Disney comic as a propaganda vehicle of United States capitalist democracy. See: Ariel Dorfman, Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (New York: International General, 1991).

109 United States War Department, *What is Nazi Propaganda?* (London: Foxley Books Limited, 2009), p. 5.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

112 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

ing and safety of its citizens. No one would deny that this kind of propaganda, intelligibly administered, benefits every man, woman, and child in the land.<sup>113</sup>

This pamphlet may well have been one of the last officially government sanctioned documents that would pitch a democratic propaganda versus a dictatorial one, for the term would soon fall into disuse and disrepute once the Nazi regime was dismantled and the massive propaganda effort aimed at employing systemic violence on a gruesome scale came into full view of the international community. The pamphlet is a remnant of Bernays's legacy and his attempt to save the term propaganda for democracy, but eventually, the term "public relations" would be the one to prevail, even though Bernays – as we have seen previously – considered propaganda and public relations essentially to be the same thing.

Just as we observed in the post-World War I debates, the pamphlet makes an enormous rhetorical effort to keep the notion of modern propaganda within the realm of democratic values. On one hand, it does so by explaining propaganda as part of regular peacetime activities, such as the selling of commodities, associated with the free, democratic consumer society. The problem of course is that this pamphlet explaining propaganda is itself propaganda. The booklet is filled with cartoons of brave allied soldiers facing demonic Germans seducing average citizens with cakes while holding grenades behind their backs. We see a caricature of Goebbels literally seeding a farmland with "seeds of destruction" and a mad looking Hitler giving speeches to brainwashed and fat Nazi-soldiers while crooked Nazi-allied "Japs" seduce indigenous peoples it wished to conquer with jewels – the latter being all the more painful in the light of the massacres of indigenous peoples in the United States. And from beginning to end there is Donald Duck: the all-American narrator of the importance of democratic propaganda.<sup>114</sup>

Obviously, there are fundamental differences between US demo-

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>114</sup> In the Second World War, Disney characters were employed *en masse* to support the war effort. One of the most stunning examples might be the 1942 Donald Duck cartoon "Der Führer's Face," in which Donald finds himself as a Nazi in Germany, where he works 24 hours per day in a Nazi weapon factory. When Donald mentally crashes due to the excessive workload, he wakes up in his own bed. Upon realizing it was just a dream, he suddenly sees the shadow of what seems to be a Nazi officer saluting him – convinced that his own country has now been taken over as well, Donald immediately returns the shadow's Nazi salute. At that moment he realizes that he is actually standing in front of the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, and thus reassured he calmly returns to sleep. But at this brief moment, the Nazi salute is equated with the Statue of Liberty's pose. It shows how documents of propaganda can sometimes simultaneously be read against the grain as propaganda critique. See further Disney's self-produced historiography of its role during the war: John Baxter, *Disney During World War II: How the Walt Disney Studio Contributed to Victory in the War* (New York/Los Angeles: Disney Editions, 2014), pp. 60–64.

cratic consumer society and the German Nazi regime. In that sense, the models of society that are propagated cannot be unambiguously equated with each other. Also, the form that modern propaganda takes in these two countries was highly different, between the excessive uniformism and hierarchically imposed symbols, gestures, and slogans of the Nazi regime, versus the differentiated symbols of a society that propagates free choice in the products it consumes and the political parties it votes for. But neither is free from modern propaganda, and post-war theorists of propaganda would start to emphasize exactly this. The intention, means, and effects of propaganda can be framed in different ways, but modern propaganda, and the manner in which it relies on the achievements of the Second Industrial Revolution and its mass media, shows structural similarities across national and ideological boundaries. Rather than modern propaganda being solely the product of dictatorship, it has re-occurred in all highly industrialized nations ever since the First World War. In this final section, we will examine three important examples of propaganda analysis created after the Second World War. While their authors come from different traditions and geographies, they share a common investment in tracing the understanding of modern propaganda in relation to the massive technological and communication capacities of modern society.

The relation between modern mass society, American capitalist democracy, and European fascism was of specific interest to the many different sociologists, theorists, and philosophers connected to the so-called Frankfurt School, which emerged at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. Although not solely invested in modern propaganda theory as such, the subject is reoccurring in the work of, among others, the philosophers and sociologists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, especially with regard to the rise of anti-Semitism under the Nazi regime. The originally strongly Marxist-oriented Frankfurt School consisted of several members of Jewish descent, and whereas the question of anti-Semitism at first was cast aside due to the fact that Marxist theory of class struggle made the question of Jewish identity one of secondary importance, once many of the members of the Frankfurt School found themselves in exile in America as a result of the rise of the Nazi regime, the issue became more poignant.<sup>115</sup>

Adorno, who had been rejected for a teaching position due to his Jewish father, was forced into exile for fifteen years. While working at Oxford University, he was approached by the sociologist Paul Lazars-

<sup>115</sup> Martin Jay, "The Jews and the Frankfurt School: Critical Theory's Analysis of Anti-Semitism," *New German Critique*, Vol. 19, Special Issue 1: Germans and Jews (Winter 1980): pp. 137–49.

feld who invited him to join a project by his Office for Radio Research at Princeton. Adorno accepted, but his own interests would strongly conflict with the project's methodology of quantified measurement research. In American research these methods, as noted earlier by Sproule, had become common practice, but for Adorno, who was also a composer, this came as a shock, as he considered culture as "precisely that condition that excludes a mentality capable of measuring it."<sup>116</sup> This stance testifies to Adorno's critical position both with regard to the fascist political system that had forced him and his colleagues into exile, and toward modern capitalist consumer societies and the models of "applied" social science that it generated.

It is in the light of Adorno's experiences in Nazi Germany and American capitalist democracy that we will look at his post-World War II essay that we briefly mentioned before, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda" (1951), in which he assessed the heritage of Le Bon and Freud in relation to Nazi propaganda. What is important in the essay is the fact that Adorno links Freud's analysis of the importance of the leader-figure as the supplementary father-figure in the formation of the masses to a Marxist analysis of the specific conditions of modern society that enables such a protagonist to gain political influence in the first place. While Freud was not connecting his analysis of the leader figure to the rise of fascism – he actually referenced socialist agitation – Adorno connects this analysis specifically to the "fascist demagogue" and considers Freud's text as a testimony of someone who "foresaw the rise and nature of fascist movements."<sup>117</sup>

Adorno joins Freud in his critique of Le Bon by stating that the formation of the masses are not merely "de-individualized, irrational, easily influenced, prone to violent action and altogether of regressive nature," and further elaborates by stating that "the members of contemporary masses are at least *prima facie* individuals, the children of a liberal, competitive and individualistic society, and conditioned to maintain themselves as independent, self-sustaining units."<sup>118</sup> Through the fascist demagogue, the mass can be transformed into a unity, if it effectively appeals to the libidinal source of mass formation. But rather than presuming that the masses are primarily shaped through "primitive instincts," Adorno concludes with Freud that the "masses are not primitive men but display primitive attitudes contradictory to their *normal* rational behavior."<sup>119</sup> Fascism is a rebellion against civilization

116 Thomas Y. Levin and Michael von der Linn, "Elements of a Radio Theory: Adorno and the Princeton Radio Research Project," *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Summer 1994): pp. 316–24, at p. 320.

117 Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, p. 134.

118 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

119 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

not because it reoccurs as archaic, but because it actively reproduces the archaic with the aim of gaining power over its masses: "It is one of the basic tenets of fascist leadership to keep primary libidinal energy on an unconscious level so as to divert its manifestations in a way suitable to political ends."<sup>120</sup> The fascist demagogue thus represents an archaic inheritance that makes a passive-masochistic attitude of individuals in the masses possible and exploitable.

Adorno's reading of the effect of propaganda seems mainly a psychoanalytic one, which obviously resonates with our earlier discussion of Freud, as well as with that of Bernays's work, who set out to commodify unconscious libidinal desires to manufacture political consent and to build an effective business-driven economy. But what makes Adorno's text different and of importance to our further study of modern propaganda, is that he did not just test the relevance of Freud's analysis of the masses on the fascist doctrine, but also emphasized the specific societal conditions which, in his perception, made fascism a possibility in the first place when addressing its growth within a competitive and individualistic society. He continues this analysis specifically when speaking about the rise of the "profession" of the fascist agitator:

Their effectiveness is itself a function of the psychology of the consumers. Through the process of "freezing" [the end of progress and the beginning of repetition, JS], which can be observed throughout the techniques employed in modern mass culture, the surviving appeals have been standardized, similarly to the advertising slogans which proved to be most valuable in the promotion of business. This standardization, in turn, falls in line with the stereotypical thinking, that is to say, with the "stereopathy" of those susceptible to this propaganda and their infantile wish for endless unaltered repetition.<sup>121</sup>

Adorno describes a society in which modern mass culture and advertisement, as devised by public relation counsels such as Bernays, coincide with the most cynical examples of the role of modern propaganda in fascism. While Adorno never fully equates American capitalist society with the Nazi regime, he obviously gears his analysis toward modern mass culture as the breeding ground for fascism's violent doctrine:

Fascist propaganda has only to *reproduce* the existent mentality for its own purposes; it need not to induce a change – and the compulsive repetition which is one of its foremost characteristics will be

120 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

121 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

at one with the necessity for this continuous reproduction. It relies absolutely on the total structure as well as on each particular trait of the authoritarian character which is itself the product of an internalization of the irrational aspects of modern society.<sup>122</sup>

So, without equating fascism with modern society, Adorno observes an existent mentality, which is the product of repetition, referring both to the standardized mass culture that resulted from modern society, as well as to its instruments of mass communication and the authoritarian character of these mechanisms, which form the foundation that allows a total structure, such as the Nazi regime, to operate.

Such analysis will have left, to no surprise, many researchers with extremely rationalized approaches to the question of modern propaganda in the United States stupefied.<sup>123</sup> Even though we have seen in the previous section that engagement with the work of Freud occurs in the United States from Bernays to Lasswell, Adorno radically expands Freud's significance by connecting the manipulation of the subconscious to what in Marxist terms is called as the "substructure" of capitalist society itself. In this case, this substructure would be formed by aspects of the power structure of modern mass society, but whose effects in the superstructure cannot easily be traced back to it. Following Adorno, modern propaganda is not merely a question of intended propagandistic messages, but is located in the power structures of modern society itself. Because mass society exists, propaganda exists: the latter is the expression of the former. And while that expression might be characterized ideologically different in the case of capitalist democracy and fascist dictatorship, both owe their existence of this same substructure.

Adorno was not the only one to expand modern propaganda analysis in these terms, and in the context of post-World War II modern propaganda theory, some have made far more radical analogies between the propaganda of capitalist-democracy and fascism. One such figure is the French sociologist, philosopher, and theologian Jacques Ellul, who has written substantially on the subject of the Second Industrial Revolution as a Technological Revolution – resulting in what he calls the "Technological Society" – in relation to modern propaganda after the Second World War. In some instances, Ellul makes assessments of

122 Ibid., p. 150.

123 Sproule, for example, mentions the response of sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld to some of Adorno's studies in America: "Adorno treated the intrusion of the commodity market into music, arguing that the result had been the standardization of output, the development of commodity fetishism, and a pronounced regression to infantile listening. Lazarsfeld was incredulous that Adorno felt no compulsion to anchor such broad theoretical brush strokes with quantified data." Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, p. 79.

the relation between modern society and modern propaganda similar to Adorno, but he draws less from the work of Freud and more from the work of post-World War I propaganda studies in the United States, such as Lasswell's, and, to a lesser extent, Bernays's and Dewey's.

Ellul's perception of propaganda was strongly informed by his own engagement in the underground resistance against the Nazis during the French occupation, something that might explain the sometimes highly polemical tone of his texts. Furthermore, the very unconventional nature of his research orientations, reaching from his earlier investment in Marxism to his self-proclaimed position as a Christian – later in his life he would become known as a theoretical protagonist of "Christian anarchism" – must have made it difficult to classify Ellul's work historically, and, as a result, his status in contemporary propaganda and communications studies is quite ambiguous.<sup>124</sup>

Ellul's major works are the complementary volumes *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (1954), translated as *The Technological Society*, and *Propagandes* (1962), translated as *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. In the former, Ellul argues that "the most important feature of techniques today is that they do not depend on manual labor but on organization and on the arrangement of machines," with the consequence that "[t]echnique has become autonomous; it has fashioned an omnivorous world which obeys its own laws and which has renounced all tradition."<sup>125</sup> Technological Society, such is Ellul's assessment, overtakes the spheres in which humans decide politically on their self-determination: it decides for them. Ellul believes that the expansion of the state and the risk of extreme centralization such as he perceives in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and the Maoist People's Republic of China, is the result of the dictates of technology: for the state to remain in power, it has to radically consume the technical domains that have come to dictate human progress. Otherwise, technology will create its own pseudo-states giving rise to "organisms as vast and powerful as the state itself."<sup>126</sup> The pseudo-state here could be considered as the equivalent of Lippman's "invisible world" and Bernays "invisible government": parallel structures of power that operate outside the control of democratic politics. But what stands out in Ellul's argument is

124 Jowett and O'Donnell, for example, write that "we find Ellul's magnitude, especially his generalizing without regard for different cultural contexts [...] troublesome" (*Propaganda and Persuasion*, p. 4); Taylor refers to Ellul's work as "one of the most stimulating conceptual examinations of propaganda" (*Munitions of the Mind*, p. 11); Sproule is by far the most appreciative, when he speaks of the lack and necessity of a "broad thinking about propaganda" in the interwar period, and mentions Ellul as an example of a thinker who was able to bring such analysis about in a later stage (*Propaganda and Democracy*, p. 89).

125 Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 14. In this regard, Ellul argues further upon Lasswell's assessment of technique as "the ensemble of practices by which one uses available resources to achieve certain valued ends." Ibid., p. 18.

126 Ibid., p. 235.

that ownership over the Technological Society's means of production can only be relative, as he perceives technique as that which owns the technician, rather than the other way around.

In several ways, we have seen how Ellul's line of reasoning in relation to the field of propaganda studies seems to resonate well: both Lippmann and Lasswell critically discuss the rise of propaganda in relation to democracy as a discussion that is inevitable, rather than desirable. This is what Ellul refers to when he speaks of the "autonomy" of technology, which demands that humanity alter its convictions and ethics to become integrated into the inevitable developments that shape modern society.<sup>127</sup> This brings Ellul to his most radical claim in his discussion of the Technological Society, namely that the concept of the totalitarian state has been wrongly applied to the Nazi regime. This does not mean that Ellul is in any way relativist about the disastrous consequences of Nazism. However, he considers its policies of mass murder rather in terms of being extremely human, than inhuman. Consequently, he considers the "uselessness" of murder on a massive scale contradictory to actual totalitarianism, for under genuine totalitarianism

nothing useless exists, there is no torture; torture is a wasteful expenditure of psychic energy which destroys salvageable resources without producing useful results. There is no systematically organized famine, but rather a recognition of the pressing necessity of maintaining the labor force in good condition. There is nothing arbitrary, for the arbitrary represents the very opposite of technique, in which everything "has a reason" (not a final but a mechanical reason).<sup>128</sup>

So whereas Adorno takes from modern mass society the possibility of what he termed the total structure of fascism, Ellul radicalizes this hypothesis. He essentially claims that the real totalitarianism is yet to

127 In regard to the "autonomy" of either the Technological Society or its propaganda, David Menninger argues that for Ellul this autonomy is always relative. Even though its effects supersede present human intention, this does not mean that its construction is not a product of human necessity and desire: "In [Ellul's] estimation, the technical phenomenon of our time is not the result of an alien mechanical force acting independently on history. It is the ironic creation of exuberant human intentions evolving into uncompromising social necessities. [...] In Ellul's sociology, humankind's pride is that it forever creates its world, but its adversity lies in the constant threat of being overcome by its creation. The relation between individual and society turns out to contain a ceaseless reminder of past human choices and actions. In this situation, one may almost wish for alien forces to blame, but that would be submitting to illusion. Looking more closely at technique, this seemingly abstract and objective thing, we get a chilling sense of its immediacy. The phenomenon is in fact the product of dreams and choices to which we have surrendered ourselves. At its core, there is no other disembodiment than our own." David Menninger, "Politics or Technique? A Defense of Jacques Ellul," *Polity*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Autumn 1981): pp. 110–27, at p. 117.

128 Ellul, *The Technological Society*, p. 287.

come, and that the sacrifice will be the very possibility of a humanity that would allow for any form of doubt, inefficiency, or uselessness to interrupt mechanical reason. Even downright murder would be preferable, as it would still give proof of our humanity. In the endgame of the Technological Society, which Ellul often refers to as an "it," as something with its own internal dynamic – not a will, but an inevitable series of outcomes that largely stand outside of human control – a "new type of human being" emerges, whom Ellul describes as "mass man."<sup>129</sup>

In *Propaganda*, Ellul continues this line of reasoning. Propaganda's task in the Technological Society, Ellul argues, "is less and less to propagate ideologies; it now obeys its own laws and has become autonomous."<sup>130</sup> What Ellul argues throughout the book is that modern propaganda is a sociological phenomenon; an inevitable consequence of Technological Society. Propaganda for Ellul describes the process in which technology as it were "performs itself" in society, and in the process, strengthens its grip on all domains of human life. For this reason, there is need for propagandas in the plural: an interdisciplinary arsenal of technological tools to integrate humans in modern society. For Ellul, power is performed not primarily by humans, but by Technological Society upon humans, resulting in the construction of a reality defined and dominated by technique. Daniel van der Velden and Vinca Kruk of design collective Metahaven, describe this understanding of propaganda as an "interface," as a tool of mediation – of computing – between two or more interconnected systems. In Ellul's logic, the substructure of Technological Society is technique itself, which operates humans in a superstructure through its own propaganda interface.<sup>131</sup>

This analysis results in Ellul's claim that "propaganda no longer obeys an ideology."<sup>132</sup> As the 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 the Technological Society is the creation of what Ellul calls "total propaganda"<sup>133</sup> and its formation of the "invisible crowd."<sup>134</sup> With the notion of total propaganda Ellul refers to the full employment of all technical means – of all propagandas – whether in the private sphere in the form of radio and television, in the public

129 Ibid., p. 407.

130 Ellul, *Propaganda*, p. 196.

131 Propaganda overlays reality with an interface that dominates and kills what it was supposed to mediate." Metahaven, "Eating Glass: The New Propaganda," *e-flux journal*, 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennial: Supercommunity, August 18, 2015.

132 Ellul, *Propaganda*, p. 196.

133 Ibid., p. 9.

134 Ibid., p. 7.

sphere in the form of advertisement and mass manifestations, or in the sphere of labor, where a similar logic is employed to enforce our designated place as laborers in a society over which we have no longer any choice or saying.

We hear, in this line of reasoning, again the voice of Le Bon. But this time, the crowd is neither the hysterical and barbaric assembly, nor is this invisible crowd fully akin to Freud and Adorno's masses guided by a primordial father figure. In Ellul's totalitarian state of the Technological Society, people are compartmentalized, made efficient, resulting in an invisible crowd that is simultaneously a "lonely crowd."<sup>135</sup> Ellul concludes that "[b]ecause a mass society existed in western Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, propaganda became possible *and* necessary."<sup>136</sup> Technology has come to precede ideology, and in the process of feedback, becomes one and the same. Whereas Adorno argued that modern society created the conditions for both capitalist democracy and fascism, Ellul fully equates the two outcomes, with the risk that his own argument becomes as "totalitarian" – in this case completely flattening out the actual differences between ideologies.

Ellul cannot but consider the choice clear-cut: "Propaganda is a total system that one must accept or reject in its entirety," although due to his own totalizing theory, this seems problematic: for how to reject something that one is so utterly part of?<sup>137</sup> Or, in the same vein, how can Ellul inhabit a position outside of the Technological Society to theorize it, if indeed it is so all encompassing as he argues? Ellul claims that such an outside to Technological Society is possible as far as one is able to form organized groups, outside or on the fringes and frontiers of the Technological Society. In that light, Ellul references the peasantry that formed some of the strongest resistance both against the implementation of the Nazi regime as well as the forced collectivization of their lands in the Soviet Union.<sup>138</sup> And whereas Ellul argues that democracy is hardly free from propaganda, most certainly not the United States, he maintains that democracy can be the name of a force opposed to the Technological Society and its propaganda:

Propaganda ruins not only democratic ideas but also democratic behavior – the foundation of democracy, the very quality without which it cannot exist. The question is not to reject propaganda in the name of freedom of public opinion – which, as we well know,

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

is never virginal – or in the name of freedom of individual opinion, which is formed of everything and nothing – but to reject it in the name of a very profound reality: the *possibility* of choice and differentiation, which is the fundamental character of the individual in the democratic society.<sup>139</sup>

We will return to Ellul's idea of resistance at the end of this chapter. What is important for now to take from Ellul is his elaboration of the specific structures of power that emerged in modern mass technological society already hinted at by Adorno. While we will challenge the Ellulian notion that it does not matter in the name of which ideology these power structures are performed in society, his description of a propaganda feedback loop – propaganda as a performance of power with the aim of constructing a normative reality in the service of this very same power – will prove accurate and crucial in our task of defining modern propaganda.

A propaganda study that allows us to depart from Adorno's and Ellul's general abstractions is the book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988) by political theorist and linguist Noam Chomsky and media theorist Edward S. Herman. Their work attempts both to define the conditions of modern propaganda and subsequently proposes a propaganda model, to effectively analyze the data that manufactures consent on a quotidian basis, both in the context of dictatorships *and* democracies – or problematic combinations of the two. Chomsky and Herman refer specifically to Ellul's analysis of the necessity of modern propaganda to become naturalized for the Technological Society to inscribe itself into everyday human behavior.<sup>140</sup> But their work additionally involves quantified data analysis, a methodology that both Adorno and Ellul reject, and bypasses psychological analyses of the impact of modern propaganda on individuals or groups.

Chomsky and Herman employ their propaganda model specifically to gain an understanding of the massive scale of media communications surrounding global warfare in the context of the Cold War. In that light, they describe the aim of their propaganda model to analyze the "behavior and performance" of US media, essentially what we have discussed so far as the performance of power in modern society which we define as modern propaganda.<sup>141</sup> With the use of the term "performance," Chomsky and Herman do not refer to its artistic connotation,

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>140</sup> Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. lxi.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

but rather use it in terms of assessing the enactment of a certain goal or objective, in a similar way as one might speak of the “performance” of a company and its employees.

Nonetheless, we will benefit throughout this thesis from expanding this notion of performance to the domain of the arts, when we think for example of the importance of embodiment in artistic performance in relation to the embodiment of propaganda: the internalization by individuals of certain convictions and behaviors that serve a propagandistic purpose. Performance scholar 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”, which can apply to “a traditional theatre performance in a proscenium theater 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.”<sup>142</sup> It is interesting to note that Fischer-Lichte moves effortlessly from defining performance in an artistic context to a political one. Similarly, many propaganda studies which 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,<sup>143</sup> or that of Marshall Soules, who discusses propaganda as a form of deception in war and advertisement, but effortlessly ends up discussing performative deception in relation to political performance art.<sup>144</sup>

Throughout our historical exploration of propaganda, we have witnessed a dual logic to propaganda as performance. If we apply performance to the work of Ellul, for example, it relates to the performance of power by and in Technological Society; Technological Society is both the agent and subject of modern propaganda. Through the work of Freud and Adorno we have also witnessed how individuals embody and perform propaganda. Performance as propaganda can be used to simultaneously describe the process in which power is performed upon people on a macro-scale, but also to demonstrate the way people internalize and perform power in a micro-scale. Tillman’s book is a good example in that regard, as the Nazi salute was mandated from above, declared on July 13, 1933, as “a general civic duty (..) mandatory in all party and state buildings and at commemorative sites.”<sup>145</sup> But the

142 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies* (London/New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 18.

143 Tilman Allert, *The Hitler Salute: On the Meaning of a Gesture* (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 90.

144 Marshall Soules, *Media, Persuasion and Propaganda* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 234-37.

145 Allert, *The Hitler Salute*, p. 30.

actual aim was that in everyday life, simple exchanges and social intimacies would increasingly become altered:

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.<sup>146</sup>

The Hitler salute, in Allert’s words, “confiscated the act of greeting,” in the process in which the performance of power on a macro-scale impacts its day to day practice on a micro-scale. The mandate is an imposition, the day to day enactment an embodiment.<sup>147</sup> Power is performed upon us, but so do we internalize and perform power. We will refer to this dual process as the macro-performative and micro-performative dimensions of propaganda, and through the work of Chomsky and Herman we will see that it is exactly this performative interplay that defines propaganda. In other words, propaganda does not “perform,” but it is itself a multi-layered performance. In the case of Chomsky and Herman, we will focus on the political dimension of propaganda as performance, whereas in our next chapter we will deepen its artistic dimension.

Published one year before the fall of the Berlin wall, *Manufacturing Consent* traces the role of propaganda specifically in the domain of mass media in the years of the Cold War and the sphere of anti-communist hysteria in the United States. Mass media in Chomsky and Herman’s analysis encompass far more than journalistic institutions and corporations, touching on larger questions of ownership in society and its impact on the construction of reality at large. While invested in questions on the relation between modern society and propaganda similar to those of Adorno and Ellul, the book follows the tradition of American muckraker activism by visibilizing unacknowledged interests between political, economic and media institutions.

Chomsky and Herman define mass media as “a system of communicating messages and symbols to the general populace,” with the function to “amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them

146 Ibid., p. 33.

147 Ibid., p. 99.

into the institutional structures of the larger society.”<sup>148</sup> This function should be understood as a systemic dimension of propaganda: due to the fact that the mass media are dependent on structures of concentrated wealth and ownership – monopolies of power – it is inherently limited in reporting on facts that would go counter to the interests of its own owners and financiers. Chomsky and Herman define these limits through five “filters” that make up their propaganda model:

- (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” as a means of disciplining the media; and
- (5) “anticommunism” as a national religion and control mechanism.<sup>149</sup>

According to Chomsky and Herman, the elite domination of mass media is so profound that journalists and media institutions operating within it are compelled to internalize its interests as objective facts. A filter is here described as a screen of interests, largely defined by the agendas of mass media owners and financiers.<sup>150</sup> As a result, “the U.S. media do not function in the manner of the propaganda system of a totalitarian state,” but rather maintain 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.”<sup>151</sup> We can see some resonance between the notion of the “filter” and that what we discussed as Ellul’s “interface”: the mediation between a structure of power and the society in which this power is performed.

Ownership and advertising are not the only filters through which mass media propagandize a specific reality. There is also the filter that results from political dependency. This goes further than merely trying to obtain diplomatic support for the right to broadcast and distribute, but also affects the acquisition of information. In order to remain

148 Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 1.

149 Ibid.

150 Jeff Goodwin, though supportive of the definition of the five filters, remarks that these are overall applied by Chomsky and Herman to study the “content of the news” rather than the “journalistic practices” that bring this content into being. The risk, he adds, is that such a propaganda model becomes an “overdetermined model.” This results in “the great irony of Herman and Chomsky’s work” which is that “they largely eschew a careful analysis of *how* these mechanisms actually shape – and how *much* they shape – the everyday journalistic practices that produce the news.” Jeff Goodwin, “What’s Right (and Wrong) About Left Media Criticism? Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model,” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Mar. 1994): pp. 101–11, at pp. 109–10.

151 Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 1.

objective, Chomsky and Herman argue, mass media lean to official, government sources, as it is far more costly and difficult to obtain information from a source that might oppose state interests, for example in the case of a foreign war.<sup>152</sup> Chomsky and Herman trace the increase of such forms of source dependency back to the operation of the Committee on Public Information during the First World War, which flooded media outlets with so much official information that this would naturally begin to define the dominant filter.<sup>153</sup>

Furthermore, Chomsky and Herman argue that there is a variety of intersections between political and corporate interests that limit the mass media’s possibility to facilitate dissident opinion and critical information as a result of the production of “flak” by powerful lobby groups. A returning example in their book is that of Freedom House, dating back to the early 1940s, which formally operated as an NGO in support of democracy, freedom of speech, and human rights, but had “interlocks with AIM [Accuracy in Media], the World Anticommunist League, Resistance International, and U.S. government bodies such as Radio Free Europe and the CIA,” operating as a “virtual propaganda arm of the government and the international right wing.”<sup>154</sup> The ownership of power and wealth in the hands of government and corporate organizations thus built a filter through which information is manufactured after their interests, creating its own experts, sources, and even watchdogs that hardly ever moved outside of the dominant framework – a practice that brings to mind Wellington House’s early investment in engineering seemingly “independent” academic publications and expert opinions to trigger the US to join the war effort. Similarly, the use of such flak against supposedly communist elements shows overlaps with Wellington House’ framing of the German as the “Hun.” Through the filters of the propaganda model – ownership, advertisement, source dependency, flak, and anti-communism – monopolies of power are thus performed in society with the aim to construct a new normative reality that supports its own interests and undermines the possibility for critical or dissident information or opinion.

The propaganda model proposed by Chomsky and Herman is strongly invested in questioning the idea of democracy as advocated by the United States government, its influence on mass media, and the double standards it practices. An important case in this regard is their

152 As an example, they mention the Pentagon and the thousands of employees at its disposal for mere publicity purposes. The result is that the Pentagon, at the time of their writing, published over three hundred magazines at an annual costs of seventy-five million dollars: “an operation sixteen times larger than the nation’s biggest publisher,” leaving only the corporations with the “resources to produce public information and propaganda on the scale of the Pentagon and other government bodies.” Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, pp. 20, 21.

153 Ibid., p. 23.

154 Ibid., p. 28.



analysis of what they term “Third World elections” in regimes that the US supports or which the US helped come into being, such as El Salvador (in 1982 and 1984) and Guatemala (in 1984–85), and those that escape its realm of influence, such as Nicaragua (in 1984), which the Reagan administration at the time wanted to dispose of. In all cases, the vocabulary with which government and mass media define legitimate elections will be the same, namely the criteria of freedom of speech and assembly, freedom of press, freedom to organize, freedom to form political parties and absence of state terror. However, they observe that the application of these standards is extremely different.<sup>155</sup>

In the case of the elections in US-backed dictatorships in El Salvador and Guatemala, for example, voting was obliged by law, political threats were made that claimed not voting was an act of treason, ID cards needed to be signed, ballot boxes were transparent, the government crackdown on dissident journalists resulted in outright murder, the bodies of the opposition were exposed in public and the actual opposition in the form of left-wing popular guerrillas were by definition excluded from the elections.<sup>156</sup> Nonetheless, the staged elections were praised by both the US government and mass media: in the case of El Salvador, Chomsky and Hermann mention the lyrical tone with which the massive turnout at the ballot box was reported, without mentioning mandatory voting and the consistent crackdown on all opposition,<sup>157</sup> while in the case of Guatemala the results were hailed as an end to decades of “military domination” and a confirmation of the government’s success to curtail insurgents.<sup>158</sup>

In the case of the Nicaraguan elections, Chomsky and Herman explain, the situation was completely different. The government that the Reagan administration wanted to get rid of was led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front, a socialist revolutionary organization that had led the Nicaraguan resistance against US occupation in the 1930s and in 1979 had successfully deposed the leaders of the Somoza dynasty. While threatened by border incursions of contras supported by the US, the conditions for proper elections, as Chomsky and Herman argue, were nonetheless present under the rule of this popular government. Voting was not mandated by law, voting was anonymous, relative freedom of press existed – even, to a certain degree, for the contras – and actual opposition was allowed to participate in the elections.

Nonetheless, the US government and the mass media’s assessment of the elections was that of a dangerous communist state staging elec-

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., pp. 141–42.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

tions to win legitimacy, while even the most minimal form of government censorship was reported as a proof of fraud. Whereas more than four hundred and fifty international foreign observers were present during the Nicaraguan elections, giving the process favorable assessments, no US observer was present, giving the government free hand in providing reporters information on the process. The outcomes were reported by the US and its mass media as a piece of theater, a predictable win for the Sandinistas and the mood of voters – contrary to the “massive” turnout in Guatemala and El Salvador – described as indifferent, while providing maximum attention to the US-supported contras, who predictably discredited the electoral process as a coup.<sup>159</sup> Chomsky and Herman describe the underlying logic of the election in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua as follows:

In elections held in disfavored or enemy states, the U.S. government agenda is turned upside down. Elections are no longer equated with democracy, and U.S. officials no longer marvel at the election being held under adverse conditions. They do not commend the army for supporting the election and agreeing to abide by the results. On the contrary, the leverage the dominant party obtains by control of and support by the army is put forward in this case as compromising the integrity of the election. Rebel disruption is no longer proof that the opposition rejects democracy, and turnout is no longer the dramatic denouncement of the struggle between a democratic army and its rebel opposition. Now the stress is on the hidden motives of the sponsors of the election, who are trying to legitimize themselves by this tricky device of a so-called election.<sup>160</sup>

Similar to how Chomsky and Herman define “worthy” and “unworthy” victims – the first consisting of highly mediated victims belonging to friendly or client states, whereas the unworthy ones are severely undermediated victims belonging to what the US regards as hostile states<sup>161</sup> – we thus move to “worthy” and “unworthy” democracies, in

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>161</sup> An example is the manner in which mass media intensely covered the killing of a Polish priest, Jerzy Popieluszko, murdered by Polish police in October 1984. The murder took place in a Communist state, which, in the context of the Cold War, was defined as an enemy state. In contrast, Chomsky and Herman introduce the example of Father Augusto Ramirez Monasterio, father superior of the Franciscan order in Guatemala, murdered in November 1983. The killing took place in an American client state, and it was therefore considered a friendly state. Based on the excess of reporting on the first murder and an extreme lack in the case of the second, Chomsky and Herman conclude that a murder in an enemy state is a “worthy victim,” as it supports the legitimacy to pursue military action against them, while that in a friendly client state is an “unworthy victim,” as it would not be beneficiary to act militarily against one’s own proxy. As proof, they present the data on the reporting of Popieluszko’s murder versus Monasterio’s in American mass media: “The worth of the victim Popieluszko is valued at somewhere between 137 and 179 times that of a victim in the U.S. client states.” Concretely, this means that Pop-

which, according to Chomsky and Hermann, worthy elections are synonymous to the ones serving US policy and interest.<sup>162</sup>

Chomsky and Herman precisely trace how the convergence of political, economic, technological and military interests impact the construction of reality through the mass media. In their examples, the monopolization of power is crucial, as this is what brings about the erosion of borders between domains that in Chomsky and Herman's perception can only serve public interest if they maintain a relative independence. Journalism in the context of mass media is their main example, but one could equally think of the importance of the relative independence of labor unions, political parties and elected officials and the judiciary system. The less relative independence exists for the domains of politics, economy, technology or military, the easier the interests of power become manufactured as collective interest; as manufactured consent.

Assessing the performance of power through Chomsky and Herman's model thus means to trace the interests of the proprietors of monopolies of power, and the multi-layered process through which they aim to construct reality. The macro-performative dimension of propaganda relates to the activation of monopolized structures of power by their proprietors to direct politics, the economy, media and warfare to further serve their interests, whether ideological or financial in nature. The clandestine funding of client states in the form of US sponsored regimes or contras in the fight against communism to perpetrate a political-economic paradigm beneficial to its own interest, is an example of such a macro-performance. The subsequent micro-performative dimension of propaganda relates to the process in which those laboring and living within these monopolies, are affected in their convictions, attitudes, and day to day actions. The role of the mass media has been one of our main examples in this case, who are influenced – through propaganda filters – to normalize US sponsored client states as political and ideological “democratic” allies to their day to day readership,

ielusko's murder was reported between 137 and 179 times more than Monasterio's. Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 39.

162 It is important to mention that here Chomsky and Herman's methodology was used against themselves in relation to their assessment of the Khmer Rouge Regime in Cambodia. Analyzing media reports of massacres perpetrated by the Pol Pot led regime as well as the witness testimonies of Cambodian refugees, Chomsky and Herman concluded the presence of US media bias due to the fact that the government was a communist led enemy state, its victims and their testimonies were thus “worthy” as they could be used to further US policy objectives. See: Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *After the Cataclysm: Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1979), p. xi. In the course of the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge, it became clear that the media rather underreported the extent of violence. In this regard, Chomsky and Herman responded to critique of their own bias in favor of the Khmer Rouge by emphasizing that their analysis was based on the interests with which the media interpreted the events in Cambodia leaving out how the US military had contributed to the insurgency themselves, but that this was not the same as denying that a massacre was actually taking place. See: Noam Chomsky, Edward S. Herman, and Charles Burton, “Correspondence,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Autumn 1985): pp. 495–96, at p. 495.

whereas resistance groups are framed as dangerous agents of “unworthy” political ideas. In Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model, the more the interests of the proprietors of power are brought to converge with those laboring and living within its sphere of influence, the stronger the impact of propaganda on constructing reality. Although we shall see later, that the way macro- and micro-performative dimensions of propaganda interrelate, also depends on the kind of power or claim to power it brings into being.

What becomes clear from Chomsky and Herman's detailed assessment of propaganda in the Cold War is that what they describe as the “societal purpose” of the media is to “inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state.”<sup>163</sup> The media are free, but only for those who ascribe to the dominant views of its propaganda filter. They conclude that, in line with those voices criminalized in their attempt to bring into being popular people's governments:

The organization and self-education of groups in the community and workplace, and their networking and activism, continue to be the fundamental elements in steps toward the democratization of our social life and any meaningful social change. Only to the extent that such developments succeed can we hope to see media that are free and independent.<sup>164</sup>

In these concluding words, we hear an idea similar to Ellul's, when he speaks of those organized groups capable of resisting the propaganda of the Technological Society. In Chomsky and Herman's case, these organized groups take the shape of communities capable of sufficient self-organization that can resist participating in the performance of monopolies of power. This indicates that Ellul, as well as Chomsky and Herman, is not merely describing what propaganda is and how it operates; they are also theorizing possible alternatives and models of resistance. This means that their analysis of modern propaganda and its abuse in democratic systems simultaneously forms a search for the possibility of alternative understandings and practices of democracy. On the one hand, their work shows us that after the Second World War, the concept of propaganda has become synonymous to mass manipulation and anti-democratic tendencies. On the other hand, it also shows us the complex fact that those who analyze propaganda, also tend to propagandize a model of their own: in this case, a model of

163 Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 299.

164 Ibid., p. 307.

resistance to propaganda. In the third chapter of this thesis, *Contemporary Propaganda*, we will challenge both Ellul's and Chomsky and Herman's conviction that the only way to resist propaganda is through a counter-propaganda, by proposing an "inverted" propaganda model.

Before coming to a general comparison and conclusion to our exploration of the development of propaganda theory, let us make the following three concise observations regarding our post-World War II propaganda theory up until the Cold War:

- In the aftermath of the uncovering the Nazi regime and its massacres, the post-World War II theories of modern propaganda indefinitely turn into an assessment of modern propaganda as a negative force of mass manipulation and thus opposed to democracy: in the cases of Adorno, Ellul, and Chomsky and Herman an analysis of the dangers of propaganda at best results in propositions of counter-propaganda but not of a more "democratic" propaganda, as was the case in the interbellum years in the United States;
- The post-World War II theories on modern propaganda analyze a continuous relation between the modern structures of technological, political, and economic power in relation to modern propaganda, either in the form of mass society (Adorno), technological society (Ellul), or monopolized elite power (Chomsky and Herman);
- The post-World War II theories of modern propaganda argue that the performance of power aims to construct reality – to manufacture consent – in service of the stakeholders of power.

## 1.5 CONCLUSION

What we have seen in this chapter is that the development of modern propaganda runs parallel to the emergence of new structures of power, monopolized by an elite of stakeholders, as we have discussed in relation to politics, economy, and technology (mass media). While humanity has always propagandized messages, modern propaganda is a consequence of the Second Industrial Revolution, largely indebted to Britain and its colonial Empire and its development as a modern democracy. This is what Chomsky and Herman

discuss as the "performance" of the mass media, which is part of the larger performance that we call propaganda: the process in which power is performed through a set of filters with the aim of constructing reality to benefit this same power.

What we have also seen, is that modern propaganda does not exclude democracy, on the contrary. Although it is difficult to reconcile an idealized form of democracy as people's self-governance with modern propaganda, the factual practice of British democracy stood far from that ideal anyway, not just because of its initial exclusion of large parts of the male and the entirety of the female population, but because of its far-reaching politics of imperial colonialism based on which, its own claims of being a "civilized" society were founded. This is something well understood by Edward Bernays, who considers propaganda as a solution to the problems of democracy, claiming that the invisible government of public relation counsels are best equipped to secure collective interest. This understanding of elite rule in the majority's benefit as "democracy" proves to be perfectly capable of building an understanding in which modern propaganda and democracy go hand in hand. This stands in great contrast to the intensive debates between Lippmann, Dewey, and Lasswell, who all remain doubtful in one way or another about the question whether modern propaganda is not by definition a threat to an open and informed society.

While propaganda studies after the First World War intensely debated the question of whether democracy and modern propaganda might be reconcilable, the field turns more critical toward this question after the Second World War up unto the Cold War. The hope for a modern propaganda of the common good seems indefinitely lost after the Second World War, fueled by the rigid and violent mechanisms of Nazi propaganda and the atrocities that it attempted to hide from public view.

Adorno, Ellul, and Chomsky and Herman analyze modern pro-

paganda from a variety of perspectives. Adorno assesses the dangers of modern propaganda in relation to mass society, from modern capitalism to dictatorships by means of a psychoanalytical approach. Analyzing the rise of the Technological Society, Ellul even declares that the real totalitarianism of modern propaganda is yet to come. And finally, Chomsky and Herman focus on the process in which modern propaganda in democracy operates through filters that manufacture consent in the interest of monopolized structures of power. Rather than looking for a “solution” to integrate modern propaganda in democracy, these thinkers – Ellul and Chomsky/Herman in particular – seek modes of resistance against propaganda. In their eyes, an alternative approach to democracy cannot but result in a form of counter-propaganda.

This latter notion of “countering” modern propaganda brings us back to the continuous discussion of the relation between modern propaganda and democracy. Countering propaganda, as we have seen throughout this chapter, is often connected to the idea of protecting or articulating a more principled form of democracy, in which power is subjected to the continuous control of those living in its sphere of influence, for example in the form of radically decentralized or communal governance. This presupposes that the democracies in which modern propaganda became operable are not reconcilable with these ideals of more “principled” understandings and practices of democracy. A principled democracy, as asserted by figures such as Dewey, Ellul, and Chomsky and Herman, is one in which organized groups and communities are capable of protecting their spheres of livelihood from the penetration of monopolies of power. Dewey emphasizes the importance of critical education, Ellul refers to organized groups at the fringes of the Technological Society, whereas Chomsky and Herman point to social movements and self-organized communities.

The discussion about modern propaganda as such is just as much the beginning of a discussion of the possibility of its alternatives. We will elaborate further on the work of those invested in forms of counter-propaganda or alternative, “emancipatory” propaganda throughout the next chapters of this thesis. Let us for now, based on this chapter, propose the following definition of modern propaganda:

- Modern propaganda is the performance of power in modern society

In the following chapter, we will observe that just as there exists a presumption that the concept of propaganda belongs to the domain of archaic dictatorships, there exists a persistent conviction that the

“propaganda art” of those dictatorships stands in stark if not absolute contrast with the art developed in modern democratic societies. As we have shown, modern democracy far from excludes the presence of modern propaganda, and similarly we must explore how this affects the practice of art. What, for example, could we expect when applying the propaganda model of Chomsky and Herman to artistic production? Through what filters and in whose interest, is art produced, presented, and validated? And is there a difference in the production of propaganda art depending on the kind of modern society in question?



# CHAPTER II: MODERN PROPAGANDA ART

- 2.1 MODERN ART
- 2.2 AVANT-GARDE PROPAGANDA ART
- 2.3 TOTALITARIAN PROPAGANDA ART
- 2.4 MODERNIST PROPAGANDA ART
- 2.5 CONCLUSION

As we noted at the beginning of the first chapter, the term “propaganda” in popular opinion has come to symbolize an archaic reminder of a dictatorial and “totalitarian” past. However, we have shown that the idea that modern propaganda is exclusive to dictatorial regimes is incorrect. Rather, modern propaganda has its origins in modern societies, and British democracy in particular. Of course, the fact that one regime or another employs modern propaganda does not necessarily make these regimes the same. We observed that modern propaganda is inherent to all modern societies – whether democracy or dictatorship – but that the performance of power in each of them can be different, which results in different propagandas. This stands in stark contrast with the assumption that there is an absolute opposition between “totalitarianism” and democracy, as modern propaganda is recurrent throughout the history of both.

In the previous chapter, we concluded that modern propaganda is the performance of modern structures of power. Modern propaganda relies in particular on modern technology and the means of mass communication, with the aim of constructing a reality that serves the interest of the stakeholders of power. As we observed, modern propaganda is multi-disciplinary in nature, constructing a reality – what Chomsky and Herman referred to as the manufacturing of consent – that affects all domains of life. We analyzed this process as one with a macro- and micro-performative dimension. In the case of the micro-performative dimension of propaganda, people can be implicated in the performance of power without necessarily being aware of it. Their attitudes and actions are shaped by interests that are not necessarily their own, which in the case of Adorno and Ellul we discussed as the “substructural” working of power.

In our assessment of the development of modern propaganda, we touched on a variety of its expressions. Covert propaganda, we saw, takes the form of the maintenance of systems of communication and of the control over information, such as the underground All Red Line cable network during the First World War. Overt propaganda, by contrast, takes the form of more explicit and identifiable messages that are disseminated through posters, pamphlets, publications, public manifestations, radio, and film.<sup>1</sup>

Especially in the case of the propaganda of 20th-century dictatorships, our understanding of propaganda tends to be strongly oriented toward the visual identification of overt propaganda. In the case of the Nazi and Stalinist dictatorships, for example, specific imagery comes

<sup>1</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapter, each of these media can of course also be used for covert propaganda.

to mind, such as large-scale staged theatrical political events, grandiose architectural structures, heroic painting and monumental sculpture, all of which we tend to remember and identify as “propaganda.” Art plays a crucial role in this process, as it is by means of art and its visual points of demarcation and identification that these regimes can express their power. At the same time, since we tend to orient ourselves on visual representation, art can also be deceiving. For example, when we think of Nazi propaganda, we might bring to mind famous propaganda films such as Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1935), which chronicles the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg and evokes a quasi-religious ritual set in Albert Speer’s ancient Greece-inspired architectural site, contributing to the myth of Hitler’s thousand-year Reich. One could also think of Fritz Hippler’s film *The Eternal Jew* (1940), which effectively used a method of editing that equated rats and vermin with the “plague” that the Nazis considered Judaism. While we should not downplay the impact of such films when it comes to the effort in which Nazi ideology inscribed itself upon the population, it is worthwhile to note that these works are only a small fragment of Nazi film production.

In the twelve years of its existence, the Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment, headed by Joseph Goebbels, produced 1,097 films. Only ten percent of its production was directed at overt propaganda – such as the above examples – whereas the other ninety percent were “mainly escapist entertainment,” which “manipulated social expectations and helped to create a climate that made the masses susceptible to official propaganda,” and displayed the Nazi state as a “normal condition, disoriented morality and, often unobtrusively, instilled National Socialist attitudes, stereotypes and conventions.”<sup>2</sup> When it came to the ten percent overt propaganda films, the ministry introduced a mandatory screening to Nazi Party members in order to guarantee attendance. This example teaches us that within dictatorships citizens might just as well be able to detect overt propaganda as we are able to do in retrospect. The more frightening conclusion is that, just like them, the actual propagandistic value of overt propaganda is that it allows us to think we know what propaganda is, and thus become more susceptible to internalize that which we believe is mere entertainment.

This may indicate that paradoxically, the pompous artistic expressions of the so-called totalitarian regimes distract us from the actual, more complex manifestations of modern propaganda, which touches upon the ongoing emphasis on psychological and psychoanalytical

theory in the works of propaganda theorists. For modern propaganda is not limited to what we can see, it is also what we come to embody and perform, without us necessarily being aware of our own implication in the process. Furthermore, we saw that modern propaganda never expresses itself in a singular manner. Its multidisciplinary nature makes isolated case studies of a singular painting or singular film rather ineffective. Such analyses may in fact even strengthen our idea that we are able to understand modern propaganda by isolating one of its many expressions, and maintain the idea that we can be “outside” the performance of power. Hence, we need to look at propaganda in a multidisciplinary sense, and not simply aim to understand propaganda by exposing its effects in a given visual form. Its forms, the “art” of propaganda, always have to be understood in a contextual sense, meaning that there is a larger set of political, economic, cultural, technological, as well as psychological conditions, rooted in specific structures of power, which define its actual effect. So why, in this context, should we choose to speak about *art*? Was art not supposed to be exactly that which we *can* see and sense?

In this chapter, through an exploration of the historical definition of modern art and a series of examples of modern propaganda art, we will argue the contrary. Yes, art is partly reliant on its visibility – it is how we identify it as “art” – but its reliance on visibility is not the same as actually *making things visible*. When we look at a work of art, we do not necessarily “see” its speculative financial value, we do not “see” its function as a status symbol among wealthy elites, we do not “see” its cultural capital in relation to the social standing of an individual or group, and we don’t “see” its institutional use or abuse – whether through a museum or government – in representing specific civilizational ideas in the culture wars of our time.

For example, do many people think about the artists implicated in the anti-communist witch hunt in the US when looking at a painting of Mark Rothko? Most will not. Rather, his works gained fame due to a perceived metaphysical, existential experience that results from witnessing these supposedly abstract paintings. But as we will see in this chapter, Rothko’s work might as well have been shown in a museum of anti-communism: not just as modern art, but as *modern propaganda art* proper, due to its implication in the campaigns of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Art is defined as much by what it reveals as by what it conceals, and we could say its very existence is almost paradigmatic for the realities that propagandas aim to construct. Power relies on form, on becoming manifest, recognized, sensed, admired, but at the same time – depending on the kind of power we are examining – it tends to only want to be recognized, sensed, and admired in a particu-

<sup>2</sup> Lutz Becker, “Celluloid Lies,” in Dawn Ades, Tim Benton et al. (eds.), *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators* (London: South Bank Centre, 1995), p. 277.



lar way, so as not to expose its vulnerabilities that would allow democratization, change, or overthrow of its current stakeholders. To study Modern Propaganda through Modern Propaganda Art means that we will both analyze the workings of modern propaganda and the kind of reality it aims to construct: a reality partly visible and partly concealed through art.

To speak of modern propaganda art means to critically revisit and challenge the foundational myths of modern art, its supposed autonomy and independent faculty in representing the world around us, rather than to look into propaganda art that aims to *construct* the world which we inhabit. It means that we must engage in a material analysis of the political, economic, and ideological conditions under which art is produced and artists are implicated in the performance of power in modern society. The result is that we will approach artworks as implicated in the larger interface between structures of power and the reality these structures and their stakeholders aim to construct. The work of art in modern society is not simply what it “is,” but far more how it is *mediated*. As Frankfurt School philosopher Walter Benjamin argued in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1935), that the artwork in modern society may well be defined by its *reproduction*.<sup>3</sup> In other words, in the modern age, art has become part of the larger domain of mass culture – the culture industry that Adorno despised. As much as art continues to try to distinguish itself from mass culture, to remain art, its means of production, mediation, and validation rely upon it, just like any other cultural commodity. What we call “art” is a product of historical processes, in which the changing nature of power structures also impact the nature of art. The modern age, which made modern propaganda possible, also made modern propaganda art possible, and in doing so it has *redefined what we can understand to be “art” as such*. The artwork, its reproduction and mediation in this context, cannot be separated from one another. 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 symbol of legitimation of ruling powers when it hangs in the director’s office, and so forth. One of the realities of this artwork is not more “true” to the artwork than the other. The painting is inherent to the interface through which it is produced, disseminated, validated, etc.

In this chapter, we will thus see how an artwork can both be considered as an image or proposition of a specific idea, while at the same

time being part of a larger political campaign with a possibly completely different objective: both are part of the larger reality of modern propaganda art. And that reality also changes the validation of what kind of media are relevant to define as art. We will see that modern propaganda art still privileges certain traditional media, such as painting, sculpture, and monumentalism, but that the value of such classical artforms and the civilizational aura that they bring forth are mediated through the interface of modern media, such as radio and film. In the final chapter on contemporary propaganda art, we will come to see that film and even videogames equally take part in the definition of art in the context of contemporary propaganda.

To gain an understanding of the *History of Modern Propaganda Art*, we will first attempt to understand the way in which “modern art” and “propaganda art” have been defined historically. We will see that these two terms have often been separated, modern art being considered as the ultimate expression of a free democratic society, whereas propaganda art would be its dictatorial counterpoint. As we by now may suspect, this differentiation itself has lent itself to propagandistic aims. Only by revisiting the origins of modern western art we will be able to point out this highly problematic opposition between “democratic” and “totalitarian” modes of artistic production, which then allows us to articulate three models of propaganda art that emerged throughout the 20th Century: *Avant-Garde Propaganda Art*, *Totalitarian Propaganda Art*, and *Modernist Propaganda Art*. Each of these three models will be defined by comparing a specific structure of power to specific art forms, as part of our endeavor to define propagandas in the plural.

Let us now explore the historical and political conditions that have defined our present-day conception of “modern art.”

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 19–55.

## 2.1 MODERN ART

In his book *MammonArt: An Essay on Economic Interpretation* (1925) writer and politician Upton Sinclair claims that the history of art as propaganda began with a fictional figure he calls “Mr Ogi,” supposedly the very first caveman–artist in human art history. Sinclair describes how Mr Ogi begins to inscribe symbols into the sand of a cave, invoking in his clan of cavemen the fear about the “magic” he unleashes by making silhouettes of animals appear. In Sinclair’s story, the caveman Mr Ogi is forced to prove to the leader of his clan that this “magic” is not a threat to his authority. To avoid punishment, Mr Ogi is willing to draw under the leader’s command, strengthening his position in the clan by this added “magic.” As such, Mr Ogi becomes the first *court painter* in history: the very first artist in the prehistory of mankind is immediately forced to dedicate his work to ruling powers to protect his position within the social context that he is implicated in.<sup>4</sup> From that initial historical moment, Sinclair concludes that art has always been complicit with power and has never been able to escape the interests of its ruling classes, thus coining the slogan “All art is propaganda.”<sup>5</sup> For Sinclair, all art is part of the performance of power.

Art historian Toby Clark makes a similar assessment, when he states that “the use of art in the service of politics has a deep and enduring history.” He explains that “[r]ulers of the city-states, kingdoms, and empires of the ancient world used art at a monumental scale to reiterate their power, glorify their victories, or to intimidate and defame their enemies.”<sup>6</sup> We notice in the comment of Clark immediately that what he refers to as “monumental scale,” is not limited to visual art in terms of sculpture or painting alone, but encompasses the architectural settings in which art is displayed as one of many signifiers of power. Architecture is here an example of an ancient “interface” through which art is presented, activated, and validated. Most thinkers that have engaged in the articulation of what we know today as modern art have made similar assessments; from the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau to modernist art critic Clement Greenberg. Each of them recognize the historical dependency and servitude of art in relation to dominant structures of power; they support the idea that art historically always propagandized on behalf of a ruling power, but simultaneously argue for a possibility of art to gain a form of “freedom,” or even “autonomy.”

4 Upton Sinclair, *MammonArt* (San Diego: Simon Publications, 2003), pp. 1–7.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

6 Toby Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc. Publishers, 1997), p. 9.

This historical dependency of art stands in stark contrast with the popular and contemporary conception of art as a form of expression that is synonymous to freedom. The shock concerning works of art that have been used as propaganda has much to do with the societal ideals that are invested in the idea of art as something that expresses something “more” or “higher” than politics, most certainly in the context of modern democracy. But if mankind has always propagandized and art has always been part of this process, how did the general assumption of art as an expression of freedom or even autonomy come about? Somewhere in the process, art must have been “liberated” from this servitude, from its condition of being a tool of propagandization. This idea that a true art is a free art is essentially the heritage of the Enlightenment and the rise of modernity. It is in the establishment of the modern nation-state that the idea of autonomy was articulated, both for the citizenry at large and for art. This notion of autonomy, we will see, is what we associate with the concept of artistic freedom, and it is this artistic freedom with which we generally – and as we will see, mistakenly – tend to separate propaganda art from modern art.

To understand the idea of art as something that is or should be detached from political instrumentalization, we begin by discussing the work of Rousseau, who, rather than being a proponent of art, was skeptical of its subservience to ruling power. Rousseau’s defense of ignorance against the Enlightenment was rooted in his belief that an “unmediated or natural perception of the world is possible.”<sup>7</sup> In his famous text *The Social Contract, or Of the Social Contract, or Principles of Political Law* (1762), he revolted against what he considered the “particular interest” that would come as a consequence of the rationalist world view of the Enlightenment, against which he posited the importance of the “general will,” which he sought in nature and the social construct of primitive man.<sup>8</sup> When the general will would triumph, the “sovereign” would no longer be the single ruler, but be transposed by the general will of the peoples separated from and in control of the government.<sup>9</sup> The outcome is what he describes as “civil society,” which would establish a balance between “natural right and political right,” between “man and citizen,” in order to guarantee the common good.<sup>10</sup>

Rousseau’s relation to art was sharpened through polemics with Enlightenment thinkers, most importantly in his text *Discourse on the*

7 Terence E. Marshal, “Rousseau and the Enlightenment,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Special Issue: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Nov. 1978): pp. 421–55, at p. 423.

8 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau’s Social Contract Etc.* (London/Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1923), p. 22.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

10 Victor Gourevitch, “Rousseau on the Arts and Sciences,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 69, No. 20 (Nov. 9, 1972): pp. 737–75, at p. 753.

*Arts and Sciences* (1750). In this work, Rousseau argues that the proponents of the arts and sciences in society had become the prime symptoms of its moral corruption. Europe, which in Rousseau’s view had “relapsed into barbarism” after the Dark Ages in its self-perception of being “highly enlightened,” claimed that “scientific jargon, more despicable than mere ignorance, had usurped the name of knowledge, and opposed an almost invincible obstacle to its restoration.”<sup>11</sup> The arts and sciences embodied, in Rousseau’s eyes, the decay of true human nature, its innocence, virtue, and “happy ignorance”<sup>12</sup>:

So long as government and law provide for the security and well-being of men in their common life, the arts, literature and the sciences, less despotic though perhaps more powerful, fling garlands of flowers over the chains which weigh them down. They stifle in men’s breasts that sense of original liberty, for which they seem to have been born; cause them to love their own slavery, and so make of them what is called a civilized people.<sup>13</sup>

Rousseau argued that it was the arts and sciences that served the power and legitimacy of the despots, and in return for their service, they gained their protection and status. As such, the arts and sciences were nothing but a glorification of a world still in chains, a people of the Dark Ages decorated with a veil of cultivation to hide their actual enslavement.<sup>14</sup> Rousseau, instead, argued that one needed to look not at the philosophers and artists, who claimed the knowledge of truth, but at the “laborer,” where one would find “strength and vigor of the body,” for he believed that “[b]efore art had molded our behavior, and taught our passions to speak an artificial language, our morals were rude but natural.”<sup>15</sup> Art and sciences represented a dangerous skepticism that repressed the ignorance and virtue located in the common man and suppressed its true knowledge. The artist, addicted to applause and luxury, was himself in chains, and as such not capable of contributing to the common good of society. The only true recompense, if anything, should be the “happiness of the peoples they have enlightened by their wisdom,” but as “long as power alone is on one side, and knowledge and understanding is on the other, the learned will seldom make great objects their study, princes will still more rarely do great actions, and

11 Rousseau, *Rousseau’s Social Contract Etc.*, p. 130.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 130–31.

14 Victor Gourevitch writes in this regard: “In societies where judgments are under the sway of public opinion and private interests, people cease to trust their taste and defer, instead, to what is approved by those who are supposed to know better: the great, the rich, the artists.” Gourevitch, “Rousseau on the Arts and Sciences,” p. 741.

15 Rousseau, *Rousseau’s Social Contract Etc.*, p. 132.

the peoples will continue to be, as they are, mean, corrupt and miserable.”<sup>16</sup> While Rousseau does not speak explicitly of propaganda, his description of the arts serving as a veil to the benefit of ruling powers, a tool that inscribes its specific class interests upon the societal realm, comes very close to what we understand as a description of propaganda art.<sup>17</sup>

Rousseau’s died before the French Revolution and a personality cult would develop around his legacy. While at first this cult mainly centered on his literary work, from 1789 on his concept of the general will gained more and more traction as the political counterpoint to the constitutional monarchy of king Louis XVI and as a tool to legitimize the new revolutionary government.<sup>18</sup> It was especially the Republican “Jacobin Club” that strove to establish a republic to implement the ideals of rational government set forward by the Enlightenment thinkers, which would paradoxically come to embrace Rousseau’s ideas, most famously in the figure of French lawyer and politician Maximilien Robespierre. In 1789, the Jacobin Club disposed Louis XVI, and established a people’s revolutionary government that would, in the course of history, be heavily debated both because of the foundational moment of the modern state it initiated, as well as the “Reign of Terror” it at the same time imposed.<sup>19</sup>

This possibility of acquiring a new, “liberating” kind of dependency is possibly best exemplified through the work of painter Jacques-Louis David. David was a member of the Jacobin Club and a dedicated supporter of Robespierre and the French Revolution. In the years preceding the overthrow of the *ancien régime*, his studio was a gathering place for political, intellectual, and social leaders of the day.<sup>20</sup> During the radical phase of the revolution, he had a seat in the National Convention and liaisons with the Revolutionary Tribunal. David himself

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>17</sup> Rousseau’s alternative for an art that once liberated from its subservience to the despot could contribute to the common good was located in his ideal of the public theater festival: “The closest he [Rousseau] comes to a suggestion about the role the arts might play in a society with good morals is the recommendation that Geneva, instead of introducing a permanent theater, establish public festivals in which all would participate and which would provide joyous occasions on which everyone is both actor and spectator, fully himself and fully a member of the community, where all class distinctions are forgotten and all do and hold everything in common.” Gourevitch, “Rousseau on the Arts and Sciences,” p. 743. It is interesting to keep this proposition in mind when we discuss the emergence of mass cultural manifestations in the form of the *Proletkult* art groups – Proletarian Culture – in the years of the Russian Revolution below.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon H. McNeil, “The Cult of Rousseau and the French Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Apr. 1945): pp. 197–212.

<sup>19</sup> Albert Soboul, “Robespierre and the Popular Movement of 1793–4,” *Past & Present*, No. 5 (May 1954): pp. 54–70. Discussions on the legitimacy of the Reign of Terror continues up unto today, in which right-wing and conservative thinkers tend to associate it with the inherent violent nature of the left, whereas left-wing and revolutionary thinkers interpret it as a form of popular self-defense against the systemic violence imposed by the sovereign. See also: Sophie Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror* (London/New York: Verso, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed assessment of David’s role in the French Revolution, see: Warren Roberts, *Jacques Louis David: Revolutionary Artist* (Chapel Hill/London: The University of Carolina Press, 1989).

was elected as a member of the Committee of Public Safety, which identified the counterrevolutionaries that the Revolutionary Tribunal would persecute and kill during the Reign of Terror.<sup>21</sup> He was far from the only artist who would join the revolution. Amongst young artists and students, who were not benefiting from the highly exclusive and privileged position of a minority of artists that served the upper classes and monarchy, and who tended to marry into other rich artist families from one generation to the other, the revolution was a chance to demand equality of artistic opportunity. Art historian David L. Dowd even speaks of the involvement of artists such as David and his less known comrade Antoine-François Sergent, in terms of “propagandists”:

The revolutionary leaders, impelled by artist-politicians like David and Sergent, established a system of financial encouragement of painters of talent and inaugurated largescale public works projects to feed the artists as well as to provide effective revolutionary propaganda. Many painters were employed for the *fêtes nationales* of the Revolution, and these propaganda demonstrations helped many of them to survive. Local authorities at the departmental, district, and communal levels as well as the popular societies also commissioned innumerable works of art. Allegorical paintings of Liberty and Equality, scenes of military victories and “great days” of the Revolution, representations of heroes and martyrs of the First French Republic, classic canvases depicting republican Greece and Rome, as well as appropriate decorations for public buildings, were ordered.<sup>22</sup>

Now that the arts gained their part in the general will as represented by the revolutionary government, their support did not just come from private patronage, but through public subsidies; the breakdown of academic barriers increased the number of female artists in the academies during the revolution; new public cultural institutions such as the Louvre Museum, the Museum of French Monuments, and the National Jury of Arts were founded; and overall, after the revolution, the status of artists in society had changed.<sup>23</sup> Through the work and politics of

<sup>21</sup> David L. Dowd, “Jacques-Louis David, Artist Member of the Committee of General Security,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Jul. 1952): pp. 871–92.

<sup>22</sup> David L. Dowd, “The French Revolution and the Painters,” *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1959): pp. 127–48, at p. 143.

<sup>23</sup> With respect to the foundation of the new museums Idzerda notes a great dilemma of the new revolutionary government, which on one hand wanted to protect and elevate the arts in support of the common good, but on the other hand were faced with an artistic heritage that had largely been commissioned and financed by the ancien régime. As a response, in 1790, a Monuments Commission (later followed by the Temporary Arts Commission) was established comprising David and others, who were to designate works of art that were worthy of preservation by the

the artists in the revolution, a level of social equality was achieved that changed the role of the artists as servants or superior craftsmen into one recognized as fundamental to the expression of the general will.<sup>24</sup> Art propagated the revolution, but the artist was – embodied in the figure of David – also an inherent part of the revolution, among others through their role in developing the countless revolutionary festivals that were to propagate the new revolutionary calendar and the rites of the new “secular religion” of the Republic upon its populations.<sup>25</sup> This was not without risks, the death of Robespierre in 1794 under the same guillotine to which he and David had sent the enemies of their revolution became a historic paradigm of the “revolution eats its own children.” This paradigm will resurface in the second section of this chapter when we will discuss the role of artists in the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. But let us first see how the liberation of art from despotic instrumentalization was to be elaborated further.

In the years of the French Revolution, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant resided in the small Prussian town of Königsberg, currently known as Kaliningrad. He was an open supporter of the Jacobins, which was slightly paradoxical as he was simultaneously also a pacifist and convinced of the moral imperative to obey the law.<sup>26</sup> While inspired by the moral philosophy of Rousseau, Kant did not believe humankind could find morality in and of itself – that is to say, by embracing its “primitive” or “innocent” nature – but rather through the furthering of rational social organizations in which all would be subject to the same set of laws. The work of Kant that concerns us primarily is the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), in which he sets out to define the conditions for aesthetic judgement; not just in relation to “fine art” but to aesthetic objects in the widest sense, predominantly in nature.

In his elaboration of aesthetic sensibility, Kant argues that while the notion of taste is crucial in the process of judging a specific object, this taste cannot be one of mere enjoyment or sensation. Rather, Kant claims, “[t]aste is the ability to judge an object, or a way of presen-

state, whereas others were to be publicly destroyed. This iconoclasm was formally sanctioned by the state, and the massive mobilization that resulted from it made it nearly impossible to keep track of public monuments and sculptures that were destroyed in mass campaigns of the communes. The commissions attempted to balance the paradox between the need for destruction and preservation by initiating public destructions of art works as festivities on one hand, and moving designated works to be protected within the new museums. This brings Idzerda to observe that “[i]t seems probable that when these works were seen in the museum, torn out of their cultural context, they were regarded only as ‘art’; their significance as tokens, symbols, or mana had been drained away because of their placement in an artificial situation, a strange milieu,” concluding that “the public museum may be said to have originated as both an instrument of and a result of iconoclasm.” Stanley J. Idzerda, “Iconoclasm during the French Revolution,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Oct. 1954): pp. 13–26, at p. 24.

24 Dowd, “The French Revolution and the Painters,” p. 154.

25 Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

26 Sidney Axinn, “Kant, Authority, and the French Revolution,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Jul.–Sep. 1971): pp. 423–32.

ting it, by means of a liking or disliking *devoid of all interest*,” and only such object of liking can be called “beautiful.”<sup>27</sup> Subsequently, what brings a universal judgment of aesthetics about is a “subjective purposiveness,”<sup>28</sup> meaning that the purpose at hand is not a functional one, but one that relates back to its own “autonomy.”<sup>29</sup> As mentioned, the beauty of the object for Kant is not necessarily the object of art. Nonetheless, Kant’s conception of a “purposeless purpose” of the aesthetic experience would become applied to art in the course of history; as an explanation and legitimization of art’s autonomy and its search for the sublime.<sup>30</sup> Kant’s own view of the essence of art would neither propagate the instrumental logic of elite interests, nor that of a revolutionary movement – its laws are of a different kind. This is crucial, as the idea that Kantian aesthetics are the equivalent of the aesthetics of art, laid the very foundation for centuries of discussion about the definition of the “freedom” of art: not just in terms of the rights to expression or the need to stand outside of political instrumentalization and its rational interest; it solidified the idea that outside the Kantian notion of autonomy and its purposeless purpose we cannot speak of something in terms of art at all.<sup>31</sup>

Kant himself claims 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.”<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, this notion of the *freedom of art* is not the same as an *autonomy of art*. For Kant, autonomy lies in the aesthetic experience – maybe even in the aesthetic experience of an artwork – but not necessarily *within the artwork itself*.<sup>33</sup> This does

27 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), p. 53.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

30 The sublime, different from beauty, is for Kant not what provokes contemplation, but rather that which supersedes our capacity of comparison. It is a “magnitude that is equal only to itself,” but, provoking both fright and awe in the subject, it “proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense.” Whereas Kant emphasizes grand and terrifying events in nature that provoke such experiences of the sublime, he at the same time perceives the experience of the sublime as a proof of the human mind’s capacity to conceptualize even infinity: an incalculable experience can still be captured in the realm of the senses, of aesthetic experience, leading him to the observation that this means that the human mind within itself holds a power that is “supersensible.” *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 106.

31 Haskins points out that the paradox in the notion of purposeless purpose is that its purpose is exactly to define what the autonomy of art is in relation to that which it is not. In relation to historians and critics who followed a neo-Kantian paradigm of artistic autonomy, such as the American critic Clement Greenberg, she introduces the notion of “instrumental autonomism,” which “emphasizes the work of art’s distinctive capacity, as an object of value, to do something not done, or not done the same way, by other kind of objects.” In other words, the need to make a distinction between art’s autonomy and the realm of instrumental reason is not so much devoid of purpose, but rather defines a different purpose of art all together: “[W]hile strict autonomism presupposes that artistic value is necessarily a form of intrinsic, as opposed to instrumental value, instrumental autonomism permits works of art to be valuable, as works of art, both intrinsically and instrumentally.” We will see this more specifically in the employment of autonomous art in the Cold War. Casey Haskins, “Kant and the Autonomy of Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Winter 1981): pp. 43–55, at p. 43.

32 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 170.

33 As Jean-Marie Schaeffer explains, Kant considers art always compromised when it comes to engaging in a pure aesthetic judgement due to the added intentions of the artist: “Any human

not mean that fine art knows no constraints in Kant's view. There is a necessary "mechanism" that forms the body – the academic form – in which an idea manifests itself and without which the "free spirit" of art would evaporate.<sup>34</sup> This seemingly contradictory process of academic necessity versus the freedom of art's spirit is explained by Kant in analogy to nature: "Nature, we say, is beautiful if it also looks like art; and art can be called fine art only if we are conscious that it is art while yet it looks to us like nature."<sup>35</sup> Fine art must look like nature, even though we are aware that it is art. That which connects the seeming paradox between reason and nature is the figure of the genius. For the artist-genius cannot be merely contained within his training: "Nature, through genius, prescribes the rule not to science but to art, and this also only insofar as the art is to be fine art."<sup>36</sup> The artist's skill is thus only partly academic in nature, for essentially, it is nature that expresses its beauty through the academic discipline of the artist:

Genius can only provide rich *material* for products of fine art; processing this material and giving it *form* requires talent that is academically trained, so that it may be used in a way that can stand the test of the power of judgment.<sup>37</sup>

When trying to understand the concept of modern art, it is crucial to keep in mind the key terms that Kant introduces here: for it is through the notions of aesthetic autonomy and freedom, aesthetic sensibility and the sublime, as well as the emphasis on the academy and the notion of the artist-genius, that modern art was founded. It was a practice of art that was made possible through revolutionary tendencies from the Enlightenment to the French Revolution, but that simultaneously departed from its instrumental reason and gained its relative independence.

Before we attempt to explore how Rousseau's plea for a liberation of art from its subservience to despots and Kant's translation of this agency into the notion of artistic freedom has affected the history of modern propaganda art, there is a final historical concept that

creativity, whether artisanal or belonging to the fine arts, can be referred to a determinate intention (*Absicht*). Thus if we experience the finality in a work of art, this is in conformity of our expectations, since we know that such an object corresponds to a specific end, namely the one that guided its creator." On the contrary, Schaeffer continues, "We do not posit such an intention for natural objects, and that is why, when they manifest a finality, it is a finality without representation of a specific end, giving rise to pure aesthetic experience". Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger* (Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 33–34, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 171.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

is important for us to mention: the originally military concept of the "avant-garde," which usage as part of the canon of modernity, according to literary critic and professor of comparative literature Matei Calinescu, equally "started in the aftermath of the French Revolution."<sup>38</sup>

The ideas of the French political and economic theorist Henri de Saint-Simon developed his ideas about the avant-garde in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Originally known as the "duke" of Saint-Simon, he had rejected his aristocratic status after returning from his voluntary participation in a cavalry regiment in the year 1779 of the American Revolutionary War. The rejection of hereditary privilege followed his ideals of a new society for the industrial age, inspired both by the American Revolutionary War and the French Revolution, but different from Rousseau and Kant, he emphasized the possibility of furthering the human cause by embracing and expanding the possibilities offered by the First Industrial Revolution.<sup>39</sup> Saint-Simon's later classification as a utopian philosopher was strengthened by his book *Système Industriel* (1825), in which he espoused his vision of the advancement of the industrial age that would be led by a new type of scientist who would help the development of society and the possibility of a global peace.<sup>40</sup>

Later in his life, Saint-Simon's approach to the "engineering" of society in industrial terms would shift from a "mechanistic philosophy of nature popularized in France during the Enlightenment under the influence of Newtonian thought" to a "Romantic idea of society as a kind of living organism."<sup>41</sup> He sought a new role of artists in society by "placing them at the head of an elite administrative trinity consisting of artists, scientists, and industrialists-artisans."<sup>42</sup> In a fictional dialogue between the artist and the scientist from his foundational text *L'artiste, le savant et l'industriel* (1824) – either co-written or ghostwritten by Saint-Simon's disciple and friend Olinde Rodrigues – the artist makes a plea for the unification of the three forces of art, science,

<sup>38</sup> Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 101.

<sup>39</sup> Saint-Simon's vision of a new league of nations would prove to be timely. See, for example: Elliot H. Polinger, "Saint Simon, The Utopian Precursor of the League of Nations," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Oct. 1943): pp. 475–83, at p. 475.

<sup>40</sup> Saint-Simon's ideas in this regard have retrospectively been argued to be a kind of Marxism *avant la lettre*. But whereas Saint-Simon has often been referenced as the "Father of Socialism," his own ideas were strongly influenced by liberal philosophy, in which the rationale of free exchange would naturally rid the idlers from the new industrial society for the common good of all. Nonetheless, his clear articulation of a conflict of classes and belief in industrial progress and the inevitability of a post-statist political and economic paradigm that would benefit the world at large shows clear parallels, and after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, Lenin personally sanctioned a statue to be erected in Saint-Simon's name. For an early study on Saint-Simon and Marx, see Alice M. MacIver, "Saint Simon and His Influence on Karl Marx," *Economica*, No. 6 (October 1922): pp. 238–45.

<sup>41</sup> Donald D. Egbert, "The Idea of the Avant-Garde in Art and Politics," *Leonardo*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan. 1970): pp. 75–86, at p. 76.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

and industry, which he considers crucial for human progress, for “Qui pourrait satisfaire aux besoins de l’homme, ou lui procurer les jouissances qui sont aussi des besoins pour lui, si les arts, l’industrie, les sciences, venaient tout à coup à disparaître?”<sup>43</sup> Not the government, but the union between these forces was to direct a new society, for they “peuvent marcher d’elles-mêmes, et sans lesquelles rien ne pourrait marcher.”<sup>44</sup> This new union is what holds the power to advance the general wellbeing of society. In the case of the artist, that means that the ideal world they inhabited could no longer be an exclusive domain, but should serve the public cause. The artist in Saint-Simon’s dialogue concluded that:

C’est nous, artistes, qui vous servirons d’avant-garde; la puissance des arts est en effet la plus immédiate et la plus rapide. Nous avons des armes de toute espèce: quand nous voulons répandre des idées neuves parmi les hommes nous les inscrivons sur le marbre ou sur la toile; nous les popularisons par la poésie et le chant; nous employons tour à tour la lyre ou le galoubet, l’ode ou la chanson, l’histoire ou le roman; la scène dramatique nous est ouverte, et c’est là surtout que nous exerçons une influence électrique et victorieuse. Nous nous adressons à l’imagination et aux sentiments de l’homme nous devons donc exercer toujours l’action la plus vive et la plus décisive; et si aujourd’hui notre rôle paraît nul ou au moins très-secondaire, c’est qu’il manquait aux arts ce qui est essentiel à leur énergie et à leurs succès, une impulsion commune et une idée générale.<sup>45</sup>

As we can see, Saint-Simon in some ways developed Rousseau’s ideas on the possible role of the artists by putting their imagination to service as an avant-garde of the common good; in the words of Calinescu: “To Saint-Simon, the artist is the “man of imagination” and, as such, he is capable not only of foreseeing the future but also of creating it.”<sup>46</sup> Different from Rousseau, however, Saint-Simon pushed the possibility of a massive rational organization of society to its furthest consequence, by concentrating on the triple powers represented by the artists, scientists, and industrialists-artisans. Saint-Simon rejected what had become known as “l’art pour l’art” – an “art for art’s sake,” a popular concept which echoed Kant’s idea of the “purposeless purpose” of

43 Henri de Saint-Simon, Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin, *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon* (Paris: Librairie de la Société des Gens de Lettres, 1875), p. 202.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 205.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 210–11.

46 Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 102.

aesthetic experience.<sup>47</sup> The introduction of the concept of avant-garde represented what was at stake when the artists would take their proper role in advancing modernity: the objective of not merely representing and propagating, but directly shaping and transforming society through the faculty of art. Although that does not necessarily mean that modernity and the avant-garde can be conflated; Calinescu argues that “The avant-garde is in every respect more radical than modernity,”<sup>48</sup> and concludes: “It is quite clear that the avant-garde would have been hardly conceivable in the absence of a distinct and fully developed consciousness of modernity; however, such an acknowledgment does not warrant the confusion of modernity or modernism with the avant-garde [..].”<sup>49</sup>

What we have seen from Rousseau to Kant and Saint-Simon, is how in mere half a century fueled by a short-lived but profound revolution, a series of concepts were introduced that up until today continue to define our understanding of Western modern art. Notions such as the freedom of art, its autonomy, the artist-genius, the sublime, and the overall idea that the specific sensibilities of art provide an exceptional status that might be used for the betterment of society, if not in the form of an avant-garde, have become an inherent part of our understanding of modern art. Whereas we should shy away from imposing the term propaganda too easily on a time-frame in which it was not in common use, we see that the dilemma between free and instrumentalized art, between “autonomous” and “propaganda art” was already present.

The crises and revolutions sweeping throughout Europe up until the 20th 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 for a new world *and* a new art to be born

For example, the futurists, in the spirit of the imperialist, anti-democratic, and patriarchal politics of Mussolini’s fascism, famously

47 According to Rose Frances Egan, the origins of the concept of “l’art pour l’art,” would have first been uttered in 1804 by the French writer, politician, and journalist Benjamin Constant, who was strongly influenced by German Romanticism. Writing on a meeting with a student of the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, who presented him his work on Kant’s aesthetics, Constant writes: “Son travail sur l’Esthétique de Kant a des idées très énergiques. L’art pour l’art, sans but, car tout but dénature l’art. Mais l’art atteint un but qu’il n’a pas.” Thus grounding the concept historically as an interpretation of Kant’s paradigm of art’s “purposeless purpose.” Rose Frances Egan, *The Genesis of the Theory of “Art for Art’s Sake” in Germany and in England* (Northampton/Paris: Departments of Modern Languages of Smith College, 1921), pp. 10–11.

48 Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 96.

49 *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

declared their “intend to liberate [...] [Italy] from the countless museums that have covered it like so many cemeteries,”<sup>50</sup> and embraced what they regarded as the cleansing effects of war and technology: “We intend to glorify war – the only hygiene of the world – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and contempt for women.”<sup>51</sup> By contrast, the Berlin dadaists, strongly allied with German Bolshevism, accused expressionism of operating under the pretext of being “propaganda for the soul” preaching a “comfortable life free from content or strife.”<sup>52</sup> In their unambiguous embrace of the “muddle of noises, colors and spiritual rhythms” that composed daily modern urban life, the dadaists declared themselves as a new art movement in which even the businessman could be a creator and “every man is chairman and every man can have his say in artistic matters.”<sup>53</sup>

As different as these avant-garde movements were in their ideological orientation, they were all marked by their willingness to embrace and translate the ideas of political revolution into an artistic one and vice versa.

But let us first make three observations based on this first summary of the origins of the concept of modern art:

- The age of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, gave rise to a conflicting set of concepts that differentiated art from its undifferentiated unity with the ruling powers: the politics of modernity created the foundation for our current conception of modern art;
- The different ideas that fueled the revolution and its outcomes resulted in different structures of power, each of which impacted the practice and outcomes of art differently: a process in which we perceive a continuous relationship between different forms of power and different artistic forms;
- The age of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, further gave rise to conflicting ideals of how artistic independence was to be gained concretely in relation to new structures of power: either by siding with popular movements (Rousseau, David), by differentiating itself specifically from the realm of political instrumentalization and claiming autonomy of aesthetic

experience and freedom of art (Kant), or to form a vanguard of modernity (Saint-Simon).

These three conflicting ideals will guide our discussion in the following three sections. Let us now first explore more concretely how artistic revolutionary theories of the politicization of modern art tested the outer limits of Saint-Simon’s conception of the avant-garde of the industrial society through the notion of *Avant-Garde Propaganda Art*.

50 Filippo Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, Laura Wittman (eds.), *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 52.

51 Ibid., p. 51.

52 Richard Hülsebeck, “First German Dada Manifesto,” in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory: 1900-1990* (Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. 254.

53 Ibid., p. 255.



## 2.2 AVANT-GARDE PROPAGANDA ART

From cubism to futurism, from dadaism to constructivism, the early twentieth century brought about political changes and revolutionary tendencies that generated a variety of avant-garde movements. Of our specific interest are those that articulated their theory and practice in relation to the political realm and engaged with the notion of “propaganda.” In no other context than the Russian Bolshevik Revolution this was done with the same rigor and political implications, and in no other context was the complex relation between avant-garde and subsequent “totalitarian art” more explicit.

The First World War of 1914–18 did not only give birth to the first modern propaganda apparatus in the heart of British empire, it also created the conditions that sparked the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, resulting in the establishment of the Soviet Union, bound to become the main political and ideological challenger of Western capitalist democracy. Similar to the French Revolution, the Bolshevik October Revolution was simultaneously a political and a cultural revolution. Lenin’s article “Party Organization and Party Literature” (1905) was foundational for the revolution’s perspective on the relation between the Party and the arts. In the text, written in the year of the general strike when the Bolsheviks were not yet in power, Lenin calls for taking literature under party control, demanding that “[n]ewspapers must become the organs of the various party organizations, and their writers must by all means become members of these organizations.” As a consequence, “[p]ublishing and distributing centers, bookshops and reading-rooms, libraries and similar establishments—must all be under party control.”<sup>54</sup> At the same time, Lenin emphasizes that outside of the party “[e]veryone is free to write and say whatever he likes, without any restrictions.” Within the context of the party, however, Lenin demands the same freedom to “expel members who use the name of the party to advocate anti-party views.”<sup>55</sup>

Essentially, Lenin questions the very notion of artistic freedom, as he claims that “[t]here 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.” In a context very different from Rousseau and Robespierre, Lenin clearly perceived that a shift to a revolutionary, egalitarian society also entailed a shift in the role of the arts: rather than reducing the notion of artistic freedom to the limited privilege of serving the tsarist regime

<sup>54</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 10 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), pp. 44–49.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

and its ruling feudal classes, a new, genuine freedom loomed, the consequence of the artist's dedication to the proletarian cause.

In 1918, a year after the Bolsheviks took power, Lenin published his decree "The Removal of Monuments Erected in Honour of the Tsars and their Servants and the Production of Projects for Monuments to the Russian Socialist Revolution," which called for the erection of "busts or full-length figures, perhaps bas-reliefs" that would depict "predecessors of socialism or its theoreticians and fighters, as well as those luminaries of philosophical thought, science, art and so forth, who, while not having direct relevance to socialism, were genuine heroes of culture."<sup>56</sup> Lenin had organized his list of people to be immortalized in monumental statues in categories varying from "Revolutionaries and Public Figures" which included Robespierre, Saint-Simon, Marx and Engels, "Writers and Poets," such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Pushkin, as well as "Philosophers and Scientists," "Artists," and "Actors."<sup>57</sup> Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Soviet People's Commissar of Education was in charge of bringing the decree into practice. Lenin encouraged the monuments to be made of temporary materials, and only to represent dead people, strongly opposing the visualization of living Soviets, including himself.<sup>58</sup> Lenin did not "prescribe the style that the statues should take; sculptors were given a free hand and thus the program also served as a forum for discussion about the virtues of different styles."<sup>59</sup>

Lenin regarded art first of all as a propaganda tool for mass education that could serve in tackling the eighty percent illiteracy rate in his country: art was to build upon the best achievements of the past – the selection of celebrated figures to be monumentalized was an indication of what these achievements were in his eyes – and in the process raise the cultural standards of the masses.<sup>60</sup> In his 1920 "Rough Draft of a Resolution on Proletarian Culture" Lenin wrote:

Not the *invention* of a new proletarian culture, but the *development* of the best models, traditions and results of the *existing* culture, *from the point of view* of the Marxist world outlook and the conditions of life and struggle of the proletariat in the period of its dictatorship.<sup>61</sup>

In Lenin's ideal of mass education combined with his rather conser-

56 Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1999), p. 138.

57 Vladimir Lenin, *Lenin on Literature and Art* (Maryland: Wildside Press, 2008), p. 205.

58 Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, p. 138.

59 Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the 20th Century*, p. 79.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

61 Vladimir Lenin, *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 42 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), p. 217

vative dictate of singular monumental figures to be inserted into the public domain to elevate the masses, we may discern his characteristic pragmatism: knowing fully well that the Soviet Union, devastated by the First World War and the subsequent Civil War, was not yet in any condition to radically re-invent its public institutions, he leaned on existing methodologies that he wished to see cautiously transformed into the new revolutionary reality.

Lenin considered propaganda to be fundamentally different from indoctrination. Propaganda was "designed to mobilize youth and adults for important social and economic tasks,"<sup>62</sup> whereas indoctrination in the form of "memorization or reiteration of Marxist slogans and phrases" seemed to him "unintelligent and unproductive."<sup>63</sup> Lenin essentially considered propaganda to be mass education in action. His concept of education rejected the Enlightenment belief that reason was a self-emancipating force, nor did he believe in Tolstoy's Rousseauian rejection of educational institutions as a corruption of the spontaneous nature of mankind: according to Lenin, education was political in nature, as political revolution preceded cultural development. A revolutionary political consciousness would allow for the construction of socialism and hence the advancement of education. Propaganda – combining the dissemination of ideas with mobilization for direct action – was exactly the type of education that the still fragile Soviet Union needed.<sup>64</sup>

The post-revolutionary period saw a rise of different cultural groups engaged in *agitprop* (agitational propaganda), which organized "street festivals and mass-action dramas" stressing popular involvement and deriving their material both from "festivals of the French Revolution" and "Russian Orthodox ceremonial processions with the carnivalesque styles of folk entertainment, incorporating clowns, life-size puppets, street criers, and circus acrobats as well as the Bolshoi Theatre."<sup>65</sup> During the third anniversary of the October revolution, cultural groups organized a reenactment of the storming of the Winter Place performed by a cast of thousands: a mass theater that re-staged the foundational moment of the Soviet Union. However, groups that deviated too far from the party line would be put back under party control. For example, Proletkult – the Proletarian cultural-educational organization – founded as a result of a 1917 conference organized by Lunacharsky, consisted of more than three hundred groups with over

62 Frederic Lilje, "Lenin and the Politics of Education," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Jun. 1968): pp. 230–57, at p. 255.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 256.

64 *Ibid.*

65 Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the 20th Century*, p. 77.

four hundred thousand members aimed at generating working class culture from the grassroots.<sup>66</sup> Many of the large cultural events after the October Revolution had been their initiative. But the wish of Proletkult organizers to give autonomous direction to the cultural life of the Soviet Union clashed with the principles that Lenin had laid out in *Party Organization and Party Literature*, as he considered their claim to autonomy to be a “separatist” tendency.<sup>67</sup> Lenin’s hostility to the Proletkults seems somewhat paradoxical, due to its effective investment in developing a cultural practice from direct worker participation, but had much to do with his long residing conflict with former Bolshevik member and co-founder of Proletkult Alexander Bogdanov. Whereas Lenin believed that political and economic revolution had to precede cultural revolution – propaganda was the means through which to achieve that process, to politicize *through* culture before culturalizing the country as such – Bogdanov believed that proletarian culture could precede and guide these necessary changes through “fraternal solidarity, the cooperative spirit and work rhythm of human labor in large-scale enterprises.”<sup>68</sup>

Despite his own more conservative preferences for figurative monumentalism, Lenin allowed in the early days of the revolution a relative cultural pluriformity that generated a variety of avant-garde movements loyal to the Bolshevik Party line to flourish. While briefly discussing some of the most prominent examples, we will keep in mind Lenin’s propaganda paradigm with regard to the role he saw for art in the new Soviet Union.

At the foundation of the Russian avant-garde that would come to pledge support, if not full loyalty, to the Bolsheviks we find the work of the painter Kazimir Malevich. Departing from European avant-garde movements invested in the relation between the construction of the image and technological change, such as the cubists and futurists, Malevich established the concept of “suprematism,” which formed a landmark for the pre-Soviet avant-garde. Rejecting figuration in its totality, Malevich set out to establish an art of pure “non-objective” sensation, represented by geometric shapes, of which the most famous example was inevitably the *Black Square* (1914–15). In his manifesto “From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism,”

66 In the words of McKenzie Wark, “Proletkult created a network of studios in both the arts and the sciences (although they worked best in the arts). The aim was self-governed activity on the part of workers rather than propaganda or consciousness raising. Proletkult sought liberation from fetishes such as authority, subjectivity, and property. Bogdanov even thought this might be easier in Russia, where everyday life was barely touched by bourgeois norms.” McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (London/New York: Verso, 2016), p. 35.

67 Wim Beeren, Marja Bloem, Dorine Mignot (eds.), *The Great Utopia: The Russian Avant-Garde 1917–1932* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1992), p. 79.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 253.

first published in 1915, Malevich declares to have transformed himself to the “zero of form,” thrown off the oppression of the academic standard of painting, and progressed toward an “art that advances towards creation as an end in itself and towards domination over the forms of nature.”<sup>69</sup> Malevich rejected the imperative of academic figuration as a “primitive” form of expression; instead he called for an embrace of the “new beauty of our modern life,” to create “new form,” for “[t]he technological side of our age advances further and further ahead, but people try to push art further and further back.”<sup>70</sup> While Malevich’s text is not explicitly political, it embraces the possibility of a new modern paradigm through which to assess the possibilities of art.

From 1920 onward, Malevich would continue to espouse his views on suprematism during the Lenin years through the UNOVIS group, the Founders of the New Art. As a teacher at the Popular Art Institute in Vitebsk, he and his former student El Lissitzky explored and taught the possibility of “objects to embody ideals rather than to perform social function.”<sup>71</sup> This did not exclude utilitarian applications of suprematist aesthetics. El Lissitzky’s famous poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (1920), for example, which is composed of a large red triangle penetrating a white circle on a black background surrounded by fragmented cubes and rectangles, could easily have been considered a non-objective painting in line with Malevich’s suprematist ideals. Lissitzky’s expansion of suprematism added to the image its title, essentially its slogan, clarifying that the red wedge symbolizes the revolutionary Bolsheviks, who are penetrating and defeating their White movement opponents during the Russian Civil War. Lissitzky thus merged the development of the visual vocabulary to construct a new world with the propagation of that new world at the same time.

In Lissitzky’s text “Suprematism in World Construction” (1920), the artist explains how suprematism brought the possibility of a “reconstruction of life,” rejecting the historical subservient role of the artist as “a moralist, as a story-teller, as a court-jester” and instead turning to “the rebuilding of life cast[ing] aside the old concept of nations, classes, patriotisms and imperialism.”<sup>72</sup> Just like his former teacher Malevich, Lissitzky believes that the artistic exploration of technology serves this “reconstruction of life” beyond the models that molded the old world, either in the form of academia in art, or in tsarist autocracy in politics.

69 Kazimir Malevich, “From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism,” in John E. Bowlt (ed.), *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902–1934* (London: Thames and Hudson), pp. 118–19.

70 *Ibid.*, 120–21.

71 Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 10.

72 El Lissitzky, “Suprematism in World Construction,” in Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, p. 153.

After the violence of the First World War, Lissitzky writes, the world saw the destruction of the possibility of technology to contribute to the reconstruction of life, but then “came communism and extolled work as the true source of man’s heartbeat.”<sup>73</sup> For Lissitzky, art has a central role in this process; the task to develop a new language that redirects the relation of humans to the world as its “master-builders,” no longer subjected to the raw laws of nature but as the ones that define its laws through revolutionary artistic and political practice:

The artist’s work lies beyond the boundaries of the useful and the useless. It is the revolutionary path along which the whole of creation is striding forward and along which man must also bend his steps. “Artistic work” is but an obstacle on this path and in consequence a counter-revolutionary concept. The private property aspect of creativity must be destroyed, all are creators, and there is no reason of any sort for this division between artists and non-artists.<sup>74</sup>

This introduction of the notion of the master-builder replacing that of the artist is considered a foundational moment of the subsequent movement of constructivism: a shift away from the suprematist ideas that the painting could in and of itself form the legitimate outcome of an artistic process. Lissitzky, sympathetic to suprematism, pushes its potential and arrives at considering its geometric vocabulary as building blocks in which his ideal of the artist as the master-builder of a new world expresses itself. His famous *Prouns* series (1919–24) that began to transform suprematist aesthetics into more three-dimensional depictions that could be associated with architectural and industrial technical drawings are emblematic for his ideal to expand suprematism into the domain of revolutionary industrial engineering. Similarly, we can see this outcome in the work of constructivist artist Vladimir Tatlin and his *Monument to the Third International* (1919–20): a tower in the shape of stacked transparent rotating cylindrical structures meant to facilitate political offices, a radio station, loudspeakers, as well as a platform for public lectures – although Tatlin himself always refrained from the constructivist label. Combining both Lenin’s call for a public, educational, and monumental propaganda art, as well as Malevich’s and Lissitzky’s ideas of a necessary correlation between technology and new forms of art, 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

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

actively contributed to the building of a propaganda interface, instead of merely participating in it.<sup>75</sup>

The political and artistic revolutionaries, had defined a new modern paradigm, a revolutionary modernity that separated itself radically from capitalist modernity. Its propaganda, as Lenin had wished, embodied a desire to directly act and serve revolutionary ideals and tasks. Tatlin’s *Monument* was as much a celebration of the industrial and technological progress, as it was a public signifier that served concrete dissemination of the Party’s views. We can observe a similar ambition to combine sculptural constructivist aesthetics with practical applications in the domain of propaganda in the work of Gustav Klutssis and his *Propaganda Kiosk* (1922), which took the form of temporal public sculptural constructions that combined a platform for public speeches, radio amplification through loudspeakers and distribution channels for revolutionary books and newspapers. In Klutssis’s work, the creation of art and the creation of a new propaganda infrastructure are part of one and the same endeavor: the work of art is both a carrier of propaganda, and a tool through which to perform propaganda by its users. In a Marxist sense, in the context of Avant-Garde Propaganda Art, we could say that the border between what used to be the covert substructure of power and its elite ownership versus the overt superstructure of the normative reality this power aimed to construct was lifted. The proletariat, at least in theory, was to be made co-owner of the means of production and performance that define propaganda. In other words, the multi-layered performance of power – its macro and micro-performative dimension – become part of the project of proletarianization: sender and receiver are to operate equally. The macro-performative dimension is defined by the collective seizing of the means of production, and the micro-performative dimension is defined by the process in which the Soviets bring about the process of redistribution in daily self-governance. No longer is the macro-performative defined by elite interest, but by collective interest. At the risk of being reductive, we could roughly say that the different relationship between the macro- and micro-performative dimension in propagandas is character-

<sup>75</sup> Tatlin drafted a proposal together with the painter Dymshits-Tolstaia in a response to Lenin’s decree on the erection of new public monuments in June 1918, in which they suggested – contrary to the relatively chaotic manner in which commissions for the monuments were handed out at that moment – a structural involvement of young and revolutionary artists that had been ignored by the old tsarist regime. Rather than repeating the stylistic character of 19th-century public sculpture and monuments, Tatlin and Dymshits-Tolstaia imagined the monuments to function as “street platforms” from which “new and vital words rousing mind and consciousness of thought would fly forth into the masses.” They further proposed a democratization of the creation process, by first showing models of the monuments to the public at large for them to select the final design. See: Vladimir Tatlin and Sofia Dymshits-Tolstaia, “Memorandum from the Visual Arts Section of the People’s Commissariat for Enlightenment to the Soviet of People’s Commissars: Project for the Organization of Competitions for Monuments to Distinguished Persons,” *Design Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Autumn 1984): pp. 70–74, at p. 73.

rized by either a vertical or horizontal structure of power. The fact that such a schema is far from absolute, is characterized by the swift changes from the early Russian revolution to Leninist and finally Stalinist rule, in which the Soviet Union from an aspired horizontal structure quickly transformed to a vertical one. But the ideological intention of a vertical or horizontal model of power – whether successful in its implementation or not – does help in our attempts to differentiate propagandas; or, in the case of the Soviet Union: to analyze the different phases in which one propaganda model turns into another.

In his article “Revolution and Art” (1920–22), Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Soviet People’s Commissar of Education, expressed his ideal of a coalition between party-loyal artists and their artistic experiments in relation to the revolutionary government, when he posed: “For a revolutionary state, such as the Soviet Union, the whole question of art is this: can revolution give anything to art, and can art give anything to revolution?”<sup>76</sup> Just like Lissitzky, Lunacharsky claims that the revolution is accompanied by new “ideas of remarkable breadth and depth,” and subsequently that “if revolution can give art its soul, then art can give revolution its mouthpiece.”<sup>77</sup> Just as the French Revolution aspired, Lunacharsky continues, art now joins the masses and adorns popular holidays and manifestations with art, song, and poetry: “it will unite everything in a common act.”<sup>78</sup> The revolutionary artist and Lunacharsky both believe in the unification of art and life. Not only did revolutionary artists propagandize the ideals of the revolutionary government through their work, they educated themselves through the communist ideals just the same. In other words, it was not just the imagery of art that changed, but the very conditions of artistic production and the understanding of the institution of the artist as such. As we noted in the introduction to this chapter, propaganda redefined what was to be understood as art in the first place.

As an example of such a “new artistic soul” that emerged through the revolution, Lunacharsky refers to poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, editor of LEF, the journal of the group Left Front of the Arts (later on, *Novyi Lef*). LEF was mainly organized around the Institute for Artistic Culture (INKhUK) situated within the People’s Commissariat for Enlightenment, which “urged artists and theorists to join economic councils and go into the factories to design new products.”<sup>79</sup> The Left Front of the Arts in its turn pushed the limits of constructivism toward the subsequent movement of productivism, with a prominent role for the

76 Anatoly Lunacharsky, “Revolution and Art,” *Ibid.*, p. 190.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

79 Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia*, p. 10.

artist Alexander Rodchenko who criticized the suprematists for their obsession with the “mystique of the material.”<sup>80</sup> Rodchenko rejected all former associations and bonds to the idea of a pure art, and declared a commitment to the domain of industry. Productivist art was focused on the formation of “useful objects,” the true expression of the ideas that had remained theory in the domain of constructivism.<sup>81</sup> For Rodchenko new designs of productivism reached beyond the realm of aesthetics and formed a “synthesis of ideological, theoretical, and practical factors,” that took the form of publications, film titles, advertising posters, furniture, film, and theatrical sets. They were produced according to Rodchenko’s conviction that “certain materials would signify communist values by their reference either to communist purpose or methodological construction; that is, carved wooden furniture would not be appropriate, but machined mass-produced pieces would.”<sup>82</sup> With his characteristic poetic and bombastic language full of capitals and italics, Rodchenko, in his 1921 manifesto “Slogans,” declares art as “one of the branches of *mathematics*,” and states that “ART *which has not entered life*” is to be “handed over to the *archeological* museum of ANTIQUITY”:

THE FUTURE doesn’t build monasteries for the ROMAN PRIESTS, PROPHETS, and HOLY FOOLS of art.

Down with ART as a bright PATCH on the mediocre life of a propertied man.

Down with art as a precious STONE amid the dirty, dark life of the poor man.

Down with art as a means TO ESCAPE A LIFE that isn’t worth living. LIFE, a conscious and organized life, capable of SEEING and CONSTRUCTING, is a contemporary art.

A PERSON who organizes his life, work, and himself is a CONTEMPORARY ARTIST.

WORK FOR LIFE and not for PALACES, TEMPLES, CEMETERIES, and MUSEUMS.

Work in the midst of *everyone*, for *everyone*, and *with everyone*.

DOWN with monasteries, institutes, ateliers, studios, offices, and islands.

*Consciousness*, EXPERIMENT, goals, CONSTRUCTION, technology, and *mathematics* – these are the BROTHERS of contemporary ART.<sup>83</sup>

80 Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond* (London/New York: Verso, 2011), p. 24.

81 Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia*, p. 82.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

83 Alexander N. Lavrentiev (ed.), *Aleksandr Rodchenko: Experiments for the Future* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2005), pp. 142–43.

At this stage of Rodchenko's writing, the Soviet Union was still far from an industrially developed country – its own revolutionary modernity remained a mere ambition rather than a reality – making Rodchenko's idea of productivism as means to mass-produce constructivist aesthetics into the large public domain limited in scope. Nonetheless, he made significant contributions, for example the *USSR Worker Club* (1925), which is exemplary of his philosophy. It is a multifunctional space that offered workers a communal table for discussion, study and play, 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 active workers' engagement in social and political life. Exhibited as part of the Soviet pavilion at the 1925 "Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs" in Paris, it formed a testimony to the Avant-Garde Propaganda Art production in the years dominated by Lenin's and Lunacharsky's cultural policies. In the *USSR Worker Club*, we find an artwork transformed into a full infrastructure for political and social activity; the artwork facilitates and provides tools for furthering revolutionary consciousness and practice. The artwork performs revolutionary modernity and simultaneously provides the means for its users to perform and apply its possibilities on their own terms.

By the time Rodchenko presented the *USSR Worker Club*, the peak of the artistic avant-garde had already passed. Lenin had died a year earlier, and the leadership of the Communist Party would direct the country into a model of radical and violent authoritarian and dictatorial policies. The avant-garde, which had embraced the revolutionary moment of the October Revolution and which had claimed a position at the forefront of reconstructing life in the new revolutionary Soviet Union, would be among the first to experience this setback. But before we explore the history of the decline of this artistic experiment, let us attempt to summarize what essentially defined this early model of Avant-Garde Propaganda Art.

As we discussed in the first chapter, modern propaganda is the performance of power in modern society. In the context of the early years of the Soviet Union, we have observed the demand of the revolutionaries to modernize the country, but in a way that ran contrary to the politics of the Western world. Rather than replicating its model of capitalist modernity, it aimed at establishing a revolutionary modernity that would make the construction of socialism and subsequent stateless communism a reality. As such, the Soviet Union attempted to return to some of the initial ideals of the French Revolution, while avoiding what it perceived as the subsequent decline in the form of the bourgeois state.

In the context of the Russian Revolution, the possibility of propa-

ganda is devised by Lenin as a means to educate through politicization, in building the necessary base to achieve an idea of revolutionary modernity. Propaganda emerges simultaneously with the endeavor of constructing modern socialism. Theoretically at least, this is a different form of modern propaganda than that of the British. Rather than being an expression of the height of imperial modernity, propaganda becomes part of the process in constructing a counter-modernity based on revolutionary ideals.

In Lenin's ideals of propaganda as mass education we can discern the real possibility of a propaganda of mass education and emancipation. Just as the avant-garde rejected the separation between art and life, this model of propaganda rejects the separation between the one who creates propaganda and those who are merely subjected to it, what Lenin considered mere "indoctrination." Mass, communal propaganda, on the other hand – a collective performance of power – is a propaganda of politicization and equalization: socialism is constructed through the common, revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat. Its avant-garde leads, but in the process, aims to merge with the true master-builders and constructors of the new world, the revolutionary entity of the people.

This brings us back to a fundamentally important observation in the work of Ellul and Chomsky and Herman: namely the idea that only strongly organized groups that can resist the apparatus of modern propaganda have a chance to build alternatives to its dominance. While Ellul and Chomsky and Herman consider this as a form of "counter-propaganda" in their wish to reject the very notion of propaganda altogether, it would in the context of the Soviet Union and its aim to establish a revolutionary modernity in opposition to capitalist modernity be more precise to speak of a fundamentally *different* form of modern propaganda. Whereas Ellul would certainly not agree with such an assessment – he considered Lenin responsible for the later horrors of Stalinism – we would do well here to take his proposition of discussing propagandas in the plural literally. Although Ellul used the term propagandas to clarify the fact that the technological society uses a variety of propagandas to further its aim to establish "Total Propaganda," we will here part with his absolutist claim on the notion of propaganda as something that should be resisted by definition, and observe in the early Soviet Union the possibility of defining a completely different type of propaganda that Ellul's model is unable to accommodate. Again, this does not mean that this is by definition a "better" propaganda. However what we want to stress here is primarily that we are dealing with a *different propaganda*, following from our earlier analysis that different structures of power generate different propagandas.

We should not idealize the early years of the Soviet Union and Lenin's strong emphasis on party discipline and the centralization of power within the party, leading to alternative cultural and political initiatives to be considered by him as "separatist." This authoritarian and harsh party line might have well contained the seeds of the decline of the revolutionary project in the years after Lenin's death, although we will leave that ongoing debate to the many historians interested in this question. For us the main importance is to conclude that the *attempt* to construct a revolutionary modernity – and its partial successes – provides us with the possibility of articulating different models of modern propaganda as a result of the different character of the structures of power that defines their modus operandi. Whereas British capitalist modernity produced a model of covert propaganda in service of elite interests, the Soviet's engagement with a revolutionary modernity aimed to produce a model of overt propaganda in service of and practiced by the proletarian masses. A different distribution of power – a different structure of power – can thus result in a different model of modern propaganda.

Before continuing our exploration of the role of art and propaganda in the Soviet Union after Lenin's death, let us first summarize the definition of Avant-Garde Propaganda Art as we have discussed it in this segment:

- Avant-Garde Propaganda Art is characterized by a practice of mass education – of mass performance – in which art had to align itself with the vanguard of the Party if it aimed to participate in its revolutionary objectives;
- Avant-Garde Propaganda Art aims at a synthesis between art and life through revolutionary practice, and as such aims at rebuilding the structures of power in a given society: by changing the structure of power, a different propaganda becomes possible as well;
- Avant-Garde Propaganda Art demanded of artists not merely to illustrate political causes, but to alter the very conditions of artistic practice as such: the privileged autonomy of the individualist bourgeois artist was to be rejected in favor of the artist as builder or constructor of a world that would benefit the autonomy of the proletarian collective as a whole;
- Avant-Garde Propaganda Art contributes to changing the structure of power in a given society and propagates its redistribution, leading to the possibility of a collective propaganda, in which the unequal powers between the knowledgeable sender (the propagandist-artist) and its ignorant receiver (the sub-

ject-audience) are aimed to become equalized: egalitarian.

In the years following Lenin's death, the importance of art remained acknowledged by the subsequent Stalin regime, although its politicization would take a different turn compared to Lenin's aim of a moderated process of industrialization through the New Economic Policy and the relative pluriformity of cultural life that developed in parallel. We will now explore how, contrary to the ideals of an Avant-Garde Propaganda Art, the Soviet Union after the death of Lenin witnessed the emergence of what would become known as *Totalitarian Propaganda Art*: a complex concept that served very different political functions and operated in a significantly different way.

## 2.3 TOTALITARIAN PROPAGANDA ART

In his book *The Total Art of Stalinism* (1987), the Russian philosopher Boris Groys discusses the development of the concept of “socialist realism,” which was officially declared as the Stalin-sanctioned artistic doctrine of the Soviet Union by Andrei Zhdanov, the Head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee, during the First Congress of the Writer’s Union in 1934.<sup>84</sup> This declaration of socialist realism followed the dissolution of all existing and competing art groups in 1932, and was aimed at shaping Stalinist cultism and his return to political nationalism, putting an end to the relative pluralism of art movements that had existed during the years of Lenin’s rule.<sup>85</sup> Groys explains that the notion of “realism” in socialist realism had little to do with the idea of an accurate representation of objective reality, but was rather “oriented to that which has not yet come into being but which should be created.”<sup>86</sup> In other words, painters, designers, sculptors, filmmakers, and architects who had now been placed under total control of the state were not supposed to show the world as it was, or as they thought they saw it, but according to the Party line dictated by Stalin. In his *Speech to the Congress of Soviet Writers*, Zhdanov stated that “[i]n our country the main heroes of works of literature are the active builders of a new life – working men and women, men and women collective farmers, Party members, business managers, engineers, members of the Young Communist League, Pioneers.”<sup>87</sup> Stalin called upon writers as “engineers of the soul,” declaring 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.”<sup>88</sup>

Socialist realism was thus a realism located in socialist engineering objectives, which would bring about the inevitable communist future that Stalin was guiding the country toward. Its realism was the realism of the Party’s objectives, the inevitable development from feudalism to bourgeois capitalism, and from socialism to communism.<sup>89</sup> It is in the

84 Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 36. The departure from the internationalist artistic avant-garde ran parallel to the increasing nationalist policies of the country, most exemplary through Stalin’s maxim of “Socialism in one country” in 1924, claiming that “the working class, in alliance with the laboring peasantry, can deal the finishing blow to the capitalists of our country and build a socialist society, even if there is no victorious revolution in the West to come to its aid.” Josef Stalin, *J. V. Stalin: Works*, Vol. 8 (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1954), p. 101.

85 Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 33.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

87 Andrei Zhdanov, “Speech to the Congress of Soviet Writers,” Harrison and Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900–1990*, p. 420.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 411.

89 “Because Socialist Realism was a method of creation rather than a style or aesthetic system, its theorists concentrated on abstract definitions of the kind of political consciousness that all the arts had to reflect and through which their success or failure could be judged. The first of these



light of this “realism” that we should consider famous paintings such as *Sketch for Stalin’s Speech at the 16th Congress of the Communist Party* (1933) by Alexander Gerasimov, depicting the fatherly figure of Stalin guiding his Party; *To Mother for the Next Feed* (1935) by Taras Gaponenko, showcasing joyous peasants working modern machinery in an overabundant harvest; or *A Relay Race Around the “B” Ring* (1947) by Alexandr Deineka, representing healthy young Soviet athletes running the main streets of Moscow. Few will know the names of these artists, and few will be able to bring to mind the specific imagery of their work, but many will be able to immediately add more of these stereotypical and artificial images in their imagination in the form of heroic fighters of the Soviet army and committed workers of its industry. Similar to the art of Nazi Germany, these are the archetypical images that have come to define our association with the cultist dimensions of propaganda art in dictatorships – and therefore propaganda art in general. They are the product of Stalin’s attempt to centralize and standardize all cultural production, rejecting the internationalist and egalitarian objectives of the early Soviet confederacy structured by the Party, oriented toward a relentless claim to power around his single person as father of the glorified Soviet nation. From Avant-Garde Art as a form of mass performance we move to an attempt of a singular performance of the state, directed by Stalin – which Groys refers to as the “Total Art of Stalinism.”<sup>90</sup> The macro-performative dimension of propaganda in this case, is again enacted from the position of monopolized power.

Stalin had come to favor figurative art with a romantic air above all else, which benefited conservative art groups such as The Association of Artists for a Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR), whose work hearkened back to the prerevolutionary movement of the *Peredvizhniki*, the “Wanderers” or “Itinerants.” This 19th-century group of painters who opposed the tsarist regime had moved to the countryside, and its traveling exhibitions depicted both the proud ethos of the peasantry as well as its hardships.<sup>91</sup> But whereas the aesthetics of the socially engaged Wanderers were adopted owing to their radical historical heritage and

their accessible figurative and naturalistic depictions, their engagement with the actuality of social reality was most certainly not: their means were now employed to represent a romanticized and desired *future* reality dictated by Stalin, rather than the social devastation of his ruthless policies.

For the former Russian avant-garde, the shift of power proved disastrous. Already in 1926, an article “A Monastery on a State Subsidy” had been published, critiquing the work of Malevich and his colleagues at the State Institute of Artistic Culture (GinKhuK). It was subsequently closed and Malevich was arrested and convicted to three months’ imprisonment on the charge of being a German spy.<sup>92</sup> This proved to be the beginning of the denunciation of what came to be regarded as the “formalist” art of the suprematist, constructivist, and productivist movements. In 1928, an article in *Sovetskoye Foto* attacked Rodchenko, accusing his photographic work as plagiarizing the “formalist” aesthetics of foreign non-Soviet photographers, initiating a debate that over the following years would develop, in an increasingly eerie way, into the most narrow definition of the “correct” depiction of reality.<sup>93</sup> For example, in 1933 a student asked Rodchenko about a photograph he had taken of a young pioneer from a low perspective: “Why does the pioneer look upwards? It is not ideologically correct. Pioneers and the youth of the Komsomol must look ahead.”<sup>94</sup> Under the Stalinist regime, whose paranoia had generated a permanent witch hunt for all “revisionists” that appeared to even marginally deviate from his established Party line, such accusations of formalism and internationalism could lead to death. LEF editor and poet Vladimir Mayakovsky became another target. His replies and counter-articles on formalist accusations were to no effect, leading him to commit suicide in 1930. Artists such as Lissitzky, Rodchenko, and Klutskis saw themselves forced to compromise, publicly apologize for their “formalist” tendencies, and retreat from the public eye while taking on socialist realist commissions following the outlines of Stalin’s cultural policies. In some cases, this proved not sufficient to take away the suspicion of their revisionist tendencies, and Klutskis, after having produced a series of posters and other propaganda materials according to the new criteria of socialist realism – many in collaboration with artist Lyubov Sergeevna Popova, also his life partner – was executed during the Great Purges on Stalin’s orders in 1938.

Despite the fact that there seems to be a clear difference between

rules of thumb was *narodnost*’ (based on the word for ‘people’ and ‘nation’) which was centered around the relationship of the work to popular ideas and sentiments as well as to the ethnic origins of the people it depicted. *Klassovost*’ related to the class awareness of the artist which had been heightened during the Cultural Revolution and to how he or she depicted such concerns. *Partiinost*’ was the expression of the central and leading role of the Communist party in all aspects of Soviet life as well as membership over the party; and *ideinost*’ was the introduction of new thinking and attitudes, of course first approved by the party, as the central content of the artwork.” David Elliott, “Moscow: Introduction,” in Dawn Ades et al. (eds.), *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators* (London: South Bank Centre, 1995), p. 187.

90 The performance of the state in the form of forced industrialization under Stalin was extensively documented by Novosti Press Agency for national and international purposes, see: Mark Holborn and Torsten Nyström, *Propaganda: Photographs from Soviet Archives* (Chichester: Bonnier Books, 2007)

91 Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p. 85.

92 David Elliott, “The End of the Avant-Garde,” in Dawn et al., *Art and Power*, p. 195.

93 *Ibid.*, pp. 195–96.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 197.

the Leninist and Stalinist policies in both politics and culture, there have been many theorists and historians who suggest a subsequent relationship. Groys, for example, argues that socialist realism in some respects is a continuation of the ideals of merging art with political life as espoused by Avant-Garde Propaganda Art. Art historian Igor Golomstock, whose work we will discuss below, goes even further by suggesting that the Leninist paradigm of modern propaganda art was a foundation even for Hitler's cultural policies in the Third Reich. We will continue to explore at what level these claims are correct, and how one can distinguish Avant-Garde Propaganda Art from socialist realism.

Whereas the events following Lenin's death may suggest a stark contrast between the Russian avant-garde in the Lenin era and the Stalinist regime, Groys's analysis of socialist realism instead argues for an art-historical relation between the Russian avant-garde's declaration of being the new master builders and artist-constructors, and Stalin's demand of artists to become the engineers of the soul of the Soviet citizenry. Groys criticizes the "myth of an innocent avant-garde,"<sup>95</sup> and argues that whereas the avant-garde might have been naive in believing that they would be allowed to shape the cultural policies of the early Soviet Union, they had themselves aggressed competing art groups – such as the Association of Artists for a Revolutionary Russia, which they considered counter-revolutionary – in their hopes of constructing a new world from scratch. And, within the avant-garde, the struggle for power among its various art groups had been present as well. In its turn, as the regime began to espouse its preferences toward a conservative and romanticized figurative doctrine of culture, the avant-garde now found itself – unsurprisingly – aggressed by the very groups they had wanted to exclude from the cultural life of the Soviet Union. But the essential issue at stake, Groys argues, is not the conflict between the avant-garde and the Stalinist regime, but rather its continuity, for "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."<sup>96</sup> Rather than a break, Groys sees Stalin as the one who took over 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 his cultural apparatus according to his will:

Stalinist culture brought in to the open the myth of the demiurge, the transformer of society and the universe, which, although it

95 Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 8.

96 Ibid., p. 36.

was presumed by the avant-garde, was not explicitly represented in avant-garde artistic practice, and it set this myth in the center of its entire social and artistic life. Like the avant-garde, Stalinist culture continues to be oriented toward the future; it is projective rather than mimetic, a visualization of the collective dream of the new world and the new humanity rather than the product of an individual artist's temperament; it does not retire to the museum, but aspires to exert an active influence upon life.<sup>97</sup>

As mentioned, we find similar ideas to those of Groys in the work of Russian art historian Igor Golomstock, who authored a standard work on the role of art and culture in dictatorships, *Totalitarian Art* (originally published in 1990, revised in 2011). Golomstock, a former member of the Union of Soviet Artists, concurs with Groys that totalitarianism made the "political ideas of total revolution and social transformation" of the avant-garde into a "ready-made," translating them "into their opposite and forges from them a weapon with which to destroy their enemies – including the very creators of these ideas."<sup>98</sup> In his view too, the avant-garde had a role in proposing the necessity of a synthesis between art and life which, in the hands of the dictator-artist, found its true expression in Stalin's totalitarian project.

Different from Groys, however, Golomstock introduces the notion of "totalitarianism."<sup>99</sup> His attempt is to define the notion of Totalitarian Propaganda Art as a specific model of artistic production dictated by the same principles and aesthetic doctrines in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and Maoist China. Golomstock is convinced that the Russian revolution forms the reoccurring cultural blueprint for each of these regimes. While his study proves enlightening in terms of the specific characteristics of state-sanctioned art within the fascist, Nazi, and Stalinist regimes, we will see that his attempt to argue for a singular and overall homogeneous existence of a Totalitarian Art is untenable.

Golomstock takes the work of the American Lewis Mumford, who introduces the notion of the "megamachine" in his book *The Myth of the Machine* (Vol. I 1967, Vol. II 1970) as a starting point for his definition of the "laws" of totalitarian art. Often compared to the apocalyptic

97 Ibid., p. 113.

98 Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, The Third Reich, Fascist Italy, and the People's Republic of China* (New York/London: Overlook Duckworth, 2011), p. xvi.

99 A term which, according to Rasmussen, was "first put into use by opponents of Mussolini's fascist government in the early 1920s – Mussolini was critiqued for giving excessive power to the fascist party [...]. For Mussolini the term expressed the primacy of the political over all other social spheres as well as the state's integration of and control over all aspects of social life." Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "Approaching Totalitarianism and Totalitarian Art," in Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jacob Wanberg (eds.), *Totalitarian Art and Modernity* (Aarhus/Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2010), p. 109.

vision of modern technological totalitarianism elaborated by Jacques Ellul, Mumford describes this “megamachine” as an “invisible structure, composed of living, but rigid, human parts, each assigned to his specific office, role and task, to make possible the immense work-output and grand designs of this great collective organizations.”<sup>100</sup> For Golomstock, this paradigm of the megamachine embodies the laws of the totalitarian state where Totalitarian Propaganda Art gains its effect. Just like Ellul, Golomstock considers the question of ideology to be secondary. It is the radical centralization of the state apparatus and its attempt to engineer and control all aspects of social, political, and economic life, that is the true creation of totalitarianism, and its art is merely shaped in the image of this mechanical reality. According to Golomstock, the one-party state of totalitarianism defines the doctrines of its art:

The foundations of totalitarian art are laid down at the same time and place as those of the one-party State:

1. The State declares art (and culture as a whole) to be an ideological weapon and a means of struggle for power.
2. The State acquires a monopoly over all manifestations of the country’s artistic life.
3. The State constructs an all-embracing apparatus for the control and direction of art.
4. From the multiplicity of artistic movements then in existence, the State selects one movement, always the most conservative, which most nearly answers its needs and declares it to be official and obligatory.
5. Finally, the State declares war to death against all styles and movements other than the official ones, declaring them to be reactionary and hostile to class, race, people, Party or State, to humanity, to social or artistic progress, etc.<sup>101</sup>

Following these principles of totalitarian art, Golomstock explains how in Nazi Germany this resulted in the foundation of the Reich Culture Chamber (Reichskulturkammer), 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. These institutions became instruments of a single dictator–artist, of whom the failed-artist-turned-ru-

100 Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union*, p. xvi.

101 *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

ler has become the ultimate embodiment of Golomstock’s totalitarian art.<sup>102</sup> In Golomstock’s words: “Hitler saw himself as the architect of the Third Reich.”<sup>103</sup>

Different from Groys, Golomstock considers the organizational foundation of totalitarian art that demands total cultural control under a single party to be rooted in the works of Vladimir Lenin, and most particularly his text *Party Organization and Party Literature* (1905), which we discussed above. According to Golomstock, Lenin’s view on the relation between party and art formed through the German communists Hitler and Mussolini’s indirect inspiration for the forging of a cultural propaganda model, and a direct inspiration in the case of Mao Zedong.<sup>104</sup> Despite the relative freedom that Lenin preached for artists outside of the Party, and the cultural lenience toward the party-loyal avant-garde, Golomstock perceives Lenin’s orientation on the Party as the main tool of governance as the inevitable foundation for further cultural centralization and control that would find its ultimate expression in the late years of the Stalinist era.

Golomstock’s comprehensive comparative study of art production within dictatorships attempts to structurally show organizational and aesthetic overlaps. What strikes us in the propaganda art of dictatorships, he explains, are the reoccurring figures of heroic leaders, heroic soldiers, heroic factory workers, heroic peasants, depicted in styles that reassert the aesthetic models of a glorified past. In Nazi Germany particularly in reference to ancient Greece, in the case of fascist Italy the Roman Empire, and in the Stalinist Soviet Union the bizarre conflation between the romantic aesthetics of the pre-revolutionary rural painters and the tsarist might that these very same artists opposed. This rewriting of history to serve the politics of the present and to project an even more heroic future upon the populace, involved a permanent falsification of history. It depicts Hitler visiting military fronts at

102 We find a very similar approach to the notion of the artist-dictator in the work of Tzvetan Todorov, who argues that Hitler’s fascination for the composer Richard Wagner was at the foundation of his understanding of his own role in “directing” the Third Reich as his own Gesamtkunstwerk, or “total work of art.” The notion of the total work of art was elaborated in Wagner’s 1848 essay “Art and Revolution,” in which he took the European revolutions of the time as a starting point to argue for the possible for a “communist” gathering of all creative forces in a single interdisciplinary play. For Wagner, the total work of art was something of a staging of a prefiguration of the possibility of revolution through art. Wagner’s later political conservatism and anti-Semitic writings cast a dark light upon his artistic heritage, which Todorov regularly highlights, for example in his essay “Artists and Dictators,” in which he writes: “It is common knowledge that the Führer reserved a special place for Wagner who incarnated in German-speaking countries the concept of the artist not as a figure among others in society but as the very model for society,” after which he continues to mention Hitler’s correspondence with Wagner’s son, the fact that Hitler recited Wagner by heart and claimed to have “attended 30–40 performances of *Tristan and Isolde*” as well as the fact that Wagner’s overture of *Rienzi* was “played regularly at Nazi party congresses.” See: Tzvetan Todorov, *The Limits of Art* (London/New York/Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010), pp. 36–37.

103 Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union*, p. 166.

104 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

locations he never went to; masses of Bolsheviks storming the Winter Palace even though in reality the palace was empty and only a handful of revolutionaries had participated; and making political opponents of the regime disappear to the benefit of the new leaders who appear to have always been present.

But Golomstock also observes differences. For example, the emphasis on the rural quality of the romantic depictions of peasant life in the Stalinist Soviet Union versus the more rigid neo-classicist tendencies of Nazi art. Or the near absence of nudity in socialist realism, as the singular naked body would deny its collective social essence, whereas in the work of the Nazi artists the nude body gave proof of the purity of the racial Aryan and as such was a singular “prototypical” model to be followed and aspired to by the collective. But also on an organizational and infrastructural level Golomstock emphasized that especially fascist Italy was never successful in establishing an “iconographic canon,” as it never declared a clear fascist cultural doctrine and allowed relative artistic freedom as long as artist groups did not oppose Mussolini’s rule. For instance, the futurist avant-garde exhibited at the same time as the more traditional Novecento group, and architectural expressions varied between high modernist aesthetics and more regressive classicist themes derived from the height of the Roman Empire.<sup>105</sup> In the case of the Maoist People’s Republic, which receives only a minimal treatment in the book as the “Chinese variant,” Golomstock declares Mao’s ideals of a “New Democratic Culture” that was to be “nationalist in form, socialist in content”<sup>106</sup> as a mere “second-hand” copy of the cultural model of the Soviet Union.<sup>107</sup>

The problem with Golomstock’s conclusion 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

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 122. The claim that Stalinist and Maoist art production can be conflated is strongly refuted by art historian Christof Büttner in his discussion of the sculpture group “Rent Collection Courtyard” (1965), which consisted of 114 dry-clay, life-sized figures. During Maoist rule the installation was copied five times due to its enormous popular acclaim. In seven scenes the sculpture depicts the exploitative politics of landlord Liu Wencai, and shows how farmers deliver their harvest as a form of tax, but are tricked and forced to hand over even their daughters to provide breast milk to the opium-addicted, weakened Wencai. The sculpture group is exhibited in the former house of the landlord, Anren, in the district of Dayi, and was realized by a worker’s collective that, basing themselves on the cultural theories of Mao Zedong, refused to place any signature on the work and based their depictions of the scene on studying and discussing with the people having lived through the pre-revolutionary politics in the region. The theatrical use of the sculpture group, its collective production by professionals and amateurs alike, and the rejection of pedestals or durable materials, distinguishes the work strongly from the thesis of socialist realism. Büttner states that “[i]t is a work of art that is so convincing that many interpret it to be the simple, unimaginative depiction of a real event and held it in disdain for exactly that reason. That was all the more true when Western art historians labeled it Socialist Realism and, even worse, stigmatized it as propaganda art for the Cultural Revolution.” Christof Büttner, “The Transformations of a Work of Art – Rent Collection Courtyard, 1965–2009,” in Esther Schlicht and Max Hollein (eds.), *Art for the Millions* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2009), p. 38.

socialist realism, disappear; the mega-machine of totalitarianism itself – not even Stalin as the ultimate performer, as Groys argues – is the sole creator of dictator and propaganda artist alike. According to Golomstock, 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.”<sup>108</sup> The ultimate example, he concludes, can be found in the works of former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who “himself an artist [...] also wrote a treatise on art” and in Churchill’s entourage “we find no architects, artists and writers like Rosenberg, Speer, Goebbels and Shirach – the leader of the Hitler youth and self-styled outstanding lyrical poet of National Socialism.”<sup>109</sup>

Golomstock’s remarks are crucial for understanding the political implications of the concept of Totalitarian Art, for here, through the writings of Churchill, it becomes clear that the term serves to establish an absolute opposition between Totalitarian Art and Democratic Art. Churchill being as an exemplary leader of a “democratic” society, his essay “Painting as a Pastime” (1921–22) is the most important example of a mode of artistic production that is non- or even anti-totalitarian. In this text, the future British Prime Minister, who would lead his country in the Second World War against the Nazis, elaborates on one of his private cultural passions, landscape painting. Explaining his passion as a military leader in the medium of painting, Churchill writes:

In all battles two things are usually required of the Commander-in-Chief: to make a good plan for his army and, secondly, to keep a strong reserve. Both of these are obligatory upon the painter. To make a plan, thorough reconnaissance of the country where the battle is to be fought is needed. Its fields, its mountains, its rivers, its bridges, its trees, its flowers, its atmosphere – all require and repay attentive observation from a special point of view.<sup>110</sup>

Apart from Churchill’s evident militaristic perspective on studying a landscape – seemingly evoking the same gaze, whether going to war or when merely painting its environment – there are at least two troubling elements to the opposition with which Golomstock ends his thorough elaboration on art and dictatorship.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>110</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *Painting as a Pastime* (London: Unicorn Press, 2013), pp. 48–49.

The first is the equation of avant-garde art in the Soviet Union with Stalinist-sanctioned socialist realism. Neither Groys nor Golomstock claim that they are exactly the same, but they both argue that the aim to create a synthesis between art and life was introduced by the avant-garde and formed the cultural blueprint of Stalinism. In other words, Stalin realized what the avant-garde was only dreaming of. Groys is right to say that there was no “innocent” avant-garde; they were employed in politics and the shaping of new structures of power. But the engagement of the avant-garde with the question of power in egalitarian terms radically differed from Stalin’s authoritarian, nationalist, and bureaucratized dictatorship. Totalitarian Propaganda Art under Stalinist rule meant a rejection of proletarian, collective dictatorship in favor of a singular and cultist nationalist rule by Stalin himself. There is no point in idealizing the October revolution and its stated objectives of classless communist society that were always far from reality, but Stalin rejected the very possibility of this thesis and repurposed art as propaganda back to its role as a servant tasked with the glorification of the tsar. Again, we should avoid here a moral judgment that declares the avant-garde “innocent” and the art of dictatorships “guilty,” but rather, we should emphasize the explicit difference in the structures of power that each represents as well as the clearly conflicting artistic outcomes that are their result.

The second problem, mainly related to Golomstock, is the question how “total” the notion of “totalitarianism” has to be? Mussolini’s cultural apparatus, according to Golomstock, was not “total enough,” and the “Chinese variant” too much of a copy to be as “total” as the Soviet one. Without ignoring the absolute and evident brutality of the Stalinist or Nazi regime, how does this notion of totalitarianism actually help us to gain an understanding of its cultural and propaganda machinery other than through the term “dictatorship”? The term totalitarianism seems to be devised in this case to declare something of a “sublime evil,”<sup>111</sup> which, in the words of Golomstock, knows its own laws, and no creator except for itself. This in turn generates something of an art beyond analysis, a totalitarian monstrosity that exists under its own laws, in its own time, and which is irreconcilable with the “laws” of our democratic present. But how then does such a thoroughly propagandistic art relate to our exploration in the previous chapter, in which it

111 Slavoj Žižek, who often returns to the mechanisms of Soviet politics and propaganda in his work, writes in this regard: “Throughout its entire career, ‘totalitarianism’ was an ideological notion that sustained the complex operation of [...] guaranteeing the liberal-democratic hegemony, dismissing the Leftist critique of liberal democracy as the obverse, the ‘twin’, of the Rightist Fascist dictatorship. [...] [F]ar from being an effective theoretical concept, [totalitarianism] is a kind of stopgap: instead of enabling us to think, forcing us to acquire new insight into the historical reality it describes, it relieves us of the duty to think, or even actively prevents us from thinking.” Slavoj Žižek, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?* (London/New York: Verso, 2001), p. 3.

became clear that modern propaganda finds its origins in the imperial democracy of the British, whose heritage Churchill would later on defend against the Nazi regime? Here, it becomes clear that our study faces not a distinction between totalitarian propaganda and democratic freedom, but of two propagandas with overlaps *and* differences.

In short, 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 to merge art with life. Through the notion of Totalitarian Propaganda Art, we essentially define what is free art; making all regimes that do not fit the radical label of totalitarianism automatically 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 very idea that the notion of democracy may in fact very well serve “totalitarian” objectives. As such, the concept of Totalitarian Propaganda Art serves a dual function: it offers a “complete” description of the role of art within specific 20th-century dictatorships on the one hand, but on the other also serves to create the myth of democratic exceptionalism when it comes to the use of propaganda.

Before continuing our exploration of the role of art and propaganda in the context of democracies – those that define the propaganda art of others as “totalitarian” – let us first summarize the definition of Totalitarian Propaganda Art as we have discussed it in this section:

- Totalitarian Propaganda Art is the category which describes the centralization of art and cultural production under extreme authoritarian regimes: we think of Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia when it comes to the enforcement of narrowly defined scripts through which the artists unambiguously have to contribute to the cult of dictator and dictatorship alike;
- Totalitarian Propaganda Art is at the same time meant to conceal both the differences between the art of various dictatorships – think of the relative cultural differences tolerated under fascism compared to the total subjugation of “Aryan” artists under Nazism – and as such aims at defining totalitarianism as radically opposed and irreconcilable with modern democracy;
- Totalitarian Propaganda Art is a dualistic term: on the one hand, it is a category with which to describe the art produced under control of 20th-century dictatorships, while on the other, the term totalitarianism serves political regimes to distinguish themselves as opposed to dictatorial influences of the past – and therefore “free”;

- Totalitarian Propaganda Art is thus both a descriptive term as well as a form of propaganda in and of itself: as a form of democratic propaganda it is used to define the universe of democracy and totalitarianism as radically oppositional, and thus risks at leading to a blindness to the existence of propaganda in modern democracies: as such this use of Totalitarian Propaganda Art can also be considered as part of the vocabulary of *Modernist Propaganda Art*

For many years after the collapse of Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes, the Soviet Union would serve as the Evil Empire against which Western democracy could position itself. The cultural legacy of Stalin's socialist realism functioned as its very own counter-propaganda, and was extensively used by democratic regimes as a proof of the cultist and "totalitarian" aesthetics of their opponents. In the following, final section of this chapter, we will explore how this discourse was in fact part of a propaganda effort best described as *Modernist Propaganda Art*.

## 2.4 MODERNIST PROPAGANDA ART

Whereas the notion of modern art applies to different and conflicting art movements around the world that sought to define an artistic vocabulary in relation to the political, industrial, and technological changes throughout the 19th and 20th century, the concept of *modernist* art became closely defined within the paradigm of capitalist democracy in the United States. It curiously combines Kantian and Saint-Simonian terminology in an attempt to define an art that fits the ideal of American political and cultural exceptionalism. We find the results of this endeavor most precisely articulated in the work of one of the most influential art critics of the interwar and post-World War II era in the United States, Clement Greenberg.

When Greenberg published his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) in the Marxist-oriented journal *Partisan Review*, he essentially laid out a theoretical framework of modernist art that assembled all concepts mentioned in the first section of this chapter, ranging from notions such as artistic freedom, beauty, the sublime, genius, autonomy, and the avant-garde. In his essay, Greenberg discusses the appearance of "avant-garde culture" as a result of Western bourgeois society, and refers to it as a "superior consciousness of history."<sup>112</sup> Greenberg argued that through avant-garde culture bourgeois society had proved itself to be "not an eternal, 'natural' condition of life, but simply the latest term in a succession of social orders."<sup>113</sup> Avant-garde artists such as Picasso, Braque, Mondriaan, Miró, Kandinsky, Brancusi, and even Klee, Matisse, and Cézanne had parted from the distracting turmoil of their times to dedicate their work to an "art for art's sake" of "pure poetry":

The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape – not its picture – is aesthetically valid; something given, increate, independent of meanings, similar or originals. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.<sup>114</sup>

Greenberg thus conjoins Saint-Simon's idea of the artist as the avant-garde of society with Kant's aesthetic vocabulary – while bypas-

<sup>112</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

sing the latter's emphasis on autonomy in relation to aesthetic experience, rather than the autonomy of art itself. The artist stands at the forefront of society by employing what Greenberg calls the artist's "relative values," which are essentially the "values of aesthetics" through which the "absolute is invoked."<sup>115</sup> Greenberg here refers to the New York artists that would become known as the *abstract expressionists*, who abandoned the domain of figurative representation in favor of the non-figurative.

In "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Greenberg claims that this avant-garde is at risk of being abandoned; for art that seeks an "experience to expression for the sake of expression"<sup>116</sup> – and that is what he considered the project of abstract expressionism to be – generates a sense of alienation with its former patrons, those to which the artist has always been "attached by an umbilical cord of gold."<sup>117</sup> The avant-garde needs a social basis, and this basis is to be found in a ruling class. But the ruling class seemed all too easily drawn to the "rear-guard," what Greenberg considers the rise of "kitsch."<sup>118</sup> Kitsch, in Greenberg's view, takes on a manifold of forms in popular and commercial culture, operating as a market devised for the masses of urbanized Western Europe and America who are incapable of engaging with "genuine culture."<sup>119</sup>

Greenberg observed that kitsch was winning the sentimental support of the masses and, in order to gain political support of the populace, that elites embraced and encouraged kitsch as a legitimate culture, instead of resisting it: "The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects."<sup>120</sup> He considered the rejection of avant-garde art by the regimes of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and fascist Italy the first signs of such cultural decay. For fascists and Stalinists avant-garde art was too complex to employ as a tool of propaganda; for this purpose kitsch was far more effective, so Greenberg argued. What remained, he claimed, was the hope that in opposition to totalitarian states and modern capitalism, a genuine socialist state would arise that would be able to support and establish a "new culture" in defense of the avant-garde, and thus, of civilization as such.

In the fifties, Greenberg had assembled a canon of artists who represented this new culture, those whom he considered the most im-

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid., pp. 7–8.

117 Ibid., p. 8.

118 Ibid., p. 9.

119 Ibid., p. 10.

120 Ibid., p. 19.

portant "living culture" of his time.<sup>121</sup> But in terms of patronage, he did not have to hope for a future socialist government, as the success of the abstract expressionists had skyrocketed in the sphere of private collectors, galleries, and museums. After all, it turned out that American capitalist democracy had given birth to the elite that Greenberg had hoped for. Thus, the critic who only a decade earlier published a major article in a Marxist journal became one of the prominent voices in defining the meaning of this new culture, which he would increasingly define as a true American contribution to the progress of art history. Greenberg's essay "American-Type Painting" (1955) is exemplary for this new endeavor.

Greenberg saw the answer to what he considered to be the retrograde mannerisms of the European avant-garde, in the work of the New York abstract expressionists. Whereas he thought that artists such as Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning were still clinging to a certain European cubist vocabulary, artists such as Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and – most of all – Jackson Pollock were liberating themselves from the European heritage, and advancing the cause of a truly autonomous art. Greenberg emphasized in their work the importance of "flatness," the absence of spatial depiction, but the full recognition of the painterly object as a reality per se – the painting as nothing more or less than the painting itself.<sup>122</sup> Pollock became the embodiment of the project of abstract expressionism: jumping around his studio or in the open air, "dripping" industrial paint upon canvases, which, instead of being mounted on the wall, were placed on the floor. Aggressively approaching the canvas from all sides, Pollock's "action painting" had a ritual, spontaneous side while being at the same time rigorously conceptually planned. His practice perfectly embodied the Greenbergian paradigm of the neo-Kantian modernist artist: the avant-garde did not form a break with history, but rather wanted to advance it, resulting in a new culture of American modernist art.

Kant, Greenberg would further argue in his essay "Modernist Painting" (1965), was essentially the "first real Modernist," as he had articulated the process through which art was able to engage in a self-critical process; and it was this process of questioning one's "own foundations" that Western – and in this case, specifically American – society had progressed the furthest.<sup>123</sup> The shift from *modern* art to *mo-*

121 Ibid., p. 21.

122 Ibid., p. 226.

123 Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Art & Literature*, No. 4 (Spring 1965) reprinted in: Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, *Art in Theory. 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas.* (London: Paul Chapman, 1982): pp. 754-760, p. 754. It is interesting to note that Greenberg named Jacques-Louis David as an important contributor to the rise of modern art, not because of his revolutionary work – for this could only implied an instrumentalization of art which would make it mere kitsch – but because of David's plea to differentiate painting specifically from the

*dermist* art meant for Greenberg that this process of self-exposure had reached a historical culmination in the new American culture it was establishing. This process of self-criticism and self-interrogation led to a true “purity” of appearance, one that formed the “guarantee of its standards of quality” as much as its “independence.”<sup>124</sup>

As it became clear that a growing capitalist elite was eager to provide all the necessary support to the booming market of American abstract expressionism, Greenberg’s defense of modernist art became increasingly characterized by an explicit sympathy for liberal politics, which would turn into an active aversion to Marxist ideology. This is exemplified by his membership of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom in the early 1950s, an organization that aimed at reinvesting in the project of political liberalism, discrediting ideology, and campaigning against communism.<sup>125</sup> This organization was symptomatic for the beginning of the Cold War, and the rise of McCarthyism – named after US senator Joseph McCarthy, who became notorious for fueling the so-called Red Scare, the fear that the Soviet Union would attempt to infiltrate and subvert the US government. Greenberg would serve as a prominent member of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom in 1952–53, and the level at which he sympathized with the organization’s agenda is expressed by his fall-out with fellow member and historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, whom Greenberg accused of being too soft by merely proposing to defend cultural freedom, rather than actively pursuing anti-communist activities.<sup>126</sup> He was also one of the core members of the organization who refused to denounce the anti-communist campaigns of Senator McCarthy.<sup>127</sup>

The American Committee for Cultural Freedom was affiliated with the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom, and was as such an entity with a clear political and ideological purpose. During the Cold War, the Congress for Cultural Freedom had the task of covertly propagating abstract expressionist – modernist – art in Europe 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. Characteristic of Greenberg’s implication in this propagandistic effort was his speech “Modernist Art” for an international broadcasting emission of the Voice of America, the official external broadcast institution of the US fe-

deral government, which received direct policy orders from the White House, reaching millions of listeners worldwide. As we may recall from the first chapter, this was the very same period that the CIA engaged in a series of covert operations to establish client regimes abroad. The art historian Meyer Schapiro, for example, had chosen not to join the American Committee for Cultural Freedom explicitly for this reason.<sup>128</sup>

In 1951, Greenberg publicly attacked the journal *The Nation*, which he claimed to be pro-Soviet, leading to Republican Congressman George Dondero – a prominent supporter of McCarthyism and ironically a fervent opponent of modernist art – to include Greenberg’s accusations against the journal in the Congressional Records that documented possible pro-Soviet subversives in the United States.<sup>129</sup> Art historian Francis Frascina, who researched Greenberg’s implications in the Red Scare, concludes that the critic was more than aware of the fact that he was operating in the interests of a government-funded, unofficial “Ministry of Culture”:

[B]y the 1950s Greenberg had become an anti-communist not least because he saw communism as dominated by a tendency that was not self-critical and which had forced art and literature to be criticized and altered by outside agendas. But, equally, organizations and institutions in the United States, such as the ACCF [American Committee for Cultural Freedom], the USIA [United States Information Agency, a diplomatic agency involved in the propagation of American culture], and the State Department had their agendas; those of a ruling elite, backed up by overt and covert funding. With “Modernist Painting” Greenberg was attached to this elite by an umbilical cord of gold.<sup>130</sup>

This does not mean that Greenberg was necessarily aware of the extent to which his plea for a modernist art of American exceptionalism was being instrumentalized, certainly not to the level of the CIA. While rumors of governmental involvement in intellectual and artistic circles had been continuous, it was not until democratic Senator Mike Mansfield called for a wide-ranging congressional investigation into all clandestine financing of the CIA and the subsequent Katzenback Committee’s 1967 report, that a large scale debate ensued on a range of American covert operations, including cultural ones.<sup>131</sup> It was that

practice of sculpture: a first step in questioning the reality of one’s own medium, and thus a first step toward an art that would become its own primary subject.

124 Ibid., p. 755.

125 Nancy Jachec, “Modernism, Enlightenment Values, and Clement Greenberg,” *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1998): pp. 123–32.

126 Ibid., p. 125–26.

127 Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper. The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 2000), p. 199.

128 Francis Frascina, “Institutions, Culture, and America’s Cold War Years: The Making of Greenberg’s Modernist Painting,” *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2003): pp. 71–97, at p. 76.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid., p. 92.

131 Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper*, p. 405.



same year that *Ramparts* magazine published a lengthy investigative report on CIA covert operations, exposing the range of seemingly independent, private, and philanthropic organizations that had been operating as fronts for its activities.<sup>132</sup>

The role of art in Cold War propaganda would famously become the topic of the 1974 *Artforum* essay “Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War” by art historian Eva Cockcroft. Cockcroft’s essay specifically focuses on the structures of “self-perpetuating boards of trustees composed primarily of rich donors,” which often form “the same ‘prominent citizens’ who control banks and corporations and help stage the formulation of foreign policy.”<sup>133</sup> She mentions the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, which from the early 1940s onward had supported war-related cultural programs, and now, in the context of the Cold War, had expanded its activities overseas through Porter McCray, MoMA’s head of international programs and former employee of the Office of Inter-American Affairs during the Second World War. Cockcroft describes that abstract expressionist artists were of great importance to McCray, who displayed them prominently in international exhibitions such as *The New American Painting* (1958–59), which also toured eight different European countries. According to the introduction to the show’s catalogue by art historian and former MoMA director Alfred H. Barr, the abstract expressionists “defiantly reject the conventional values of the society which surrounds them, but they are not politically *engagés* even though their paintings have been praised and condemned as symbolic demonstrations of freedom in a world in which freedom connotes a political attitude.”<sup>134</sup> For Cockcroft, this ideological reading of modernist American art as “non-ideological” is exactly what made it so effective in the Cold War policies opposing the figurative doctrines of Stalinist socialist realism. While the MoMA might not have been directly tied to the government and CIA Cold War effort, there were certainly suspicions of mutual interests, due to its private donors and former political affiliations of some of its employees, as well as their shared ideological project of promoting American exceptionalism in Europe:

[T]he Abstract Expressionists succeeded in creating an important new art movement. They also contributed, whether they knew it or not, to a purely political phenomenon – the supposed divorce between art and politics which so perfectly served America’s needs in the cold war.<sup>135</sup>

132 Ibid., p. 382.

133 Eva Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War,” *Artforum*, Vol. 12, No. 10 (Jun. 1974): pp. 39–41, at pp. 174–48.

134 Ibid., p. 153.

135 Ibid., p. 154.

The most detailed account of this cultural Cold War was published by historian Frances Stonor Saunders under the title *Who Paid the Piper?* (1999). Essentially, Saunders’s book is a detailed reconstruction of the operations initiated by the CIA in the domain of cultural warfare from 1950 until 1976 under the umbrella of Congress for Cultural Freedom, which “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.”<sup>136</sup>

The Congress for Cultural Freedom originated from the post-war years in Berlin, which after its division became the site of political contestation between the Americans and Soviets. Cultural policy was crucial in winning over the hearts and minds of the Europeans, and in that regard the Americans lagged far behind. In the field of what Saunders refers to as the “Kulturkampf,” the Soviets were experienced in appealing to international intellectual and cultural elites, and as early as 1945 they had opened a State Opera in Berlin, followed in 1947 by a House of Culture: “Thanks largely to Russian propaganda, America was widely regarded as culturally barren, a nation of gum-chewing, Chevy-driving, Dupont-sheathed philistines.”<sup>137</sup> Whereas from 1948 onward the Marshall Plan offered financial credits and material assistance to strengthen Western European countries in their future role as valuable NATO alliances, the educated and cultured classes were still to be won over. The CIA, which had been founded in 1947 through the National Security Act, was going to prove crucial to this endeavor.

A key figure in the American cultural offensive was the Estonian-American Michael Josselson, who, with much of his family killed by the Bolsheviks, held a strongly anti-Communist position. Enlisted at first in the US army to assist the denazification process and as a cultural advisor, Josselson was approached by the CIA to join its Berlin station for Covert Action in 1949. After a disappointing American counter-conference to the successful Soviet “World Congress for Peace” that had taken place on April 20, 1949, launching Picasso’s lithograph *La Colombe* (The Dove) as its permanent icon, Josselson, in his new position as a CIA operative, proposed to his superiors the establishment of a permanent structure to organize intellectual resistance. This proposal became the foundational document of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (codename QKOPERA), the new CIA-backed

136 Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper*, p. 1.

137 Ibid., p. 19.

cultural arm of the American Cold War machinery.<sup>138</sup> However, to be successful, it was crucial that the Congress for Cultural Freedom would uphold an image of utmost independence. Josselson was the only CIA-operative in the core group, and, formally, his colleagues were unaware of the exact sources of the funding transferred to the organization 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.<sup>139</sup> Here, the newly developed covert “civilian” structures of the CIA came to being, and Saunders effectively describes them as the American counterpoint of the Cominform – its very own “Deminform.”<sup>140</sup>

On Monday June 26, 1950, the first five-day Congress for Cultural Freedom opened in the Berlin Titania Palast in the presence of prominent American figureheads such as US senator Schlesinger, writer Tennessee Williams, actor Robert Montgomery, as well as strategically selected prominent “black” figures, such as journalist Max Yergan, who were chosen to counter the Soviet critique of American’s failure to ensure civil rights for its African-American population. Part of the British delegation were composer Peter de Mendelssohn and historian Hugh Trevor-Roper and the French provided philosopher and sociologist Raymond Aron as well as the writer André Malraux, who would later become the Minister of Cultural Affairs under De Gaulle, a role in which he would continue to support and appear in the projects of the Congress. These figures give a sense of the variety of international intellectual and cultural key players that in the course of more than two decades after would be paid to participate in the many activities of Josselson’s organization.

While the American administration considered the congress a success, receiving praise from President Truman himself, doubts had risen about its intentions: the impressive scale of the congress was unique to impoverished Europe and raised suspicion.<sup>141</sup> And though suspicions around the Congress would never fully disappear, Josselson forged an organizational strategy that henceforth would include dissident opinions that the American government itself might reject, but that would

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>139</sup> According to Saunders’s research, in the whole period of the operation’s existence the financing of the Congress for Cultural Freedom by the CIA amounted to “tens of millions of dollars” (p. 129). Important organizations that operated as “fronts” for the CIA, to avoid the money to be traced directly to the Agency, were the Fairfield Foundation (p. 125) and the Ford Foundation (pp. 129, 142), among others.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>141</sup> In the case of state-sanctioned media, this was different of course. For example, Wolf von Eckardt writes in a review that “In contrast to the rigid unity which Soviet-controlled cultural meetings in Breslau, New York and Paris displayed in their effort to hold a propagandistic monopoly over peace and culture, the Berlin Congress resulted in a creative association which drew its very strength from the diversity and richness of different opinions.” Wolf von Eckardt, “Congress for Cultural Freedom: Review,” *Information Bulletin* (Sep. 1950): pp. 19–23, at p. 21.

nonetheless draw leftist cultural classes closer:

The real objectives of the Congress were clarified. It was not to be a center for agitation, but a beachhead in Western Europe from which the advance of Communist ideas could be halted. It was to engage in a widespread and cohesive campaign of peer pressure to persuade intellectuals to disassociate themselves from Communist fronts or fellow travelling organizations. It was to encourage the intelligentsia to develop theories and arguments which were directed not at a mass audience, but at a small elite of pressure groups and statesmen who in turn determined government policy.<sup>142</sup>

Under the guidance of Josselson, the Congress for Cultural Freedom embarked on a great diversity of cultural projects. It established parallel institutions, such as the Italian Association for Cultural Freedom, the British Society for Cultural Freedom and the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. It published cultural and literary magazines such as *Preuves* in France, *Encounter* in England, and *Tempo Presente* in Italy – the latter literally copying the title of *Les Temps Modernes*, edited by arch-enemy, philosopher, and Communist sympathizer Jean-Paul Sartre. But its publications also reached beyond Europe with the journals *Cuadernos* in Latin America, *Quest* in India, *Quadrant* in Australia and *Jiyu* in Japan, and later on integrated existing journals such as the American *Partisan Review* into its organization.<sup>143</sup> The congress further initiated public and cultural manifestations, notably the “Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century” in Paris, 1952, presenting works by Samuel Barber and Igor Stravinsky. The music-oriented events were orchestrated largely by Russian-American composer Nicolas Nabokov, who had been tasked with controlling musical manifestations in Germany on possible Nazi influences, and gained historical fame when confronting the Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich.<sup>144</sup> Nabokov also took charge of “The International Conference of Twentieth Century Music” in Rome in 1954, which presented young composers that created atonal and dodecaphonic composition, music that was despised by the Stalinist regime. Remarkable was also the CIA’s clandestine book program

<sup>142</sup> Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper*, pp. 98–99.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>144</sup> Nabokov had interrogated Shostakovich at a Soviet-organized “Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace” in New York on March 25, 1949. Confronted by Nabokov’s question whether the composer agreed with the denunciation of “formalist music” by the Soviet regime, the terrified Shostakovich could not but mumble in confirmation. Ibid., pp. 12, 50. For a more detailed account of the cultural hostage situation in which Shostakovich operated within the Stalinist regime, see the work of his student Solomon Volkov, who describes the symphonies the composer developed during Stalinist rule as part of an ongoing and terrifying dialogue with and covert critique of the regime. Solomon Volkov, *Sjostakovitsj en Stalin – De kunstenaar en de isaar* (Amsterdam/Antwerpen: De Arbeiderspers, 2003), pp. 308–9.

that used fronts in the form of independent publishers and literary agents to distribute books from American figures such as T.S. Eliot as well as Soviet writers, such as Boris Pasternak, whose novel *Dr Zhivago* (1957) was prohibited in his own country due to its critical relation to the state. These books were produced and distributed under the auspices of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and under the guidance of the CIA T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943) was even translated and airdropped into Russia.<sup>145</sup> And naturally, when the Russians invaded Hungary in 1956 and Sartre for the first time fully distanced himself of the Communist Party in an article in *L'Express*, the Congress made sure to have thousands of copies distributed instantly.<sup>146</sup>

Through progressive culture, the Soviet enemy could be exposed in its barbarity, both politically and culturally. But precisely here one of the great paradoxes of the Congress for Cultural Freedom is evident, namely that its preference for modernist art was far more progressive than any other, overt national program of the United States itself. For example, "President Truman articulated a view held by many Americans that linked experimental, and especially abstract art to degenerate or subversive impulses."<sup>147</sup> And under Senator McCarthy's witch hunt for Communist conspirators this sentiment was only strengthened. McCarthy's close ally, Dondero, even proclaimed that "[a]ll modern art is Communistic," claiming cubism, futurism, dadaism, expressionism, abstractionism, and surrealism to be "primitive," "insane," and "in denial of reason."<sup>148</sup> But the Congress for Cultural Freedom, in line with the writings of Greenberg, saw in the work of the modernist artists something entirely different, and supported the dissemination of its works in the form of large-scale touring exhibitions such as *Modern Art in the United States* (1955) and *The New American Painting* (1958–59) – a campaign that Saunders describes as a form of "reverse *Entartete kunst*," meant to show that "modernism owed its survival – and its future – to America"<sup>149</sup>:

145 Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper*, p. 248.

146 Ibid., p. 306.

147 Ibid., p. 252.

148 Ibid., p. 253.

149 Ibid., p. 119. David Caute challenges Saunders's research on the international work of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, when he writes that while the CIA "certainly involved itself in clandestinely promoting literary magazines, music festivals, and orchestral tours, along with much else in the United States, the financing of American art exhibits abroad was largely the work of the Rockefellers, the Whitneys, and the Guggenheims," claiming that "Western attention post-1967 has been so fixated by the machinations of the FBI, and the KGB, that no historical episode is now deemed worthy of attention unless some clandestine agency of the state can be shown to be at the back of it." What Caute bypasses is that Saunders does not argue for some "totalitarian" cultural apparatus of the CIA, but rather lays out the much more complex and decentralized structures through which American exceptionalism was promoted in the Cold War period. Her research is not so much one of "guilt by association," but an exposé of the many different levels of involvement and different grades of awareness of actors involved in the process. See: David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 540–41. See further: Robert Burstow, "The

[F]or them, it [modernist art] spoke to a specifically anti-Communist ideology, the ideology of freedom, of free enterprise. Non-figurative and politically silent, it was the very antithesis to socialist realism. It was precisely the kind of art the Soviets loved to hate. But it was more than this. It was, claimed its apologists, an explicitly *American* intervention in the modernist canon. As early as 1946, critics were applauding the new art as independent, self-reliant, a true expression of the national will, spirit and character.<sup>150</sup>

Saunders also argues that the modernist artists were not as "depoliticized" and unaware of the instrumentalization of their work as is often claimed. Apart from the painter Ad Reinhardt, who, unlike most abstract expressionists who had espoused Marxist sympathies, 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, many of the artists had direct and voluntary links to the anti-Communist movement.<sup>151</sup> Barnett Newman had no problem to speak publicly of his work as a reflection of the "new America,"<sup>152</sup> Motherwell and Pollock – just like Greenberg – were members of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. In 1940, Rothko and Gottlieb even helped to establish the Foundation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, "which started by condemning all threats to culture from nationalistic and reactionary political movements," but in later months became an active agent in the anti-Communist movement by "exposing Party influence in various art organizations" with the aim to "destroy all Communist presence in the art world."<sup>153</sup>

From this point of view, Pollock's "drippings" suddenly demand a fundamentally different contextual reading than the one preferred by Greenberg. Rather than being questionable neo-Kantian culminations of radically self-interrogating autonomy, the figure of Pollock becomes a performer in a much larger geopolitical construct: his work operates within the micro-performative dimension of propaganda, directed through the macro-performative dimension of the Cold War. His wild dances around his canvasses while throwing paint in all directions are not merely an attempt to arrive at a truth located within the act of painting itself, but should rather be understood as a ritual performance of the doctrine of freedom espoused by the structures of power

Limits of Modernist Art as a 'Weapon of the Cold War': Reassessing the Unknown Patron of the Monument to the Unknown Soldier," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1997): pp. 68–80, at p. 80.

150 Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper*, p. 254.

151 Ibid., p. 277.

152 Ibid., p. 275.

153 Ibid., pp. 276–77.

in capitalist democracy, a doctrine to which Pollock himself declared his loyalty through his membership of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, a doctrine that further connected him with anti-Communist leagues of the United States through an “umbilical cord of gold.” The privilege that resulted from this political affiliation cannot be underestimated. While Pollock’s works would gain international fame and win the artist great financial success, an artist like Reinhardt, who was unwilling to distance himself from his political convictions, remained largely ignored until the 1960s. Pollock’s works might be criticized by American conservatives at home, but in the international sphere they were successfully capitalized as the embodiment of American exceptionalism and the doctrinal freedom it wished to export to the rest of the world.

Pollock’s work means little as propaganda, but this is essentially true for every work of propaganda art. As we saw in the first chapter, modern propaganda always demands a larger political, economic, and technological structure in which singular gestures become of importance in propagating a larger set of power interests. In this context, Greenberg’s notion of a modernist autonomy of purposeless purpose clearly shows its limits: Pollock does not perform in relation to the canvas alone, but in relation to the entire apparatus that guarantees the circulation and financial and ideological validation of his work as a cultural weapon in the Cold War. From the perspective of the CIA’s avant-garde, the purposeless purpose of modernist art thus becomes of true purpose in its merger of art with the reality of capitalist-democratic life. In declaring modernist art as the ultimate culmination of modernity, Greenberg opened the way for the avant-garde of the CIA to translate these ideas into the construction of a new reality.

Nonetheless, even though the general public today has been made aware of the use of Modernist Propaganda Art in the Cold War for several decades, the omnipresent faith in modernist art remains unshaken, in stark contrast to the fate of Avant-Garde Propaganda Art and Totalitarian Propaganda Art. The work of the Soviet avant-garde has certainly been recognized in the historical canon as one of the most important alternative histories of modern art, and its works well represented in international art institutions. Yet they continue to be exhibited with caution. The works tend to be politically contextualized, and the implication of the artists in the relation to the regimes of their time and their tragic end as propagators or victims of Stalinism is usually mentioned – often with a moral question hanging in the air: were the artists of the avant-garde ultimately at the side of democratic change

or complicit to dictatorship and totalitarianism?<sup>154</sup>

In the case of Totalitarian Art, socialist realist artworks are rare items in international museum collections, except when concerning the work of acknowledged avant-garde artists that had been forced to dedicate their talents to the Stalinist cult. Socialist realist works of art only travel in exhibitions that take the form of *Entartete Kunst* displays, inviting spectators to witness the horrors of totalitarianism, rather than to genuinely study the process through which these artworks came into being and the larger social and political context in which they operated. In the case of both Avant-Garde Propaganda Art and Totalitarian Propaganda Art, the political subtext of the works is emphasized as a means of defining their historical place. Hardly ever are they presented as autonomous art in the Greenbergian sense of the word.

In complete contrast, Modernist Propaganda Art is present in every major museum collection of the United States and most museum collections in and outside Europe. Only with the greatest exception, when shown in exhibitions with a very specific political investment, do we find any reference to the anti-Communist political orientation of its artists or its use as Modernist Propaganda Art. This absence of any political context shows us the all-encompassing success of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Even though we know, or could easily know, the implications of these works as Modernist Propaganda Art at a time in which the CIA and the American Government were implicated in gruesome military takeovers of democratic and popular governments, those works are still not acknowledged for 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*. In essence, there is nothing non-figurative about the works of Modernist Propaganda Art: *it offers figurative representations of the freedom supposedly inherent to non-figurative representation.*

Modernist Propaganda Art represents the capitalist democratic imaginary of what liberation is supposed to be. We might not directly recognize the heroic American soldiers and tragic victims of Communist violence, but presented within the right context, they are inevitably present in Pollock’s drippings – as inevitably as they are present in each and every work of Soviet socialist realism. But our museums still decide differently: Modernist Propaganda Art is not exhibited in

<sup>154</sup> Jonathan Jones’s recent comments on an exhibition of Soviet avant-garde art at the occasion of the 100-year anniversary of the Russian Revolution are exemplary, when he writes: “It is a lazy, immoral lie to keep pretending there was anything glorious about the brutal experiment Lenin imposed on Russia – or anything innocent about its all-too-brilliant propaganda art.” It would be hard to imagine any such similar critique regarding overviews of Modernist Propaganda Art. See: Jonathan Jones, “We cannot celebrate Russian art – it is brutal propaganda,” *The Guardian*, Feb. 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2017/feb/01/revolutionary-russian-art-brutal-propaganda-royal-academy>.

a dark corner of propagandistic *Entartete Kunst*, but 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 the face of Modernist Propaganda Art, we enact democratic freedom. For democracy's intentions *must* be different, such is our presumption. That makes Modernist Propaganda Art, more than any of the art in the past, still effective and operational. *Visible as art, invisible as propaganda*: that is the core of the enormous success of Modernist Propaganda Art.

Before arriving at a general comparison and conclusion to our exploration of categories that help us to define the history of modern propaganda art, let us first summarize the definition of Modernist Propaganda Art as we have discussed it in this section:

- Modernist Propaganda Art is a form of modern propaganda employed by Western capitalist democracies which propagandizes ideals of individualist and “purposeless” freedom in contrast to the dogmatic, collective, and instrumentalized nature of Totalitarian Propaganda Art;
- Modernist Propaganda Art demands of the artist a visual vocabulary that can be effectively positioned as the absolute opposite of Totalitarian Propaganda Art and thus at first sight must not be associated with any specific political objective, but instead suggest an internal autonomy that defines its reason of being in the world;
- Modernist Propaganda Art functions through the use of images not associated with propaganda, and as such is a propaganda that propagates liberation from all forms of propaganda as such: its rejection of all overt political messages is part of its core political message;
- Modernist Propaganda Art is visible as art and invisible as propaganda: our incapacity to recognize it as propaganda, even when we are made aware of its use as such, is the essence and proof of its persistence and continuous value in embodying, performing, and thus propagating the doctrines of capitalist democracy.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

In the first chapter, we concluded that modern propaganda is the performance of power in modern society; in this second chapter, we have traced the process in which modern propaganda performs power as art. We have done so not by analyzing artworks in and of themselves, but by contextualizing them within specific political, economic, and technological developments, beginning with the very origins of modern art in the period surrounding the French Revolution. Through the work of Rousseau, Kant, and Saint-Simon we observed that this revolutionary moment allowed for a liberation of art from its subservience to ruling powers, although the exact form of a “free art” proved to be subject to very different interpretations. From the notion of an “autonomous” aesthetic experience as elaborated by Kant to the role of art in furthering the common good as described by Rousseau, and the more radical stance of Saint-Simon, who rejected “art for art’s sake” and emphasized its role as an avant-garde of society in service of revolutionary ideals located in mass industrialization and the rejection of the state.

We continued this specific political reading of the foundations of modern art in the context of the Russian Revolution and its attempt to contribute to the creation of a revolutionary modernity in opposition to western capitalist modernity. From these contextual readings of the role of art in modern propaganda, we observed that different structures of power are performed as different models of propaganda art. For example, the modern propaganda of imperial British democracy privileged an elitist approach, in which the figure of the propagandist and its public are clearly distinct, whereas in the early years of the Russian revolution these distinctions were – at least in theory – rejected in favor of an educational or “emancipatory” propaganda enacted through an avant-garde but aimed for and by the masses. In the latter case, political alliances between the Bolshevik Party and the Russian Avant-Garde, advanced a distinctively different form of conscious politicization by artists and art movements, which we discussed as Avant-Garde Propaganda Art. We have noted that such differences impact the interplay between the macro- and micro-performative dimensions that define propaganda.

We also investigated the conflation of different developments in art in modern propaganda through the concept of Totalitarian Art, proposed by Igor Golomstock. We tried to show how his usage of the concept of totalitarianism obfuscates both the differences between specific cultural doctrines of dictatorships – from fascist Italy to the Third Reich – but also between different political and cultural developments within

the Soviet Union; for example, between the relative freedom provided by the Bolshevik Party in relation to the Russian Avant-Garde and the radical, state-imposed doctrine of socialist realism under the Stalinist regime. We concluded that the concept of Totalitarian Propaganda Art in this respect, is not just a term used to describe art within dictatorships, but used to obscure its differences. Golomstock's insistence on an absolute distinction between Totalitarian Propaganda Art and art created in modern democracies further serves as a reminder that our critical capacity to analyze the implications of modern democracies in propaganda analysis can be undermined, and proves to be a propagandistic mechanism in and of itself.

This led us to the final analysis of Modernist Propaganda Art, as theorized by Clement Greenberg. Here we became aware of the complex and decentralized usage of modernist art as propaganda by the CIA in service of American exceptionalism during the Cold War period. We saw how through covert channels, reminiscent of the development of propaganda in imperial British democracy, movements such as abstract expressionism served as a cultural counterpoint to Soviet-sanctioned socialist realism, with the goal to build support for American capitalist democracy as the new safe haven of modernity. Crucial in this regard is the detachment between what an artwork depicts and how it is deployed: we noted the non-figurative nature of the works that were privileged in the CIA's investment in Modernist Propaganda Art, which represented an abstracted notion of depoliticized freedom and non-ideological expression. Although these Modernist artists were not completely aware of the overall apparatus in which they operated, we also highlighted the direct and willful implication of a number of them in anti-Communist activities.

Although the history of Modernist Propaganda Art is today known to the public, its artists and their works remain insulated from the history of Totalitarian Propaganda Art and displayed publicly without mention of their implication in some of the most devastating US-led wars and covert operations in history. Therefore, Modernist Propaganda Art is recognizable as art, but invisible as propaganda, and thus continues to be one of the most effective forms of modern propaganda in history. Whereas Avant-Garde Propaganda Art and Totalitarian Propaganda Art are always politically and historically contextualized, Modernist Propaganda Art remains largely free from such critical inquiry and continues to express the idea of an a-historical and non-ideological freedom of expression and artistic autonomy, born from capitalist democracy in the United States. From these three historical models of modern propaganda art, we may conclude that Totalitarian Propaganda Art remains effective in terms of defining what a democratic art

should *not be*, and that Modernist Propaganda Art is the only one that in theory and image remains fully operational today.

The process through which we investigated different structures of power and art thus allowed us to differentiate models of modern propaganda art. This allows us to speak even more concretely of propagandas in the plural. Let us for now, based on this chapter, propose the following definition of Modern Propaganda Art in general:

- Modern propaganda art is the performance of power as art in modern society

Now, our challenge will be to translate our definitions of modern propaganda, as well as modern propaganda art to the current, 21st century. As we have now concluded that modern propaganda and democracy do not exclude one another, and that democracy's impact on the domain of modern propaganda art continues to affect our present era, our task will be to analyze both the heritage of modernity and modern art in our present time, and to locate the dominant – and often conflicting – structures of power that define our current condition: that which we refer to as the contemporary. We will do so by testing how our definition of modern propaganda relates to what we will now define as *contemporary propaganda*. Our aim will be to analyze three structures of established and emerging powers that have a particularly prominent impact in our time, in the form of the War on Terror, popular mass movements, and stateless peoples. Subsequently, in the final chapter, we will explore how the structures of power that define contemporary propaganda shape *contemporary propaganda art*.



# CHAPTER III: CONTEMPORARY PROPAGANDA



3.1	CONTEMPORARY PROPAGANDA
3.2	WAR ON TERROR PROPAGANDA
3.3	POPULAR PROPAGANDA
3.4	STATELESS PROPAGANDA
3.5	CONCLUSION

The notion of the contemporary indicates what happens in our *present*, carrying within it the obvious paradox that defining a present turns it instantly into history – in fact into a different history. Art historian Sven Lütticken considers the contemporary rather as something of an arena or theater, as he writes that “the contemporary should be seen as a contested terrain, as asynchronous coexistence of different temporalities, ideologies, and social realities.”<sup>1</sup> In this context, Lütticken speaks of the contemporary as “history in motion.”<sup>2</sup>

As we will explore throughout this chapter, in our present century, the conflicts between different claims on history and, consequently, its impact on our present and future, have become increasingly prominent. The western project of the War on Terror has been enacted through military and technological means by declaring a “clash of civilizations”<sup>3</sup> – a war that stages an opposition between Western, 21st-century “democratic progress” and Muslim fundamentalist “sealed time.”<sup>4</sup> We can also think of the claim of the Islamic State, whose self-declared global caliphate proposes itself as a new Ummah for Sunni factions all over the world, modeled after the year 1 of its prophet.<sup>5</sup> Or we can think of the warnings of environmentalists and activists like Naomi Klein, who refer to our geological age as the anthropocene – part of a timeframe that extends far beyond past and future date-keeping, in which human technology has irreversibly altered the ecology and geology of the planet – forcing us to face a future in which there might not be any history left.<sup>6</sup> It is this conflictual theater of the contemporary – this theater

1 Sven Lütticken, *History in Motion: Time in the Age of the Moving Image* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), p. 25.

2 Ibid.

3 The words of Samuel Huntington, who developed the notion of the clash of civilizations in the years preceding the War on Terror, would become paradigmatic in the global warfare of the 21st century: “Law and order is the first prerequisite of Civilization and in much of the world — Africa, Latin America, the former Soviet Union, South Asia, the Middle East — it appears to be evaporating, while also under serious assault in China, Japan, and the West. On a worldwide basis Civilization seems in many respects to be yielding to barbarism, generating the image of an unprecedented phenomenon, a global Dark Ages, possibly descending on humanity.” Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 321.

4 The concept of sealed time is borrowed from Lütticken, with which he aims to describe the caricature made of Islamic civilization supposedly counter-posed to progress. See: Sven Lütticken, *Icons of the Market: Modern Iconoclasm and the Fundamentalist Spectacle* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009), p. 65.

5 In the words of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, leader of the Islamic State: “O Muslims in all places, rejoice, take heart, and hold your heads high! For today you have, by God’s bounty, a state and caliphate that will renew your dignity and strength, that will recover your rights and your sovereignty: a state joining in brotherhood non-Arab and Arab, white and black, easterner and westerner; a caliphate joining together the Caucasian, Indian, and Chinese, the Syrian, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, and North African, the American, Frenchman, German, and Australian.” Quoted from Cole Bunzel, “From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State,” *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World*, Analysis Paper No. 19 (Mar. 2015): p. 41.

6 In the words of Naomi Klein: “Fundamentally, the task is to articulate not just an alternative set of policy proposals but an alternative worldview to rival the one at the heart of the ecological crisis – embedded in interdependence rather than hyper-individualism, reciprocity rather than dominance, and cooperation rather than hierarchy. This is required not only to create a political context to dramatically lower emissions, but also to help us cope with the disasters we can no longer to avoid. Because in the hot and stormy future we have already made inevitable through

where a variety of histories find itself in motion and the “contemporary” manifests itself through radically different conceptions of time – that we will analyze in this chapter through the prism of contemporary propaganda.

In the previous two chapters, we have been able to define some key terms in our analysis of propaganda. We have defined propaganda as a performance of power, and in the context of different modernisms – from Western capitalist modernity to Soviet revolutionary modernity – we concluded that as structures of power differ, so do propagandas. We have sometimes referred to the material dimension of these structures of power as “infrastructures.”<sup>7</sup> In *Totalitarian Propaganda Art* and *Modernist Propaganda Art*, we have seen how the macro-performative dimension of these infrastructures relates to the aim of constructing reality according to the interests of its proprietors, which is sustained by the micro-performative dimension of propaganda in which the performance of power acts *through* the bodies of society at large. Our examples were the Stalinist regime and the United States in the Cold War, which are relevant case studies as both operate as “vertical” structures of power, but in very different ways.

In the case of the Stalinist regime, we witnessed a near “sovereign” macro-performative dimension of power in which art, through the paradigm of socialist realism, was employed to represent and shape reality after the interest of a singular ruler. The micro-performative dimension is embodied by those who labor for socialist realism to come into being. Whether artist, factory worker or farmer, each were to embody a reality they themselves were simultaneously tasked to create. In the case of the United States, which aimed to uphold democracy in the face of the Soviet Union, such overt centralized direction of art was unthinkable. Similar to the earlier model of democratic propaganda that we discussed in relation to the British Wellington House, a covert propaganda in the form of the CIA-backed Congress of Cultural Freedom was needed to counteract the Soviet Union on the cultural frontlines, without scrutinizing the idea of democracy as a model free of propaganda. This macro-performative dimension of propaganda,

our past emissions, an unshakable belief in the equal rights of all people and a capacity for deep compassion will be the only things standing between civilization and barbarism.” Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs The Climate* (Canada: Penguin Random House, 2014), p. 399.

7 Nato Thompson in this regard speaks of “infrastructure of resonance,” which he explains as “the set of material conditions that produces a form of meaning. It is, to put it as directly as possible, the collection of structures (newspapers, social networks, academic institutions, churches, etc.) that shape our understanding of any given phenomenon – including ourselves. Anything that circulates is thus a part of an infrastructure of resonance.” In Thompson’s definition of power, the infrastructure of resonance is key: “If we want to change meaning in the world, we simply need to diagram an infrastructure, visit it, and radically alter it.” Nato Thompson, *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Brooklyn/London: Melville House, 2015), pp. 60, 61.

subsequently was to direct the micro-performative dimension in the form of the abstract expressionists “enacting” their liberation of figuration: the grand variety of cultural workers proclaiming their artistic freedom at the many iterations of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and the public at large, which was to internalize the absolute cultural distinction between the symbols of freedom (liberated abstraction), and oppression (indoctrinated figuration).

It is important to emphasize that although both examples follow a vertical structure of power, the models are still very different. The existence of democracy in the context of the United States, however compromised or contradictory, defines a different relative freedom of its citizens, but also shapes a different propaganda. Whereas the Stalinist regime has little need to separate propaganda from governance, the legitimacy of the United States was dependent on maintaining an absolute separation between democracy and propaganda, although actually, it was in need of both. We already mentioned that the notions of the vertical and horizontal are far from absolute, but moreover, one can dissect a variety of propaganda models both within vertical and horizontal structures of power.

In the case of Avant-Garde Propaganda Art, we have seen how the revolution initially aimed at redefining the performance of power that is propaganda, by turning the macro-performative dimension of propaganda into collective action of which the micro-performative dimension is a direct continuation, with the aim of equalizing the relation between sender and receiver. The macro-performative dimension in this case is defined by a collective demand for the seizure and re-distribution of power. The micro-performative dimension is defined by the self-governance of the Soviets, that were to secure the redistribution of power on a day to day basis. Avant-Garde Propaganda Art is the result of this horizontal model of power. The shape and form of constructivist and productivist art is shaped by the macro-performative dimension of the revolution, but simultaneously provides tools for the furthering of its micro-performance in the form of its propaganda kiosks and workers clubs, that turns workers in both senders *and* receivers of propaganda.

In this chapter, we will further elaborate on these different workings of propaganda through two models. The first is the rebooted propaganda model of Chomsky and Herman that focusses on the performance of monopolies of power in which the distance between sender and receiver is maintained and strengthened. The second is an inverted propaganda model, which focusses on emerging powers with an egalitarian objective in length of the early stages of the Russian Revolution, that aim at unifying sender and receiver.

What defines the scale and acceleration of the Technological Society in the 21st century and, as we will trace in the beginning of this chapter, also the scale and acceleration of contemporary propaganda is the so-called “War on Terror.”<sup>8</sup> The War on Terror is a war declared by the first George W. Bush administration, when on September 11, 2001, nineteen hijackers operating under the name of the organization Al-Qa’ida (*The Base*), managed to gain control over four commercial airplanes crashing them into four different sites. As the United States war effort increased in its aftermath, the September 11 attacks were increasingly framed as an attack on the Western world itself; an attack on the “values” of capitalist democracy, not only on individual freedom, but also consumer freedom.<sup>9</sup> The War on Terror persuaded many Western nations, including the United Kingdom, and my own country, the Netherlands, into a “Coalition of the Willing.”<sup>10</sup> These wars defied international law – not in the least the United Nations Charter – in a variety of ways.<sup>11</sup> The two Barack Obama administrations that succeeded Bush’s felt obliged to continue the efforts of the War on Terror in Iraq and Syria to stop the rise of the Islamic State – itself the product of the Iraq War<sup>12</sup> – now in the form of the more soberly titled “Anti-ISIS Coalition,” strategically including additional Middle-Eastern allies, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and Turkey, in order to diminish the neocolonial appearance of the war effort.<sup>13</sup> This attempt to create the general guise of a broad multi-national coalition beyond

8 President George W. Bush read his State of the Union on September 21, stating: “Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” “Text of George Bush’s Speech,” *The Guardian*, Sep. 21, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/21/september11.usa13>.

9 This was expressed most famously by Bush, when calling upon the responsibility of the American people to support the war effort by keeping the economy going, stating: “I encourage you all to go shopping more.” “President Bush’s News Conference,” *New York Times*, Dec. 20, 2006, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/20/washington/20text-bush.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/20/washington/20text-bush.html?_r=0).

10 Operation Iraqi Freedom was not supported by the United Nations, leaving the administration of President George W. Bush to assemble its own coalition. Although it would eventually involve about sixty nations, some of these countries supplied little more than nominal assistance, the majority of the war effort being financed by the United States and the United Kingdom. For a governmental perspective on the members of the Coalition of the Willing and their contributions to the invasion see: Stephen A. Carney, *Allied Participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 2011).

11 In 2004, then United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan, declared Operation Iraqi Freedom “illegal” based on the UN founding charter. Although the first article of the charter states the right “to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace,” Annan argued that the claim of the United States and United Kingdom for the legitimacy of the invasion as a form of “pre-emptive self-defense” would lead to a breakdown of the international order. See: Ewen MacAskill and Julian Borger, “Iraq War Was Illegal and Breached UN Charter, Says Annan,” *The Guardian*, Sep. 16, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/sep/16/iraq.iraq>.

12 Journalist Patrick Cockburn, reconstructing the emergence of the Islamic State, writes in this regard: “It was the US, Europe, and their regional allies in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates that created the conditions for the rise of ISIS. They kept the war going in Syria, though it was obvious from 2012 that Assad would not fall.” Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of the Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution* (London/New York: Verso, 2015), p. 9.

13 See: Kathleen J. McInnis, “Coalition Contributions to Countering the Islamic State,” *Congressional Research Service*, Apr. 13, 2016, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R44135.pdf>.

the East–West divide was already questionable, but its fragile constellation is now under severe threat from the Trump administration due to its propagation of a “Muslim ban” to the United States in the form of Executive Order 13780, targeting countries such as Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.<sup>14</sup>

Despite Obama administration’s attempt to stage a new spirit of transnational cooperation, the neocolonial War on Terror has relentlessly continued to reintroduce a false divide between the “free” West and the “barbaric” East, allowing profoundly racist rhetorics to define both domestic and foreign policy in Western states – a divide that is further deepened and exploited by the Trump administration. The War on Terror, designed as a never-ending war, further established completely new para-legal realities, in which civil rights became suspended through 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. The passing of the “Patriot Act” by the Obama administration, which will inevitably be continued if not worsened by the Trump administration – was a legislative foundation for increased surveillance and the trespassing of civil privacy, thus becoming a piece of legislation that was mainly successful in annulling others.<sup>15</sup>

Contemporary propaganda has been essential in the aim of constructing this particular reality in the 21st century. But we should add that contemporary propaganda has been equally important to the millions of people that rose to the streets opposing the war effort, protesting against far more fundamental existential crises in the domains of economy and climate change. This holds even more for the millions of people murdered in the ongoing war, those declared stateless – if they were not so already – and their families, friends and communities. Those opposing the war effort within Western societies, and those against whom the war effort is directed – also attempt to engage their own models of contemporary propaganda, which as we will see, are different from the propaganda models of the War on Terror.

In the first section of this chapter, we will – as mentioned – begin to revisit Chomsky and Herman’s propaganda model. We will not only attempt to update and revise their propaganda model, but also propose an “inverted propaganda model,” aimed at recognizing forms of power

14 “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States” was signed as Executive Order 13780 on March 6, 2017. Retrieved from the website of the White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/06/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states>

15 The Patriot Act passed on Oct. 26, 2001, as H.R. 3162 with the aim to “To deter and punish terrorist acts in the United States and around the world, to enhance law enforcement investigatory tools, and for other purposes.” Retrieved from the website of the United States Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ56/PLAW-107-publ56.pdf>.

and propaganda largely ignored by the original model. Through the work of Joseph Masco, Judith Butler, and Mohamedou Ould Slahi, we will identify in the next three sections three main actors that have emerged on the global stage of the contemporary, strongly shaped by the War on Terror. These three actors mark the ideological divides and political contradictions in our 21st century and can be analyzed through an update of the original propaganda model on the one hand, and our proposition of an inverted propaganda model on the other.

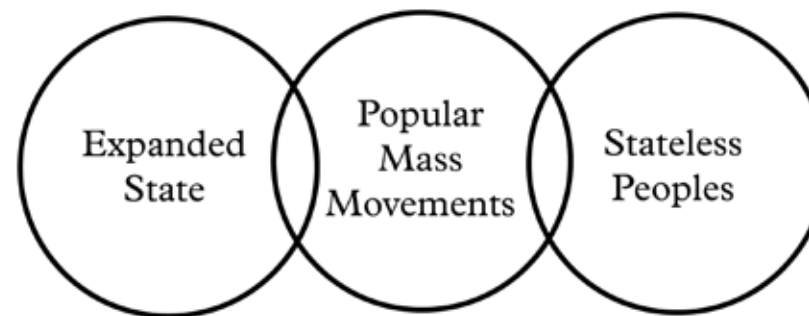
The first of these three actors is what we will discuss as the *expanded state*, which emerged as the foundational power structure of the War on Terror, whose war efforts, some argue, should themselves be considered as a form of state terror.<sup>16</sup> With regard to the expanded state we speak here of the government-driven military-industrial complex and the private economies it includes, which have shaped the massive infrastructures of the War on Terror.<sup>17</sup> The second actor consists of *popular mass movements*, large mobilizations of politicized civil society – although not necessarily majorities – which organized themselves in various protests against both the War on Terror and the social inequalities and ecological destruction. As artist Dave Beech argues, we should consider such manifestations of the popular will neither as purely a “radical and subversive version of the people,” nor as “the people as the collective addressee of the state,” but rather think of them dialectically, as a new, emergent collectivity that we will discuss as a people-in-the-making.<sup>18</sup> Beech considers the notion of the people not as an entity that appears at once, due to a revolutionary insurgency in the name of the people or of a designation as a “people” by a state. In his reading, the very notion of the people, is a transformative category in the continuous process of becoming. The third actor are *stateless peoples*, which consist of refugees and undocumented migrants fleeing the wars and social instability created by the War on Terror, stateless children born in refugee camps, whistleblowers whose nationality has been

16 The history of colonialism, imperialism, and contemporary intervention is theorized in a series of conversations between novelist and philosopher Andre Vitchev and Noam Chomsky in an attempt to establish a historical genealogy to posit the notion of “western terrorism,” i.e., state – or in our case, “expanded state” – terrorism. See: Noam Chomsky and Andre Vitchev, *On Western Terrorism: From Hiroshima to Drone Warfare* (New York: Pluto Press, 2013).

17 Throughout this chapter we will note different concepts used to describe the infrastructures of the War on Terror, such as “black world” and “secret geography.” Another popular term has been that of the “deep state,” borrowed from Turkish analysts. The deep state is described by Peter Dale Scott as assignments “handed off by an established agency to organized groups outside the law.” Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed describes such practices as “a novel but under-theorized conception of the modern liberal state as a complex dialectical structure composed of a public democratic face which could however be routinely subverted by an unaccountable security structure.” Although properly theorized in some domains, it is also a term popular in conspiracy theories, which brings us to maintain the more formal description of the expanded state. See Peter Dale Scott, *American War Machine: Deep Politics, the CIA Global Drug Connection, and the Road to Afghanistan* (Lanham, Maryland: Roman & Littlefield, 2010), p. 2, and Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, “Capitalism, Covert Action, and State-Terrorism: Toward a Political Economy of the Dual State,” in *The Dual State: Parapolitics, Carl Schmitt and the National Security Complex*, ed. Eric Wilson (London: Ashgate, 2012), p. 53.

18 See: Dave Beech, “Modes of Assembly: Art, the People and the State,” in Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (eds.), *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), p. 563.

taken away and supposed terrorist suspects imprisoned in high security complexes and secret prisons or “black sites” around the world, as well as blacklisted groups designated as “terrorist organizations.” Stateless peoples, in a variety of forms and through different ideological motives, resist – out of conviction or by necessity – the War on Terror.



So how do the expanded state, popular mass movements, and stateless peoples relate to one another in the contemporary global theater of the War on Terror? While the expanded state argues that its war efforts are waged in defense of democracy and its civil society, popular mass movements reject this claim, as embodied in the famous anti-war slogan “Not in our name.” In other words, the expanded state and popular mass movements stand in an antagonistic relationship. Nonetheless, popular mass movements that consist of actors of civil society, still have a certain access to certain rights and protections that the expanded state allows for, although these are relative to the kind of citizen in question: white Americans that oppose the war, for example, will generally be able to claim more protection from the expanded state than people of color, even when the latter formally hold the same kind of citizenship.<sup>19</sup> In the case of stateless peoples, these rights and protections are non-existent altogether. While undocumented migrants and

19 A report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) describes how so-called “stop-and-frisk” policies enacted by law enforcement radically increased in the aftermath of 9/11, as the attacks seemingly legitimized the profiling of Arab peoples, peoples of color in general, as well as LGBTQI+ communities: “In the post 9/11 era, as it became publicly acceptable to racially profile certain communities again, profiling impacted policing in all communities and efforts to promote community policing and improve relations between communities of color and police were greatly scaled back.” See: “Born Suspect: Stop-and-Frisk Abuses & the Continued Fight to End Racial Profiling in America,” *NAACP, Sep. 2014*, p. 5, [http://action.naacp.org/page/-/Criminal%20Justice/Born\\_Suspect\\_Report\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://action.naacp.org/page/-/Criminal%20Justice/Born_Suspect_Report_final_web.pdf).

refugees can be deported immediately, with few laws protecting them, subjects considered potential terrorists face indefinite detention, even torture, if not imminent destruction – a condition elaborated by philosopher Giorgio Agamben as a form of “bare life.”<sup>20</sup>

Considering that stateless people are considered non-citizens, or even non-human entities in the case of so-called terrorists, the procedures of deportation, indefinite detention, or destruction, can be applied by the expanded state with hardly any repercussions at all. Nevertheless, while there is no overlap between the expanded state and stateless peoples – they exist in complete opposition – there is an overlap between popular mass movements and stateless peoples; between the ones in whose name the War on Terror is waged and that stand in an antagonistic relation to it, and the ones against whom the War on Terror is waged. Both are faced with a condition of precarity, although in highly different degrees. But in both cases their precarious lives can be related back to the expanded state: an opposing force that potentially allows overlaps or alliances between the different categories of politicized civil society and stateless peoples. As we will see below, much is at stake in the overlap between the latter two categories, when it comes to the challenge of opposing and overcoming the War on Terror and its capacity to construct reality in the 21st century. We will note here that stateless peoples can of course organize themselves in the form of popular mass movements as well, or join popular mass movements organized by civil society. But we will be using the designation of popular mass movements here predominantly to discuss the role of civil society actors, those who might oppose the regime of a given state, but through their citizenship still hold a status of relative privilege or protection within it.

These three actors – the expanded state, popular mass movements, and stateless peoples – form three different subjectivities through which we can understand the oppositions that define the contemporary global theater of the War on Terror, and from which we will be able to distill three different concepts of contemporary propaganda: three different propagandas.

Different from the first chapter, which covered the development of propaganda from the First World War to the end of the Cold War, in which we attempted to provide an overview of both historical and contemporary propaganda studies, our present chapter will be more suc-

cinct, just like the period with which we will work: from the declaration of the War on Terror in the early 21st century until our present day. While there are many propaganda studies that deal with the past century, there are few that deal with our present one. As a result, we will be working with what some readers might consider an unconventional selection of sources: Masco’s *Theater of Operations*, Butler’s *Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly and Precarious Life*, and Ould Slahi’s *Guantánamo Diary*, which we will closely read in the next sections. We have selected these for two reasons. First, since each gives a profound – if not embodied – testimony of the meaning of propaganda in the context of the three actors that we just identified. Second, because they strongly resonate with the domain of *art* – not a narrow understanding of art, but an expanded theory of art that will prove crucial as a basis for our next chapter *Contemporary Propaganda Art*. We are dealing here with analysis of the *imaginative* dimensions of the War on Terror (Masco), the *performative* stagings in political mass movements (Butler), and the desperate *cultural* output of a stateless prisoner of war (Ould Slahi). This selection here is not simply defined by the already existing body of propaganda studies we discussed earlier. It rather follows the interest of a *practicing propaganda artist*: namely me, the writer of this thesis.

We will now begin by updating Chomsky and Herman’s propaganda model of and propose our own elaboration in the form of an inverted propaganda model to deepen our understanding of the process in which the three actors we have just introduced have defined the meaning and practice of propaganda in our 21st century.

20 Agamben relates the notion of bare life to the Roman concept of the *homo sacer*, a figure without rights, who, throughout history, has been essential to constituting the rights of others – for example, in the reduction of Jewish peoples by Nazism to bare life, to affirm the absolute rights of the supposed Aryan race: “Bare life remains included in politics in the form of the exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion.” See: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 13.

## 3.1 CONTEMPORARY PROPAGANDA

As we may recall, Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model from 1988 is defined through five "filters" that "manufacture consent," i.e., operate as a kind of interface for the performance of power. These five conditions can be summarized as *ownership*, *advertising*, *source control*, *flak* (distortion), and *anti-communism*. Written just before the fall of the Berlin Wall and predating the massive rise of new communication media in the digital realm – how much of these five filters that define modern propaganda retain their validity in our 21st century? Or, in other words, can we gain a first understanding of contemporary propaganda by revisiting the Chomsky–Herman propaganda model, from the perspective of both the expanded state, and its opposition in the form of popular mass movements and stateless peoples? In his article "The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective" (2000), Herman counters decades of critique that accused him and Chomsky of leftist bias and conspiracy theory and re-affirms the formal criteria of their model of quantified data analysis:

The model does describe a system in which the media serve the elite, but by complex processes incorporated into the model that involve mechanisms and policies whereby the powerful protect their interests naturally and without overt conspiracy. This would seem one of the model's merits; it shows a dynamic and self-protecting system in operation.<sup>21</sup>

He continues to argue that "the communications industries and politics over the past dozen years have tended on balance to enhance the applicability of the propaganda model"<sup>22</sup>, and ends with a challenge: "We are still waiting for our critics to provide a better model."<sup>23</sup> While that model is yet to emerge, communication researcher Brian Michael Goss did endeavor to systematically revisit the five filters of the propaganda model in his *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the 21st Century* (2013). According to Goss, the normative reality that is created by dominant monopolies of power through propaganda, follows the contemporary doctrine of neoliberalism, which he – in accordance with anthropologist and geographer David Harvey – defines as a political project of mass privatization of public infrastructures (from schools to hospitals and transport) while simultaneously emplo-

21 Edward S. Herman, "The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective," *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (2000): pp. 101–12, at p. 108.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 111.

ying state subsidies to provide tax cuts for corporation and companies and securing elite interests through a massive security apparatus, one that excessively targets disenfranchised classes, peoples of color, and the poor.<sup>24</sup> This neoliberal doctrine characterizes the type of ownership that regulates mass media nowadays. While Goss observes that, different from the period of Chomsky and Herman's writing, the cult of the media mogul is now slowly but steadily disappearing, it has been replaced by the "financial interests of the investment class"<sup>25</sup> who gain "about 75 percent of revenue from ad accounts" while "about 65 percent of newsprint space"<sup>26</sup> is devoted to them. Considering the fact that ad buyers wish to publish their commercials for a target audience with financial capacity to purchase the commodities and services they advertize, this inevitably influences both the stories being published and the audience addressed. The poor are not a consumer class, so why publish for them?

The expansion of news in the form of digital media is significant, although, according to Goss, this has not fundamentally altered the monopolization of news through ownership. A printed medium continues to produce twenty times more revenue than a digital one<sup>27</sup> and "[s]eventeen of the 25 most visited online news sites are organs of incumbent news firms."<sup>28</sup> These are simultaneously the sources that are also most cited, copied, and linked through non-mainstream digital platforms and which consequently leave the pre-Internet "news ecology" intact.<sup>29</sup> Goss' analysis risks to disregard the massive impact of formerly fringe platforms such as *Breitbart News* – home of the so-called "alternative-right," or "alt-right" in short – in the election of Donald Trump, as documented recently by writer Angela Nagle<sup>30</sup>; although one could make a case that while Trump both during his campaign and his presidency actively cites and borrows from fringe digital platforms of conspiracy theories, it is partly through Trump's own monopoly of the media and the vast power exerting through his own business empire, that marginal materials from the so-called "deep web," enter into the mainstream.<sup>31</sup> Although the Internet has been capable of ge-

- 24 Brian Michael Goss, *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2013), pp. 20–23. Echoing the work of Chomsky and Herman, Harvey speaks of the effort of the War on Terror as one to "manufacture consent," this in regard to the neoliberal economy that made the war possible and from which the war would benefit at the same time. See Chapter 2, "The Construction of Consent," in David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 39–63.
- 25 Goss, *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First*, p. 36.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Winchester/Washington: Zero Books, 2017).
- 31 Most notorious is the case of conspiracy theorist and host of the online tv-channel *InfoWars* Alex Jones, who thrives on claims that the attacks of September 11 were an "inside job," and states that

nerating counter-narratives, often by producing information later on validated by mainstream media, Goss argues that this is not the same as altering the increased monopolization of the media. Rather, he suggests, the Internet should be considered as an important site of potential "disturbance" of the existing media order, with figures such as activist-journalist Glenn Greenwald in its vanguard. Greenwald in that regard is a perfect example, as he gained notoriety through his work with former National Security Agency (NSA) operator Edward Snowden, who leaked a series of documents to Greenwald offering insight into the extent of surveillance on the civil population, media, and the political class, both foreign and domestic. Greenwald would seem to agree with Goss that while alternative digital media already form a crucial site of disturbance, they have not yet been able to fundamentally alter the monopolies on information that they have made visible, thus leaving the dominant filter of ownership as proposed by Chomsky and Herman intact in the context of contemporary propaganda.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, we find here a potentially weak spot in Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model. For while the five filters effectively define the construction of reality through propaganda from the perspective of dominant monopolies of power, a second interpretation of the propaganda model might be elementary to understand emerging structures of power in the form of digital activism in practices such as those of Greenwald, as well as much broader popular mass movements that have manifested themselves in the past 15-odd years. For the emerging structures of power, the possibilities of new digital media are amongst the most important entry points to impact a broader public domain.<sup>33</sup> This fact does not necessarily contest a propaganda model that focuses on majority ownership, but at least indicates the need for a *second pro-*

*vaccines are part of a masterplan for increased government control. Not only has InfoWars massively increased its audience since the rise of Trump, there are legitimate claims that Jones operates as an informal consultant to the American president. Jim Rutenberg, "In Trump's Volleys, Echoes of Alex Jones's Conspiracy Theories," The New York Times, Feb. 19, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/19/business/media/alex-jones-conspiracy-theories-donald-trump.html>.*

- 32 Greenwald in this regard specifically discusses the failure of media to effectively apply checks and balances to the government due to its various tied interests and mutual dependency, thus connecting the danger of data monopolization by the state with information monopolization of the media: "The theory of a 'fourth estate' is to ensure government transparency and provide a check on overreach, of which the secret surveillance of entire populations is surely among the most radical examples. But that check is only effective if journalists act adversarially to those who wield political power. Instead, the US media has frequently abdicated this role, being subservient to the government's interests, even amplifying, rather than scrutinizing, its messages and carrying out its dirty work." See: Glenn Greenwald, *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA and the Surveillance State* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 179.
- 33 This is at stake in the work of documentary film maker Neville Bolt, who attempted to re-actualize the anarchist concept of the "Propaganda of the Deed" with regard to the creation of violent images, "advertised" by insurgents across the digital realm, with the aim of mobilizing resistance against- or even overthrow of the state: "Recognizing that politics is played out in the global mediaspace, revolutionaries now use the weight of the media against the media. It is thus a form of political marketing [...] thereby positioning it in terms of wider societal gain." See: Neville Bolt, *The Violent Image: Insurgent Propaganda and the New Revolutionaries* (London: Hurst & Company, 2012), p. 257.

*paganda model* that takes emerging powers as a starting point. We will elaborate upon this further below.

Continuing his analysis of Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model, Goss argues that the propaganda filter of ownership is directly interrelated with that of source dependency. The pressure on news production, further amplified by digital readership, makes journalists increasingly dependent on official government sources. The powerful public relations apparatus of the government, in the spirit of Bernays often outsourced to private agencies, further allows for a broad presence of secondary official representatives to produce flak (distortion) aimed at undermining opposition voices, ranging from the recruitment of retired army personnel acting as "independent" experts on talk shows to positively affirm the successes of the War on Terror in Iraq,<sup>34</sup> to pseudo-scientific think-tanks that produce seemingly academic papers and data contesting the existence of climate change, followed by campaigns to discredit the work of independent researchers who argue that climate change is very real indeed.<sup>35</sup> Essentially, Goss's assessment of the first four filters of Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model – ownership, advertising, source control, and flak – is that while profound modifications in the landscape of Technological Society may have occurred – the media mogul transforming into the investor class, the realm of print enlarging into that of the digital – these changes have rather amplified and expanded the reach and capacity of Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model than altered the basic conditions of the contemporary performance of power. One point of difference stands out prominently though, and that is Chomsky and Herman's conditions of "anti-communism as a control mechanism." Regarding this point, Goss does not merely expand the propaganda model into the present, but re-contextualizes it both historically and in its contemporary manifestation. Goss argues that, unlike in the Cold War, the fifth filter of the propaganda model in the context of the War on Terror, is transformed into the broader conception of the "Us/Them" dichotomy, re-introduced by the George W. Bush administration.<sup>36</sup> We may remind ourselves in this context of the first State of the Union address after the attacks of September 11, in which Bush declared:

34 Goss, *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 63–65.

35 Ibid., pp. 146–48. An interesting contribution in this regard comes from John O'Loughlin, who discusses the "new realities of academic work in an age of terrorism" in the form of post-9/11 academia that classifies its sources just like the governmental agencies enacting the War on Terror itself. More than mere falsification, this creates a realm in which an academic claim becomes sourceless as such – as true or false as the writer claims it to be. See: John O'Loughlin, "The War on Terrorism, Academic Publication Norms, and Replication," *The Professional Geographer*, Vol. 57, No. 4, (November 2005): pp. 588–91, at p. 589.

36 Goss, *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 97.

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.<sup>37</sup>

To understand the historical, political, and ideological foundation of this dichotomy, Goss calls upon the concept of orientalism, as developed by the Palestinian-American philosopher Edward Said. In his book *Orientalism* (1987), Said identifies "[n]ineteenth-century Orientalism" as "the distillation of essential ideas about the Orient – its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness."<sup>38</sup> Articulated through the work of colonial regimes, through the work of scientists, novelists, and philosophers, these characteristics were in fact turned into a powerful imperialist and racist trope, that continues to structure the perceptions of the Orient or the East up until today. In Said's words:

My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness.<sup>39</sup>

The contemporary Us/Them dichotomy, Goss argues, is the continuation of the Occident/Orient divide. Saddam Hussein, as Goss argued, was to play the role of the backward tribal leader that maintained his innocent, uneducated peoples in a state of oppression. Removing him became the equivalent of liberating Iraq. The orientalist personalization of Hussein as Iraq was countered by the heroic media portrayal of the modern crusader in the form of George W. Bush embodying the West, completing the Us/Them dichotomy.<sup>40</sup> Goss comments that "[t]he paired exaltation and denigration of Our and Their leaders perhaps mutually summon each other into being": the more barbaric the portrayal of one, the more liberational that of the other.<sup>41</sup>

We only have to think today of the extremist language introduced by Donald Trump, or the manifold ultranationalist, if not blatantly fas-

37 "Text of George Bush's speech," *The Guardian*.

38 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 205.

39 Ibid., p. 204.

40 The question how much of the "West" was simultaneously embodied by Hussein himself – once a US ally in the Iran–Iraq War – is asked through Paul Chan's collection of the dictator's writing on democracy, in which Hussein writes: "Democratic practice should be permanently part of our policies as it constitutes a basic part of the Arab Baath Socialist Party's ideology, which considers the individual as high value but not the absolute value: for the outcome of the higher value is not the individual alone as an independent entity, but rather all the interacting central objectives at which our Party aims." See: Saddam Hussein and Paul Chan, *On Democracy* (Athens/New York: Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art/Badlands Unlimited, 2012), p. 71.

41 Ibid., p. 104.



cist, parties and regimes emerging throughout Europe, to understand how the orientalist notion of “Them” has come to include peoples of color, Muslims, refugees, as well as protesters and dissidents. What Chomsky and Herman defined as “unworthy victims” has been expanded and multiplied in the context of the 21st century via an orientalist trope.<sup>42</sup> It provides us with the knowledge that the War on Terror is, in a variety of ways, a neocolonial war, that reduces potentially dissident bodies – both within the sphere of the West and outside – to uncivilized and dangerous subjects.

But what about the societal opposition against the expanded state and its War on Terror? The way in which ownership, advertising, source control, and flak in their interrelation shaped the media spectrum in the period of the Iraq War was, Goss observes, at the same time effective as a radical form of societal censorship. This was not just a censorship of basic facts that could have undermined the Iraq invasion, but a censorship also of popular mass movements opposing the war that emerged throughout the United States and Europe. On February 15, 2003, the largest worldwide antiwar protest in history was organized, characterized by a major clash between the expanded state and its effort to impose a narrative that would legitimize the Iraq invasion, and the emerging power of popular mass movements that attempted to debunk this narrative. The strength of the propaganda of the War on Terror generated an effective “effacement of popular dissent” keeping the “lines of Us/Them conflict stark and largely unblurred.”<sup>43</sup> The invasion of Iraq, marking the beginning of a War on Terror without end, proceeded as planned. A similar form of societal censorship emerged when the Trump administration attempted to propagate through its own channels and loyal media outlets the factual falsehood that the 2017 inauguration of the new president drew a larger crowd than the 2009 Obama inauguration, while simultaneously downplaying the largest domestic demonstration against a new administration that took place a day later in the form of the Women’s March on Washington.<sup>44</sup>

Although War on Terror is extremely powerful, as we have been able to see from the changes in government and warfare in the past one and a half decade, we should not suppose that popular mass move-

42 In the Netherlands, for example, the leader of the ultranationalist *Freedom Party (PVV)* Geert Wilders began to refer to street violence enacted by Dutch citizens with a migrant background as a form of “street terrorism.” This conflation of what we call terrorism with regard to organized political violence enacted by non-state actors, and minor acts of violence in the form of harassment, theft, or street riots, evidently opens up the possibility of engaging aspects of the state apparatus meant to operate in crisis for permanent use in peacetime.

43 Goss, *Rebooting the Herman & Chomsky Propaganda Model in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 111.

44 This brought the *New York Times* to publish factual counter-information through crowd analysis, see: Tim Wallace, Karen Yourish and Troy Griggs, “Trump’s Inauguration vs. Obama’s: Comparing the Crowds,” Jan. 20 2017,

[https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/20/us/politics/trump-inauguration-crowd.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/20/us/politics/trump-inauguration-crowd.html?_r=0).

ments have no power whatsoever. In the case of the protests against the Iraq War and the incoming Trump administration, they are clearly in a minority when it comes to fully subverting the structures of power through which the propaganda of the expanded state operates, but they are a rather *massive minority*. If we move away from the context of the United States for a moment, and take a more global perspective, one could observe that during the first one and a half decades of the 21st-century, we have witnessed an enormous variety of often interconnected popular mass movements of surprising size and scale. From the manifold manifestations stretching from Tunis to Egypt and Syria known as the “Arab Spring,” to the emergence of the M15/Los Indignados movement in Spain, Catalunya, and the Basque Country, the worldwide Occupy movement, the Anti-Austerity protests in Greece, the Gezi Park protests in Turkey, the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, Black Lives Matter, Nuit Debout in Paris, and Standing Rock, as well as assemblies in the form of collective hunger strikes in war prisons such as Guantánamo Bay, the public manifestations of the disenfranchised, the dispossessed, the undocumented migrants and refugees, the LGBTQI+ movements, the university occupations by students, or even the online mobilization to massively petition against or hack into a given regime, including the work of whistleblowers and activist journalists.<sup>45</sup> In these manifold popular mass movements we witness emerging structures of power.

What is important is how these different movements become interrelated: communicating with one another through alternative media, building temporary and sometimes lasting infrastructures aimed at addressing issues bypassed by dominant monopolies of power: reaching from the necessity of building alternative structures of democratic governance, creating publicly owned media, platforms for free education, cooperative models of economy, collectivized healthcare, sustainable energy resources, and so on.<sup>46</sup> Of course, it is too general a statement

45 Sidney G. Tarrow in this regard observes how shared global crises generate different forms of popular movements shaping a field of “contentious politics,” but that the kind of movements – from democratization movements to extreme conservative action groups and so-called terrorist organizations – manifest themselves in widely different and often irreconcilable ways in response to these same crises: “[D]espite globalization – societies do not respond in lock step to the same stimuli. The countries surveyed above responded to the Wall Street crisis with different combinations of transgressive and conventional contention: As Greek anarchists torched the center of Athens, the French used the austerity crisis as a pretext to demonstrate for broader social issues, the Spanish unions struck around narrower issues, the Germans heckled their Chancellor, the American Tea Party was industriously backing rightwing candidates in the 2010 congressional elections, and the British turned away in distaste.” See: Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 261.

46 The chapter “Radical Internet Use” in John Downing’s work on alternative media networks – including artistic intervention and cultural action – for example focuses specifically on the attempts to socialize the Internet as part of the popular mass movement, notably from the perspective of the indigenous Mexican Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), which was a key inspiration to the early 2000s alter-globalization movement in the United States. See:

to say that all of these examples have the same aims or that they necessarily stand in absolute opposition to dominant monopolies of power. The mere fact that they emerge from different precarious conditions does not make them homogenous, or necessarily democratic. The Arab Spring is one such example, which at times was appropriated by subsequent regimes. Conflicts within social movements can be rampant, and challenging an existing power does not mean that the power that would replace it is necessarily better, even when it was articulated as “democratic” or “liberational” in the process. Our aim is not to discuss propaganda in absolutist terms of “good” and “evil,” but to diversify structures of power and the plurality of propagandas emerging from them. Surely what we can factually observe is that the precarious forces that assemble in popular mass movements are different from dominant monopolies of power, often because they have less actual power, recognition, and access to construct realities that would benefit their constituents. Furthermore, whether purely rhetorical or not, the claims through which these various popular mass movements emerge, tend at times to demand an oppositional kind of power. They emerge not simply with the demand to take over power as such but they challenge the very organization of power under which they are governed and regimented.

While we will discuss in further detail popular mass movements under the rubric of Popular Propaganda and Stateless Propaganda below, it is helpful to posit an alternative paradigm of propaganda to understand the difference in manifestation and possible differences in propagandas between those employed by the expanded state and those by popular mass movements and stateless peoples. As mentioned before, this demands an expansion of the Chomsky and Herman’s propaganda model, which is tailored to existing monopolies of power, and not to emerging structures of power. Their propaganda model privileges scale, allowing us to identify the main proprietors that construct our current reality. But it risks at censoring out *competing realities*, referenced by both Herman and Chomsky and Ellul as smaller-scale communities and networks that introduce alternative principles of political organization, media, and overall infrastructure to make a different performance of power and a construction of a different reality possible. Rather than discussing these as mere “counter-propaganda,” we need to recognize these emerging power structures as potentially different propagandas.

Tamara Villarreal Ford and Genève Gil, “Radical Internet Use,” in John Downing, *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* (Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001), pp. 201–34.

### Chomsky-Herman’s inverted Propaganda Model

Filters:		Demands:
Monopolization	>	Democratization
Corporate Advertising	>	Grassroot Mobilization
Source control	>	Public Knowledge
Flak	>	Transparency
Anti-Communism	>	Collectivity

To identify such emerging structures of power, we will add to the existing propaganda model an *inverted propaganda model*. This inverted propaganda model is not based on what Chomsky and Herman called “filters,” which presuppose the control over a given structure of power, but on re-occurring *demands* that presuppose a claim made to power brought forward by mass popular movements. For example, whereas the original propaganda model includes the filter of ownership – of monopolization – a re-occurring demand within popular mass movements ranging from the Occupy movement to the Arab Spring is that of *democratization*: simply put, the demand to re-distribute power in a more egalitarian way. This again raises the question of whether a demand could actually be realized, if a movement were to control power – but we can most certainly conclude that, at least as a rhetorical demand, democratization is the opposite of monopolization. Something similar is the case for the second filter of the propaganda model, namely advertising, which in the case of popular mass movements tends to be opposed to *grassroots mobilization*: messages are not circulated through elite interest and access, as is the case with advertising, but through supposedly egalitarian constituencies that form the basis of a given movement. In opposition to the filter of source control, we see the demand for *public knowledge*, just as flak is opposed with the demand for *transparency*. Whether it is the demand of Black Lives Matter for full public recognition of the excessive and illegal killing of black people by police forces, or the whistleblowers’ platforms demand for full access to the interests of monopolies of power, or the anti-austerity movement’s demand for equal taxes paid by corporations as by citizens, we see how the filters of the propaganda model are countered with the demands of an inverted propaganda model that re-occur in an various popular mass movements. That is most certainly the case with the final filter of the original propaganda model, namely that of an-

ti-communism, in our current times continued as the Us/Them dichotomy: the opposite to which we will discuss in the inverted propaganda model as the demand for *collectivity*.<sup>47</sup>

Democratization, grass roots mobilization, public knowledge, transparency, and collectivity are thus the demands that define the inverted propaganda model that we will be engaging with to understand the nature of the alternative realities constructed through the oppositional propaganda of popular mass movements and stateless peoples.

- Let us make the following three observations regarding our first exploration of contemporary propaganda:
- The contemporary can be understood through different actors and their simultaneous claims on constructing competing realities; we have discussed three examples in the form of the expanded state, popular mass movements, and stateless peoples;
- The dominant monopoly of power of the expanded state and its War on Terror can be analyzed through an updated – or “rebooted” – version of Chomsky and Herman’s propaganda model;
- The emerging power of popular mass movements and stateless peoples are to be analyzed through a different model, that we name the “inverted propaganda model”

Having assessed the value of the rebooted Chomsky and Herman’s propaganda model and proposed an inverted propaganda model, we will now proceed to define the different propagandas that both dominant and emerging powers in the 21st century create. We will begin with the expanded state and its *War on Terror Propaganda*.

47 Of course, the reversed propaganda model could possibly be used for examples of popular mass movements from the past century just as well. The reversed propaganda model is thus not exclusive to the 21st century, although we have developed and employ it for that reason. In the process of using the reversed propaganda model, we are of course aware of the bias that is inherent in the use of a term such as “democratization,” which might not be applicable to each and every popular mass movement, especially those critical of exactly the misuse of the democratic vocabulary for colonial and imperialist purposes.

### 3.2 THE EXPANDED STATE & WAR ON TERROR PROPAGANDA

In the context of the War on Terror, the scale and scope of the intersections between politics, economy, media, social life, (bio)technology, and the healthcare sector are studied and analyzed in the book of anthropologist and social scientist Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations* (2014).<sup>48</sup> According to Masco, gaining an understanding of power structures of the expanded state in the War on Terror means understanding the politics, infrastructures, and propaganda models employed during the Cold War.<sup>49</sup> While he discusses, like Chomsky and Herman, anti-communism as a control mechanism, his main focus is on technology and its culture, as it emerged through the invention of nuclear weapons:

In the White House, nuclear fear was immediately understood to be not only the basis of American military power, but also a means of installing a new normative reality in the United States, one that could consolidate political power at the federal level by reaching into the internal lives of citizens. [...] By focusing Americans on an imminent end of the nation-state, federal authorities mobilized the bomb to create the Cold War consensus of anticommunism, capitalism, and military expansion.<sup>50</sup>

The image of social destruction through a Soviet nuclear bomb is today expanded through the dangers emanating from the Us/Them dichotomy, with Them including an endless variety of terrorist dangers that have replaced the Soviet Union as sole representative of imminent destruction. Masco refers to the social effect of these images of apocalyptic destruction as a negative “social contract,” a fearful enforcement of a sense of community created by the continuous message that this same community can, at any moment, be destroyed. It was a social contract thus “enabled and structured by the affective power of atomic weapons.”<sup>51</sup> And it is exactly this negative social contract that laid the

48 The title derives from what Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz famously termed the “theater of operations” in his book *On War*, published posthumously in 1832: “The country – its physical features and population is more than just the source of all armed forces proper; it is in itself an integral element among the factors at work in war – though only that part which is the actual theater of operations or has a notable influence on it.” See: Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 18.

49 Note that in this regard, Masco speaks of the “counterterror state,” a term we will not adopt, as we will encounter several positions that claim that the War on Terror is itself a form of “state terrorism,” thus making the claim of a “counterterror state” rather ineffective.

50 Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 48. The impact on the physical, psychological, political, economic, technological, ecological, and finally geographic landscapes of the Cold War are discussed in detail in Masco’s *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico* (Princeton/Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2006).

51 Masco, *The Theater of Operations*, p. 126.

foundation for the political, military, technological, and cultural infrastructures through which the Cold War could be accelerated into the much more radical and global War on Terror. Masco shows how close the power structures of the Cold War touch upon the power structures of the War on Terror through a legislative example that concerns the political culture of secrecy, foundational for both wars:

With the 1946 Atomic Energy Act and the 1947 National Security Act, the United States effectively removed huge areas of governmental affairs from citizen's purview. These acts formally installed a new security state in the United States, constituting a fundamental change in the nature of American democracy. The Atomic Energy Act created the first kind of information – nuclear weapons data – that did not need to be formally classified: it was “born” that way. The National Security Act then created a wide range of new governmental institutions – most prominently, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the first of what would become seventeen intelligence agencies in the United States – that *by charter* would not be publicly accountable to citizens.<sup>52</sup>

The emergence of state information that is by definition secret, Masco argues, was not simply about “protecting technological secrets in a global competition with the Soviet Union,” but equally a “means of converting American society into a countercommunist state at the level of institutions, economies, politics, and emotions.”<sup>53</sup> The War on Terror accelerated this culture of secrecy through the introduction of a wide variety of formal directives and executive orders to control public information, by removing access in the name of national security, which resulted in about “nine million classification decisions in 2001 but over sixteen million in 2006.”<sup>54</sup> Taking into consideration that roughly four million people in the US hold security clearances to information removed from the otherwise public domain,<sup>55</sup> we can realize the scale of a “secret society” in which “state power rests to an unprecedented degree on the ability of officials to manage the public–secret divide

52 Ibid., p. 124.

53 Ibid., p. 128.

54 Ibid., p. 129. A relevant comparative study pitted National Security Agency (NSA) data centers that withdraw information from the public to the domain of classified information, with the data center of the self-declared state of Sealand, the latter situated near the English coast. Sealand is not only a microstate, but also presents itself as a data safe-haven where information can be stored outside of international law, as Sealand is positioned in extraterritorial waters. Both examples are about the control over information, though both abandon the ideal of public information – of the library, material or digital – as a remnant of the past. See: Mél Hogan and Tamara Shepherd, “Information Ownership and Materiality in an Age of Big Data Surveillance,” *Journal of Information Policy*, Vol. 5 (2015): pp. 6–31.

55 Masco, *The Theater of Operations*, p. 125.

through the mobilization of threat.”<sup>56</sup>

What used to be citizens turned cold warriors, now are the citizens turned “counterterror warriors,” which are demanded to lie to their environment to “protect their own classification level in everyday interactions throughout the system, and thus [...] distort their social relations to protect the system of secrecy.”<sup>57</sup> And while citizens implicated in this “secret society” are partly aware of the variety of war efforts the United States is engaged in through covert operations and drone strikes, the majority of the population is forced to live in a culture of fear created by images of an imminent destruction.<sup>58</sup> Average “U.S. citizens [without security clearance] have no insight into U.S. covert actions around the world” and thus “retaliatory acts appear to the American public as without context and thus irrational.”<sup>59</sup> The hijacked airplanes of 9/11 that flew into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, as well as other attempted assaults post-9/11, all seem to materialize out of thin air, enforcing the public image of the “irrational” and “uncivilized” nature of the terrorist, of Them, although most of the time they can be explained as acts of retaliation by their perpetrators. In an attempt to explain to the American people the historical context that brought him to sanction the attacks of September 11, Osama bin Laden stated:

The American people are the ones who pay the taxes which fund the planes that bomb us in Afghanistan, the tanks that strike and destroy our homes in Palestine, the armies which occupy our lands in the Arabian Gulf, and the fleets which ensure the blockade of Iraq. These tax dollars are given to Israel for it to continue to attack us and penetrate our lands. So the American people are the ones who fund the attacks against us, and they are the ones who oversee the expenditure of these monies in the way they wish, through their elected candidates.<sup>60</sup>

Bin Laden thus calls upon U.S. society's repressed awareness of its sanctioning of “unjust wars.” In the same letter, he also draws attention to other existential threats, when he writes that “[y]ou have destroyed nature with your industrial waste and gases more than any other nation

56 Ibid., p. 114.

57 Ibid., p. 136.

58 The radical capacity to imagine apocalyptic threats and the capacity to create the weaponry to actually make such apocalyptic threats a by oneself, is discussed by Masco in “The End of Ends,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 85, No. 4 (Fall 2012): pp. 1107–24.

59 Ibid., p. 134.

60 “Full Text: Bin Laden's ‘Letter to America,’” *The Guardian*, Nov. 24, 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver>. See also: Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli (eds.), *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2008).

in history,” something that did not bring the United States to sign the Kyoto agreement.<sup>61</sup> While Bin Laden’s narrative obviously should be challenged, Masco argues that the paradox of the culture of secrecy is that the actual threats to public safety and planetary survival such as “collapsing national infrastructure (roads, highways, levies, and dams), the devastating effects of unregulated capitalism (on jobs, housing, and pensions), or the destabilizing effects of toxic industrial substances on the environment (from polluted air and water to climate change)” remain unaddressed, or even censored from the public debate in favor of the much less existential danger of non-state terrorism.<sup>62</sup> Masco introduces the following example of such form of threat censorship:

As counterterror emerged as the primary concern of the administration, government reports on climate change were edited by federal officials to downplay evidence of human contributions to global warming and to emphasize uncertainty in climate models. Research by government scientists pursuing a link between climate change and intensifying hurricanes were restricted, and the nationwide system of technical research libraries run by the EPA was closed, allegedly due to federal budget cuts – an act that drew protests from 10,000 scientists in 2006. In 2008 a survey of EPA scientists found that the majority of them had felt pressure from political appointees in the Bush administration to distort or censor environmental assessments.<sup>63</sup>

Even in the case of evident manifestations of violent weather, such as the 2005 Hurricane Katrina that left the city of New Orleans utterly devastated, public framing by both government officials and mainstream media was in reference to the dangers of so-called weapons of mass destruction, not climate change. If a government cannot even protect its citizens from violent weather, how could it ever protect them from (nuclear) terrorism? Here we see the immediate effect of what Masco explains as the accelerated culture of fear built on the heritage of the Cold War. While an actual threat is at our doorsteps in the form of a

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., p. 27. As Naomi Klein argued notoriously, the use of shock and awe strategy through warfare and the projection of imminent danger, also generates opportunity to benefit from a paralyzed public to implement new political and economic structure outside of democratic control: “[T]he original disaster – the coup, the terrorist attack, the market meltdown, the war, the tsunami, the hurricane – puts the entire population into a state of collective shock. The falling bombs, the bursts of terror, the pounding winds serve to soften up whole societies much as the blaring music and blows in the torture cells soften up prisoners. Like the terrorized prisoner who gives up the names of comrades and renounces his faith, shocked societies often give up things they would otherwise fiercely protect.” Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), p. 17.

63 Masco, *The Theater of Operations*, p. 105.

tropical storm, neither its causes, effects, nor future preemption are addressed. Instead, the threat is transposed to another, more politically beneficial enemy in the form of the supposed terrorist, or Them. The culture of secrecy that censors existential threats to introduce fictional ones defines the imaginative force of the War on Terror, in Masco’s words, “the ability to create new realities.”<sup>64</sup>

A final striking example in this regard is Masco’s analysis of the anthrax letters sent to news media and elected officials between September 18 and October 8, 2001, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. While there is only a minor history of biological attacks in the United States, the George W. Bush administration decided to invest massively in the study and prevention of possible bioterrorism attacks, only to find out in 2008 – after an enormous and expensive operation – that the sender had been most probably one of their own anthrax specialists working in a government laboratory.<sup>65</sup> This did not stop the development of new laboratories, but rather turned health services into new front lines in the War on Terror, identifying viruses – such as SARS – as possible future terror threats. These financial boosts for industry, Masco clarifies, are also inherently tied to Cold War military-industrial practices “in which building technologies for early warning of nuclear attack also produced revolutions in computers, telecommunications, satellite systems, and electronics, all of which eventually filtered into the commercial arena.”<sup>66</sup>

We should understand the type of warfare created by the Cold War and augmented through the War on Terror as connecting a variety of industries, military or otherwise, with their own products as potential terrorist weapons, replicating and imagining an endless arsenal of new dangers: from the nuclear bomb to the microbe. This fact also provides a link between Masco’s analysis of the expanded state in the War on Terror and Goss’s theory of contemporary propaganda, which emphasized the importance of neoliberalism in understanding Chomsky and Herman’s propaganda model in the 21st century. The War on Terror is not merely a war waged by the state; it is enacted through a large set of private industries mobilized and paid by the state.<sup>67</sup>

64 Ibid., p. 138.

65 Ibid., p. 190.

66 Ibid., p. 160.

67 The most notorious example of the privatization of the War on Terror took the form of the “Blackwater” mercenary army founded in 1997 by former Navy SEAL officer Erik Prince, renamed “Xe Services” in 2009 and “Academi” in 2011. It gained public attention mainly due to the 2007 Nisoun Square Massacre in Baghdad, when its militia members killed 17 civilians for unclear reasons. While four militia were finally tried in 2015, the lawless character of Blackwater – contracted privately, and thus beyond regular army law – obstructed the proceedings severely. A thorough albeit polemic analysis of the political and economic dimensions of this mercenary industry is provided by journalist Jeremy Scahill, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army* (New York: Nation Books, 2007).

In the radicalized propaganda model of the War on Terror, existential dangers are fully co-opted into imaginary ones, mostly against enemies that the Cold War and War on Terror have created themselves. “The War on Terror [...] is unique,” says Masco, “in that it is a conflict that cannot be bounded spatially or temporally, or won.”<sup>68</sup> It is a war without limits, with the aim to “engineer a world without events.”<sup>69</sup> It is a twisted utopia, in which the expanded notion of biosecurity created through the War on Terror “promises a world without terror via the constant production of terror,” creating “a potentially endless recursive loop of threat production and response.”<sup>70</sup> The counterterror state’s “commitment to constant revolutionary change across experts, technologies, and administrative abilities,” Masco claims, will have “a deep hold on the twenty-first century.”<sup>71</sup>

Placing Masco’s analysis next to Chomsky and Herman’s rebooted propaganda model, we see that ownership, advertisement, source control, and flak, continue to play interrelated roles in the economy of the expanded state’s War on Terror. The ownership of war is common to a public–private partnership, which enacts its advertisement through corporate media, maintains its source control through massive state-administered databases that are largely confidential, and generates the necessary flak through the continuous image of imminent (self-) destruction, which forces the public to ignore actual threats such as economic crises and climate change. This economy of the War on Terror is subsequently politically and ideologically framed through the Us/Them dichotomy (formerly the anti-communist doctrine), legitimizing new infrastructures of control, which subsequently lead to new conflicts and self-engineered dangers. We should therefore refer to the economy of the War on Terror as an actual financial economy. The endless recursive loop of threat production and response is what strengthens the ownership, the legitimacy, and the expansion of this economy. As such we need to understand the expanded state’s War on Terror as simultaneously an organizational model of power *and* the propaganda for that model.

We thus conclude that War on Terror Propaganda is a contemporary propaganda defined by a performance of power that acts through the neoliberal public–private infrastructures of the expanded state. This propaganda takes the form of a recursive loop of threat production and response, to create a new reality structured on the Us/Them divide. The performativity that defines this propaganda is characterized by an

existing claim to dominant monopolies of power.

What we lack at this stage of Masco’s analysis is essentially the perspective of those who concretely live through the War on Terror, the bodies implicated in these emerging infrastructures of War on Terror Propaganda, whether these are the politicized millions of citizens downplayed by mainstream media when taking to the streets against the Iraq invasion, or the non-citizen captured and kept by force in the War on Terror’s various black sites and extralegal prisons. We will now explore the role of politicized civil society and its resistance against War on Terror Propaganda, and analyze the conditions of a different kind of propaganda, which we will call *Popular Propaganda*.

68 Ibid., p. 197.

69 Ibid., p. 194.

70 Ibid., p. 156.

71 Ibid., p. 196.

## 3.3 POPULAR MASS MOVEMENTS &amp; POPULAR PROPAGANDA

As we observed earlier, the age of the War on Terror is also the age of a growing politicized society, which organizes in the form of popular mass movements, often connecting the struggles of documented citizens to those of undocumented and stateless peoples. These popular mass movements are often related to or sparked by antiwar movements, but can also be broader in nature: demanding democratization, economic equality, and climate justice. In this section, we will analyze how the manifestation of politicized civil society in popular mass movements can be understood as a form of Popular Propaganda, and in what way Popular Propaganda aims to overcome the Us/Them divide by constructing a new “Us”: a new popular collectivity. We will do so through the work of the American philosopher Judith Butler, who has given voice to a politicized civil society that opposed the War on Terror, and was a frequent participant in the popular mass movements that were fueled by antiwar convictions, as well as economic and environmental concerns. Our first focus will be her book *Towards a Theory of Performative Assembly* (2015) in which she attempts to analyze and theorize models that emerged from worldwide popular mass movements in the early 21st century, which she refers to as “performative assembly.”

The first question in this regard is why certain bodies assemble in ways that become meaningful to discuss as a potential collectivity. Butler opts here for the rubric of *precarity*, arguing that this term describes a contemporary condition that is a result of the massive neoliberal privatization of common infrastructures – an inherent consequence of the expanded state, as we discussed under War on Terror Propaganda – and which “brings together women, queers, transgender people, the poor, the differently abled, and the stateless, but also religious and racial minorities.”<sup>72</sup> Butler’s claim is that, although conditions of precarity differ, the term precarity as such describes the falling away of a necessary collective infrastructure of life support, which can relate to a lack of economic security, absence of political representation, a refusal to provide safety from bodily harm, absence of healthcare or education, the breaking down of structures that protect from discrimination and prosecution, and so on. Butler argues that precarity might operate “as a site of alliance among groups of people who do not otherwise find much in common and between whom there is sometimes even

72 Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 58.

suspicion and antagonism.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, the *precariat* could be a potential class construct in which one could group a variety of peoples, beyond divisions imposed through the Us/Them dichotomy.<sup>74</sup>

In Butler’s work, the first step in understanding the process in which the *precariat* articulates such a new collectivity lies in the use of the body as the foundation of the social architecture that we call “assembly.” Butler here emphasizes the importance of understanding the body not as an isolated entity, but instead argues that “[w]e cannot talk about a body without knowing what supports that body, and what its relation to that support – or lack of support – might be.” That means that the collective gathering of bodies in popular mass movements is an inherent act of resistance against the lack of life support that a given regime provides to these bodies. When masses of people lose their houses due to a predatory mortgage system and assemble with their tents in a park, then this is a response to a dysfunctional or completely lacking collective infrastructure. The assembly is a direct expression of this condition of precarity while simultaneously being a protest to it.

Here we touch upon the paradoxical core of what we will define as Popular Propaganda. On the one hand, the reason why popular mass movements emerge – following Butler – is due to their collective experience of precarity, a threat to their life support, which essentially means that *power has been taken away from them*. But by gathering, by assembling, an emerging power manifests itself, bringing forward demands to reclaim or redefine power itself. In this regard, Butler writes that “the performative emerges precisely as the specific power of the precarious – unauthorized by existing legal regimes, abandoned by the law itself – to demand the end of precarity.”<sup>75</sup> This passage is crucial for our understanding of Popular Propaganda. In the original Chomsky and Herman propaganda model, we saw that the concept of performance relates to the procedure through which dominant monopolies of power are performed in society with the aim of constructing a normative reality that benefits its proprietors. What Butler argues is that in the case of Popular Propaganda, the concept of performance *is the very definition of power*. The demands of the inverted propaganda model are enacted, to make an emerging power a reality. But at that moment of performance, the enactment of the demand is the main power present;

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 27

<sup>74</sup> Our use of the term *precariat* here derives from the work *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011) by economist Guy Standing. Although Standing defines more narrowly than as Butler, it shows substantial overlap. Standing argues the *precariat* is not so much “a class-for-itself, it is a class-in-the-making, increasingly able to identify what it wishes to combat and what it wants to construct.” Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), p. 155.

<sup>75</sup> Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press, 2013), p. 121.

it is a form of “bare power,” sustained only through the bodies and fragile emerging infrastructures of those who assemble.<sup>76</sup> Different from what Le Bon considered as the barbarity of the crowd, or what Freud considers the potential of the mass to dedicate itself to a higher ideal through a leader figure, performative assembly as discussed by Butler as the emancipatory potential that emerges in the process of the gathering of bodies.

In Butler’s *Precarious Life* (2004), written in the years following the attacks of September 11, she theorizes how the manifold violence of the War on Terror simultaneously provides the possibility – even the necessity – to think collectivity differently, and to connect a diversity of precarious peoples in a new kind of popular assembly. Butler’s assessment of the War on Terror begins in the period of a war characterized by an amplification of patriotism and anti-intellectualism. Butler observes that even asking questions about the reasons the United States was attacked, the identity of the attackers and their motives, the pre-history of the War on Terror in terms of US military operations abroad, were equaled to a form of national betrayal, not just from the side of radical conservatives, but also from supposed progressives:

It is not only the conservative Republicans who did not want to hear about “causes.” The “just war” liberal Left made plain that it did not want to hear from “excuseniks.” This coinage, rehabilitating the Cold War rhetoric about Soviet Russia, suggests that those who seek to understand how the global map arrived at this juncture through asking how, in part, the United States has contributed to the making of this map, are themselves, through the style of their inquiry, and the shape of their questions, complicitous with an assumed enemy.<sup>77</sup>

The global map that Butler mentions is what Masco referred to as the contemporary Theater of Operations. And the issue of “understanding” refers to the nature and constitution of the Them in the Us/

<sup>76</sup> While an undocumented person might not be able to join a popular mass movement due to the risk of immediate deportation, civilians participating in popular mass movements – while standing in an antagonistic relation to a given regime – often still benefit from a relative, even when nearly non-existent, form of recognition. There is, in other words, still a reoccurring capacity to appear in one form or another. We thus emphasize again that we discuss the popular mass movement largely – albeit not exclusively – as a model of emerging power related to politicized civil society.

<sup>77</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 9. Butler here refers to an article by Edward Rothstein, cultural critic of *The New York Times*, written in the direct aftermath of the attacks of September 11, in which he states: “One can only hope that finally, as the ramifications sink in, as it becomes clear how close the attack came to undermining the political, military, and financial authority of the United States, the Western relativism of [postmodernism] and the obsessive focus of [postcolonialism] will be widely seen as ethically perverse. Rigidly applied, they require a form of guilty passivity in the face of ruthless and unyielding opposition.” Edward Rothstein, “Attacks on U.S. Challenge Postmodern True Believers,” *New York Times*, Sep. 22, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/22/arts/22CONN.html?pageviewed=all>.



Them dichotomy living at the outer edges of this global map. In the face of loss, Butler argues, we must attempt to engage a process of “hearing beyond what we are able to hear”: We should not consider an attack on the West as an isolated event, but attempt to engage the loss of others elsewhere in relation to our own loss.<sup>78</sup> To engage in the process of “hearing beyond what we are able to hear,” means to act against the persistent construction of Us, and therefore an engagement with the excluded articulated in the form of Them. It means dislocating oneself from the presupposed dichotomy central to the War on Terror.<sup>79</sup>

To understand how War on Terror Propaganda is capable of producing the conditions of life beyond recognition – one could say, *life beyond assembly* – Butler turns to the French philosopher Michel Foucault and his concept of “governmentality,” which he considered vital to the existence of the modern state in the way political power manages and regulates populations and goods.<sup>80</sup> This notion of governmentality stands in contrast with the executive power invested in the figure of the singular sovereign, because contemporary democracies tend to claim the legitimacy of governmentality through the sovereignty of a given people, meaning a constituency of voters; it is through claiming the people as sovereign, that the state retains its legitimacy. But Butler observes a fundamental shift created through the politics of War on Terror, located in the capacity of the state to suspend the rule of law in cases of so-called terrorism, by bypassing international law when invading other countries, bypassing civil privacy through mass monitoring and detention of civil and foreign populations, removing information from public access, and so on. This suspension of the rule of law through the state of exception, Butler argues, allows for the “convergence of governmentality and sovereignty.”<sup>81</sup> Butler describes this convergence as “resurrected sovereignty,” a sovereignty not of “unified power un-

78 Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 18.

79 Butler implicated herself directly in such dislocation when she and several of her colleagues requested to be added to the “Campus Watch” blacklist which was part of the post-September 11 witch hunts on academics in the field of Middle-Eastern studies, initiated by historian and pro-Israel lobbyist Daniel Pipes. See: <http://www.campus-watch.org/>. See further: Tamar Lewin, “Web Site Fuels Debate on Campus Anti-Semitism,” *New York Times*, Sep. 27, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/27/us/web-site-fuels-debate-on-campus-anti-semitism.html>.

80 Foucault writes: “We live in the era of a ‘governmentality’ first discovered in the eighteenth century. This governmentalization of the state is a singularly paradoxical phenomenon, since if in fact the problems of governmentality and the techniques of government have become the only political issue, the only real space for political struggle and contestation, this is because the governmentalization of the state is at the same time what has permitted the state to survive, and it is possible to suppose that if the state is what it is today, this is so precisely thanks to this governmentality, which is at once internal and external to the state, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality” See: Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 103.

81 Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 55.

der the conditions of legitimacy, the form of power that guarantees the representative status of political institutions,” but sovereignty as “a lawless and prerogatory power, a ‘rogue’ power par excellence.”<sup>82</sup> Resurrected sovereignty is thus a new type of neo-monarchical power articulated most clearly in the infrastructure of the “new war prison.”<sup>83</sup>

These new war prisons – which will also be central to our next section on Stateless Propaganda – are developed in the form of extralegal “black sites,” such as the Bagram Theater Internment Facility in Afghanistan – a prison of which the public initially was not even supposed to know its existence – or the Guantánamo Bay detention camp, in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, which became a symbol of the resurrected sovereignty of the expanded state in the War on Terror. Prisoners in Guantánamo Bay await trial in special military tribunals, whose decisions can be overruled at any moment by an executive order, thus sidestepping the very meaning of a tribunal in terms of the necessary guarantee of an independent judiciary.<sup>84</sup> Situated at a naval base in Cuba outside of United States territory, Guantánamo Bay embodies what Butler describes as the “lawless” or “rogue” domain of resurrected sovereignty, applied through the War on Terror.<sup>85</sup>

To give this emerging rogue state legitimacy, the Bush administration tirelessly worked to build a sphere of symbols that mimicked the image of just authority, for example in the way in which representatives of the administration provided it legitimacy through speech acts. The government, for example, pointed out that the form of detention imposed in Guantánamo Bay – no evidence, no charges, no trial – was actually a rather common procedure, and could be found in most societies in the form of “involuntary hospitalization of mentally ill people who pose a danger to themselves and others,” reasoning that “[t]he terrorists are like the mentally ill because their mind-set is unfathomable, because they are outside of reason, because they are outside of ‘civilization.’”<sup>86</sup> Here again, we see an overlap with aspects of the Orientalist trope discussed by Goss re-emerging in the core of the War

82 Ibid., p. 56.

83 Ibid., p. 53.

84 In the words of Michael C. Dorf: “[C]laiming that Taliban, al Qaeda, and other irregular fighters in Afghanistan and elsewhere were entitled neither to the procedural protections of the criminal justice system, nor to the humanitarian protections of the Geneva Conventions, the Bush administration asserted an entitlement to hold detainees indefinitely, subject them to harsh methods of interrogation, and try them, if it chose not to simply hold them, before specially constituted military commissions. Moreover, the administration eventually claimed, the civilian courts were powerless to rule on the legality of such measures.” See: Michael C. Dorf, “The Detention and Trial of Enemy Combatants: A Drama in Three Branches,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 122, No. 1 (Spring 2007): pp. 47–58, at p. 47.

85 On the intersection of two contradictory legal geographies, that of Cuba and the United States, necessary to create the extralegal framework of Guantánamo Bay and its contestations, see: Derek Gregory, “The Black Flag: Guantánamo Bay and the Space of Exception,” *Human Geography*, Vol. 88, No. 4 (2006): pp. 405–27.

86 Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 72.

on Terror. This trope replaces due trial by framing the subjects concerned beyond the category of humanity proper, legitimizing the use of so-called enhanced interrogation techniques or “torture lite.”<sup>87</sup> Just like Goss, Butler expands this trope, by showing that around the core figure of the dark savage – the “Terrorist” – an assembly of other political opponents can be added that resist full adherence to the construct of Us, such as public intellectuals, critics of the Israeli occupation, antiwar protestors, critical diplomats, LGBTQI+ communities, and even the mentally ill.

As Butler states: “[T]he notion of the world itself as a sovereign entitlement of the United States must be given up, lost, and mourned, as narcissistic and grandiose fantasies must be lost and mourned.”<sup>88</sup> The result of such endeavor, at least initially, means that one is to leave the space of privilege invested in the notion of Us, and to assemble with the ever-expanding concept of Them: a Them that does consist not only of the supposedly “primitive” Other, but also of the incriminated public intellectual, the queer activist, the whistleblower, the mentally ill – *the precariat*. This position means *becoming Them* to create a new egalitarian definition of Us, thus dis-identifying from the core conditions that define the successful performance of power in War on Terror Propaganda. This act of dis-identification, of the loss of privilege, and the subsequent possibility of incrimination by the expanded state, must be understood as a crucial part of demanding collectivity in Popular Propaganda.

In Butler’s work, we observe a call for such collectivity to arise through a new kind of assembly, an assembly not based on supposed sameness, but on shared loss and grief. It means to build a popular assembly between politicized civil society so far claimed as part of Us, and non-citizens aggressed as the constituents of Them, and thus to articulate a notion of communality that goes beyond the script imposed by War on Terror Propaganda. This procedure that joins different precarious conditions – whether in the form of politicized civil society in whose name the War on Terror is waged, or the non-citizens against whom it is waged – is what is manifested and performed, however fragile and conflictual, by the manifold popular mass movements that have arisen in parallel to the War on Terror, both in opposition to its policies, and as a living reminder of other forms of existential threats

to our common live support.

We thus conclude that *Popular Propaganda* is a contemporary defined by the performance of power through the assemblies of popular mass movements – the concept of performance signifying simultaneously an expression of loss of power and a claim to power – with the aim of creating new realities based on a demand to collectivity. The performativity of this propaganda is characterized by an emerging claim to power.

We will continue now by exploring the role of stateless peoples and their relation to the War on Terror and popular mass movements, and discern the conditions of *Stateless Propaganda*.

87 In the words of Jessica Wolfendale: “The language of torture lite [...] corrupts public discourse by creating the illusion that there exists a special category of torture that is professional, restrained, and far removed from the brutal practices of authoritarian and tyrannical regimes. This illusion allows us to replace the question of whether we should use torture with the question of what kinds of torture we should use.” Jessica Wolfendale, “The Myth of Torture Lite,” *Ethics and International Affairs* vol. 23, no. 1 (2009): pp. 47–61, at pp. 58–59.

88 Ibid., p. 40.

## 3.4 STATELESS PEOPLES &amp; STATELESS PROPAGANDA

Before we begin to define the notion of Stateless Propaganda, it is important to acknowledge the factual limitations of an academic exploration of statelessness from the perspective of what we could call the “stated,” those who from the moment of birth, have had the privilege of being protected by their government. Being a Swiss–Dutch, white cis male who has been proposing the construction of a “we” throughout this thesis, my analysis of statelessness that I direct towards cannot but be inherently flawed, for the concrete knowledge of the world that defines statelessness can only be forcefully acquired by *being stateless*. Our proposed definition of Stateless Propaganda must thus by definition be problematized, something that we will further elaborate upon when discussing Stateless Propaganda Art in the next chapter.

As we have seen so far, there is an overlap between the categories of the expanded state and its War on Terror Propaganda and popular mass movements and their Popular Propaganda. The former lays claim on the latter for its political legitimacy, whereas the latter aims to dis-identify from the first. But there is also an overlap between Popular Propaganda and what we will now discuss as Stateless Propaganda. We already saw how Butler attempted to theorize the notion of the assembly between precarious popular mass movements and non-citizens aggressed by the War on Terror. But Butler evidently is not a stateless subject herself. Her experience of precarity is still that, of a US citizen and is relatively protected as a result. What we will now explore is a precarity of a radically different kind, namely of those who are fully excluded from the very notion of the civil, or of the human for that matter – Them – and the kind of power and assembly that they lay claim to.

On March 26, 2010, an op-ed entitled “A Terrorist Lawyer, and Proud of It” appeared in the *New York Times*. It was written by Nancy Hollander, a criminal defense lawyer who represented terrorist suspects prosecuted under the Patriot Act.<sup>89</sup> In her article, Hollander describes the confrontation with attitudes similar to those mentioned by Butler: “When I defended someone charged with raping a baby, no one thought I might have raped my own,” she recalls, and “when I defended those accused of espionage for attempting to sell America’s nuclear secrets, no one questioned my loyalty to my country,” but “[n]ow that I am defending those accused of terrorism, some people as-

89 Her clients over the years varied from the non-profit Holy Land Foundation, which gathered funds for the reconstruction of war-damaged parts of Gaza and which was accused of material support to terrorist organizations with lifelong sentences for its three founders as a result, to prisoners in Guantánamo Bay to whom she delivered pro bono legal support. See Hollander’s lecture *Representing the Holy Land Foundation* at the New World Summit – Berlin, May 4, 2012, <https://vimeo.com/64942274>.

sume that I have stepped over an imaginary line and become ‘soft on terrorism’ or worse, that I support terrorism and am providing aid and comfort to the enemy.”<sup>90</sup> But if that is what it takes to defend the rule of law in the face of the War on Terror Hollander concludes, then “I am a terrorist lawyer, if that means I am willing to defend those accused of terrorism.”<sup>91</sup> Being a “terrorist lawyer” thus becomes the consequence of “defending the United States Constitution and the laws and treaties to which it is bound.”<sup>92</sup> Hollander essentially describes the final consequence of what Butler introduced as “rogue law”: the moment that defending the law becomes a crime in and of itself.<sup>93</sup> Hollander became part of a unique alliance with writer and editor Larry Siems and the Mauritanian Guantánamo Bay prisoner Mohamedou Ould Slahi, author of *Guantánamo Diary* (2015); a unique alliance – or an assembly – between members of politicized civil society and a de facto stateless person.

*Guantánamo Diary* was written by Ould Slahi during the second part of 2005 in the form of a 466-page handwritten document. At the time of writing the book, Ould Slahi was imprisoned in a segregation hut in Camp Echo, one of seven detention camps that make up the extralegal prison of Guantánamo Bay. Every single one of *Guantánamo Diary*’s pages had to be put up for review to the United States government, a system that Ould Slahi’s editor Siems describes as the “strict protocols of Guantánamo’s sweeping censorship regime.”<sup>94</sup> When it was finished, the document was instantly classified as secret: “every page he wrote was considered classified from the moment of its creation.”<sup>95</sup> When finally edited and published by Siems in 2015, black rectangles of censorship littered the pages, for what had finally been released was still a censored version of Ould Slahi’s original text.<sup>96</sup> The decision of Siems

90 Nancy Hollander, “A Terrorist Lawyer and Proud of It,” *New York Times*, Mar. 26, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/24/opinion/24iht-edhollander.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/24/opinion/24iht-edhollander.html?_r=0).

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.

93 Chelsea Manning, a former soldier in the United States Army and client of Hollander who was sentenced to thirty-five years of imprisonment for leaking documents and videos showing, among others, war crimes committed by the United States, argued in a similar way that pursuing justice in some cases means acting against the interests of the state: “I wanted the American public to know that not everyone in Iraq and Afghanistan are targets that needed to be neutralized, but rather people who were struggling to live in the pressure cooker environment of what we call asymmetric warfare. After the release I was encouraged by the response in the media and general public, who observed the aerial weapons team video [in which innocent civilians are killed]. As I hoped, others were just as troubled – if not more troubled than me by what they saw.” See: “Bradley Manning’s Personal Statement to Court Martial: Full Text,” *The Guardian*, Mar. 1, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/01/bradley-manning-wikileaks-statement-full-text>.

94 Larry Siems, “Introduction,” in Mohamedou Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2015), p. xvii.

95 Ibid.

96 See for the full (il)legal history of Guantánamo Bay and the legal struggles against its policies, Liz Ševčenko’s online database *Guantánamo Public Memory Project*, that traces the exceptional juridical and political status of the war prison to 1903, when the United States was given full jurisdiction and control over the base, while the territory formally remained part of sovereign Cuban land, <http://gitmememory.org/>. See also: Liz Ševčenko, “Guantánamo Bay’s Other Anniversary: 110 years of a

to include the censorship of the United States government into the printed book, rather than trying to circumvent its black rectangles, paradoxically both removes information from the eyes of the viewer, but simultaneously adds information to the document as well. It shows the institutional effort to stop us from “reading beyond what we are able to read” and as such informs us about a specific performative effort of the government. This censorship and its motive, 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 back to your family,” he said. When he said that I couldn’t help breaking in [redacted] Lately, I’d become so vulnerable. What was wrong with me? Just one soothing word in this ocean of agony was enough to make me cry.<sup>97</sup>

In his extensive editorial footnote apparatus, Siems notes that “It seems possible, if incredible, that the U.S. government may have here redacted the word ‘tears.’”<sup>98</sup> So it appears that in the name of national security, censorship is applied to the emotional reality of an imprisoned human being. Censorship here is applied to the evidence of the fact that Ould Slahi is a human subject capable of experiencing and expressing emotions. It is a censorship also of the affective dimension a reader might experience when reading Slahi’s words.

Mohamedou Ould Slahi had left Mauritania to study and work in Germany and Canada. A crucial episode while living in Germany would turn out to be his trip to Afghanistan in 1991 to join the mujahedin – the Muslim Afghan militia – that fought what they considered the illegitimate communist government supported by the Soviet Union. At the end of his training, Ould Slahi swore loyalty to Al-Qa’ida, an organization which at that time was considered an ally of the United States government in its fight against communism.<sup>99</sup> During a second trip to Afghanistan in 1992, Ould Slahi witnessed the toppling of the communist government, resulting in internal power struggles of Al-Qa’ida and other resistance factions, something Ould Slahi refused to be part of, and he left the organization. But during a brief stay in Ca-

Legal Black Hole,” *The Guardian*, Dec. 28, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/28/guantanamo-bay-usa>.

97 Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, p. 229.

98 Ibid.

99 John Prados discusses the War on Terror in Afghanistan by directly tracing its key figures to the outcomes of the American involvement in the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–89) when he states that “the CIA’s Afghan campaign is obviously closely related to current events. Osama bin Laden, as a rebel fighter from the CIA’s secret war who is suddenly at the heart of the new terrorism, is the clearest example.” See: John Prados, “Notes on the CIA’s Secret War in Afghanistan,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 89, No. 2, *History and September 11: A Special Issue* (Sep. 2002): pp. 466–71, at p. 470.

nada, his contacts with Al-Qa'ida were proven to be enough reason for the authorities to link him to the so-called Millennium Plot, a series of failed Al-Qa'ida-linked attempted assaults on civil and military targets planned in the period of the 2000 millennial celebrations. In spite of the complete lack of evidence – Ould Slahi was in sporadic contact with Al-Qa'ida members, but was not working for the organization as such – he was placed under surveillance, and decides to return to Mauritania. In Ould Slahi's words: "The only thing we had done together was make a trip to Afghanistan in February 1992 to help people fighting against communism. And as far as I was concerned that was not a crime, at least in Mauritania."<sup>100</sup> Adding that: "For Pete's sake, the U.S. was supposedly on our side!"<sup>101</sup>

After reuniting with his family and living a year in Mauritania while working as a computer specialist, Ould Slahi was called in for questioning by FBI twice and held in custody. On November 28, 2001, he was flown to Jordan through the CIA's rendition program.<sup>102</sup> Ould Slahi writes about the moment in which he enters the limitless domain of rogue law: "November 28th is Mauritanian Independence Day; it marks the event when the Islamic Republic of Mauritania supposedly received its independence from the French colonists in 1960," after which he subsequently remarks:

The irony is that on this very same day in 2001, the independent and sovereign Republic of Mauritania turned over one of its own citizens on a premise. To its everlasting shame, the Mauritanian government not only broke the constitution, which forbids the extradition of Mauritanian criminals to other countries, but also extradited an innocent citizen and exposed him to the random American Justice.<sup>103</sup>

The CIA rendition flight marked the beginning of the nearly fourteen years that Ould Slahi was forced to reside in the hands of secret police, at black sites, and in extralegal prisons – fourteen years in which he was treated as a de facto stateless person. He was to be subjected to endless interrogations based at first on Ould Slahi's supposed involvement in the Millennium Plot, but which later in the process would start to implicate him in the attacks of September 11, suggesting that

100 Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, p. 92.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

102 Extraordinary rendition is government-orchestrated abduction and extrajudicial displacement of an individual from one country to another, used extensively by the CIA in the War on Terror to torture, interrogate and imprison suspects outside of any judicial oversight. See for a detailed analysis of extraordinary rendition in the War on Terror: Trevor Paglen and A.C. Thompson, *Torture Taxi: On the Trail of the CIA's Rendition Flights* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2006).

103 Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, p. 132.

he was an active Al-Qa'ida operative, who could expose the organization's network. From Jordan, Ould Slahi was flown to Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan on July 19, 2002, and finally on August 4 that same year to Guantánamo Bay detention camp, Cuba. From the moment of his rendition on November 28, 2001 until his release on October 17, 2016, Ould Slahi would remain in custody. While severely mistreated in Amman and Bagram through beatings, intimidation, and humiliation, a full-scale torture procedure would only be implemented in Guantánamo Bay, where under direct authorization of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld he was subjected to a "special project" consisting of months of continuous sleep deprivation, stress positions (positions in which great amount of weight is placed on just a few muscles), extreme cold, beatings, sexual abuse by guards, exposure to loud music, white noise and excessive light, permanent disorientation, sense deprivation, starvation, being subjected to staged rendition flights, being stripped from religious rights, denial of privacy, and suggestions of violent retaliation against his family members and friends, including the rape of his mother.<sup>104</sup>

Ould Slahi addresses the Us/Them dichotomy throughout his book. For example when he writes that "President Bush described his holy war against the so-called terrorism as a war between the civilized and barbaric world," but "his government committed more barbaric acts than the terrorists themselves."<sup>105</sup> These contradictions in the democratic legitimization of brutal acts of state violence reach deep into American society itself. Ould Slahi remarks that "Christian terrorist organizations such as Nazis and White Supremacists have the freedom to express themselves and recruit people openly and nobody can bother them," while "as a Muslim, if you sympathize with the political views of an Islamic organization you're in big trouble."<sup>106</sup> At the heart of that contradiction is the Orientalist belief that peoples of the Muslim religion, peoples of color, peoples related to the African continent or what is called the Middle-East still are to be understood as savages, something which Ould Slahi described as a "false picture" that is the result of propaganda, and which sustains the idea that Arab peoples are inherently "savage, violent, insensitive, and cold-hearted."<sup>107</sup> For Ould Slahi, his place in the Us/Them dichotomy is a historical re-enactment of a previous colonization, and situates his own story in the broader context of slavery:

104 See Larry Siems's online project "The Torture Report: An Investigation into Rendition, Detention and Interrogation under the Bush Administration," <http://www.thetorturereport.org/>.

105 Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, p. 241.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 261.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 359.

I often compared myself with a slave. Slaves were taken forcibly from Africa, and so was I. Slaves were sold a couple of times on their way to their final destination, and so was I. Slaves suddenly were assigned to somebody they didn't choose, and so was I. And when I looked at the history of slaves, I noticed that slaves sometimes ended up an integral part of the master's house.<sup>108</sup>

At some point, all of Ould Slahi's means of resistance within the war prison are exhausted; he gives in to the interrogations and provides whatever information is asked, true or false, to satisfy the guards and gain some form of minimal protection by winning their sympathy.<sup>109</sup> But even when gaining that minimal protection, becoming part of the master's house only aims to affirm the master/slavery divide. For example, Ould Slahi recounts that he is allowed to watch the movie *Black Hawk Down* (2001) with his guards. This Ridley Scott film recounts in a heroic vein the involvement of the U.S. in a United Nations peace-keeping mission in Somalia, during which two of their helicopters were shot down by Somali militias.<sup>110</sup> "The guards almost went crazy emotionally because they saw many Americans getting shot to death," writes Ould Slahi, "[b]ut they missed that the number of U.S. casualties is negligible compared to the Somalis who were attacked in their own homes."<sup>111</sup> This structural dehumanization of the Somali victims on screen and Ould Slahi off screen, however, did not stop the guards and their prisoner from "slowly but surely [becoming] a society and [starting] to gossip about the interrogators and call them names."<sup>112</sup> But Ould Slahi's political alliance is not to his master's house, but drawn from the "warm breath of [...] other unjustly treated individuals,"<sup>113</sup> those that Franz Fanon described as the community of the "Wretched

108 Ibid., p. 314.

109 On the ineffectiveness of such "confession" retrieved through torture see Philip Rumney, "Is Coercive Interrogation of Terrorist Suspects Effective? A Response to Bagaric and Clarke," *University of San Francisco Law Review* 40 (2006): pp. 479–513, at pp. 483–84.

110 Released Dec. 28, 2001, the representation of United States military in Scott's film was of explicit interest to the Bush administration. Ashley Dawson describes how high-profile neoconservatives attended its preliminary screening, and how Scott explicitly voiced his patriotism in his desire to display the mission in a heroic manner. Ashley Dawson notes how the setting of the film makes the director's ideological commitment manifest when she writes "in *Blackhawk Down*, *The Mog*, as the film's Special Forces troops call the city, is a ramshackle megacity whose residents are armed to the teeth with the military detritus of the Cold War. Mogadishu is thus made to embody the new Heart of Darkness, a stateless urban world of vicious Hobbesian war of all against all. This view of Africa as the vanguard of anarchy is shared by a significant segment of the elite in the global North, who see the criminalization of the state in Africa as a direct threat to U.S. interests. It is from such feral zones, these analysts hold, that future threats to American society are likely to originate." See: Ashley Dawson, "New World Disorder: 'Black Hawk Down' and the Eclipse of U.S. Military Humanitarianism in Africa," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (September 2011): pp. 177–94, at p. 180. We will discuss similar case studies further in the final chapter in the segment *War on Terror Propaganda Art*.

111 Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, p. 320.

112 Ibid., p. 327.

113 Ibid., p. 87.

of the Earth," which we will discuss further below. In a core reflection in his book, he interrogates the War on Terror propaganda of the Us/Them divide, only to come to a full reversal of its logic:

Many young men and women join the U.S. forces under the misleading propaganda of the U.S. government, which makes people believe that the Armed Forces are nothing but a big Battle of Honor: if you join the Army, you are a living martyr; you're defending not only your family, your country, and American democracy but also freedom and oppressed people all around the world. [...] But the reality of the U.S. forces is a little tiny bit different. To go directly to the bottom line: the rest of the world thinks of Americans as a bunch of revengeful barbarians. That may be harsh, and I don't believe the average American is a revengeful barbarian. But the U.S. government bets its last penny on violence as the magic solution for every problem, and so the country is losing friends every day and doesn't seem to give a damn about it.<sup>114</sup>

In a full reversal of the Orientalist trope, it is not Them that represents the barbaric savage, but rather, the barbaric savage is the agent producing the very articulation and violent enactment of the Us/Them divide as such: the barbarian is Us. It is the "unjustly treated individuals" with whom Ould Slahi engages in collective hunger strikes in the war prison, and in whose mourning he finds solace and community.<sup>115</sup> And although Ould Slahi writes that "I would like to believe the majority of Americans want to see Justice done, and they are not interested in financing the detention of innocent people," and that only "a small extremist minority [...] believes that everybody in this Cuban prison is evil," his writings nonetheless clearly call for a societal responsibility toward his condition, and for the need for a collective societal self-interrogation when it comes to the acceptance of the Us/Them dichotomy produced by War on Terror Propaganda.<sup>116</sup>

*Guantánamo Diary* can be understood as a form of Stateless Propaganda that operates on two levels. First is the process of self-recognition, and therefore the recognition of the stateless as a political community. Even in the unbearable conditions of war prison, this can lead to formations of assembly and collective action, for example in

114 Ibid., p. 339.

115 Our perception of political assembly as an act of people who visibly gather in a public space limits our understanding of other, more fragmented or more complex choreographed forms of assembly, such as the case of Ould Slahi and his fellow prisoners engaging in a collective hunger strike. We will explore such alternative understanding of political assembly further in the context of *Assemblism* in the final chapter.

116 Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, p. 372.

the form of the hunger strike. The second is the process of recognition by others, and therefore the initiation of coalitions and forms of assembly between the stateless and the stated, such as that between Ould Slahi, Siems, and Hollander, in order for society at large to acknowledge the struggles of the stateless community and its equality to the stated. *Guantánamo Diary*, as a form of Stateless Propaganda, enacts both. As a testimony, it recognizes the stateless as a political community (self-recognition), and through the alliance with Siems and Hollander and the process of making the document public, it reaches society at large (recognition by others). It is important to emphasize that this recognition is the result of self-recognition, and not the other way around. Ould Slahi sets the terms of his equality; it is not an equality that is “given” as charity, but that is the result of a political demand that he voices on behalf of the stateless community.

The stateless in this particular case are radically excluded from the existing monopolies of power of the expanded state, but they are not powerless. The power of self-recognition and of political assembly in the form of the hunger strike result from extreme forms of violence and deprivation, but the stateless recognize themselves as a political community and enact political actions and demands. The impact of *Guantánamo Diary*, which turned into an international bestseller, further proves the potential influence of the assembly between the stated and the stateless. The “power” of the stateless might be extremely precarious – to the point where one’s body belongs to the war prison – but it is a power nonetheless, and one that stands in full opposition to the expanded state.

We will for now, within the given limitations of the stated, conclude that Stateless Propaganda is a contemporary propaganda defined by the performance of precarious power of a community of stateless peoples. This performance can take the form of a self-recognition of the stateless as political community on the one hand, and performative assembly between the stated and the stateless on the other. The performance of this precarious power stands in full opposition to the expanded state and demands a reversal of the Us/Them dichotomy, with the aims of constructing reality accordingly. Further examples of such forms of stateless politics and governance – from the creation of new independent states, to the initiation of stateless democracies – will be presented in the final chapter.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

The contemporary in our 21st century is defined both by the increase of technological and military infrastructure and their integration into global engineering projects like those of the War on Terror, as well as by the actors that operate in opposition to these structures of power. To understand the contemporary as an arena of competing realities – as histories in motion in the words of Lütticken – we have identified three of such actors, in the form of the expanded state, popular mass movements, and stateless peoples, each of which brings about a different propaganda through a different performance of power.

In the case of War on Terror Propaganda, we are dealing with the performance of the public–private power structures of the expanded state. Through the work of Masco, we have analyzed the imaginative capacities of this by far most influential of contemporary propagandas, to the point of its ability to construct a completely new reality based on the Us/Them dichotomy. By projecting an image of imminent destruction upon its populations, War on Terror Propaganda deepens this dichotomy with the aim of turning citizens into counter-terror warriors with full-scale secret societies, comprised of citizens holding security clearances, as a result. The projection of imminent destruction operates as a form of societal censorship, by withholding archives and undermining awareness of actual existential threats such as climate change. This endless loop of threat production and response – from the nuclear bomb to the microbe – does not only shape an industry in and of itself, but also protects the interests of the proprietors of the expanded state.

In the case of Popular Propaganda, we are dealing with the performative assembly of precarious politicized civil society and its popular mass movements throughout the world. As we analyzed through the work of Butler, the emerging power of popular mass movements is defined by performativity itself: the gathering of bodies in response to the increasing threats to their life support – threats inherently tied to the neoliberal character of the expanded state – which articulates new possible alliances between different precarious constituencies. Performative assembly challenges the Us/Them dichotomy, by allying civil society on the basis of collective demands that are not represented by the expanded state. This process in which a new definition of “Us” – a new collectivity – is articulated may include undocumented or stateless peoples, thus embracing part of “Them.” Through performative assembly, popular mass movements bring about new conceptions of collectivity as well as precarious infrastructures to construct reality to the benefit of its constituents.

In the case of Stateless Propaganda, we are dealing with people fully excluded from all relative privilege and protection of the expanded state. Different from politicized civil society and its popular mass movements, the power of stateless peoples in some cases does not go further than a claim on their very bodily presence, and even this – in the case of the war prison – can be denied. As we analyzed through the work of Ould Slahi, the extreme condition of statelessness nonetheless is not equivalent to powerlessness. The self-recognition of the stateless community connects peoples around the world, in opposition to and rejection of the barbarity of “Us.” It can also take the form of alternative forms of assembly, such as a hunger strike or an alliance with stated individuals of politicized civil society. In the next chapter, we will discuss more far-reaching forms of stateless assembly and autonomism, which start from the condition of statelessness as a collective condition and even as a possible power in its own right.

In this chapter, we have observed how each of these three actors and their propaganda show crucial overlaps as well as oppositions. The expanded state might seek to incorporate popular mass movements to maintain its legitimacy, and popular mass movements might experience relative privilege or protection of the expanded state as a result, even though the two stand in opposition. Popular mass movements and stateless peoples might seek for possible forms of alliance and assembly, even though their experience of precarity may be extremely different. The antagonism between the expanded state and stateless peoples, is most profound and, as we will see in the next chapter, can be the foundation for stateless peoples to demand full separation and autonomy from the expanded state altogether. We also observed that the kind of power at stake in contemporary propaganda is different in nature. In the case of the expanded state we dealt with an *existing monopoly of power*, in the case of popular mass movements and stateless peoples we are dealing with *emerging power*. In the case of the stateless, this emerging power further results from a process of *self-recognition*, i.e., the alternative paradigm of power that might be inherent to the condition of statelessness as such.

Let us now, based on this chapter, propose the following definition of contemporary propaganda:

- Contemporary propaganda is the performance of power in contemporary society

Having arrived at a first understanding of contemporary propaganda in the 21st century and three conceptions of different propaganda models, let us begin to deepen our understanding of each of these propagandas, their differences and overlaps, in the domain of propaganda art.





# CHAPTER IV: CONTEMPORARY PROPAGANDA ART

- 4.1 WAR ON TERROR PROPAGANDA ART
  - EXPANDED STATE REALISM: THEATER
  - EXPANDED STATE REALISM: GAMES
  - EXPANDED STATE REALISM: TELEVISION AND CINEMA
  - EXPANDED STATE REALISM: EXTENDED PERFORMANCE
  - EXPANDED STATE ABSTRACTION: VOIDS AND VISUAL ART
  - SUMMARY
- 4.2 POPULAR PROPAGANDA ART
  - POPULAR ART HISTORY
  - ASSEMBLISM
  - EMBEDDED ART
  - ORGANIZATIONAL ART
  - SUMMARY
- 4.3 STATELESS PROPAGANDA ART
  - STATELESS PROPAGANDAS AND STATELESS PROPAGANDA ARTS
  - ROJAVA'S STATELESS PROPAGANDA AND STATELESS PROPAGANDA ART
  - SUMMARY
- 4.4 CONCLUSION

As we discussed in the second chapter, propaganda art consists of what it makes visible and invisible at the same time: while it shows one thing, it conceals another. What are the scales and stakes of art's role as propaganda as we move from the modern to the contemporary?

In the context of Modernist Propaganda Art, the abstract expressionists aimed to create images that transcended traditional artistic representation. But at the same time, abstract expressionism – as we have shown – was highly figurative as propaganda art. In the context of Europe, it represented American freedom, a liberation from figurative representation that contrasted with the aesthetic regime of Soviet socialist realism. This effect of abstract expressionism as propaganda art was not limited to the object of the painting, but was mediated through a larger technological interface: from newspaper articles to television reportages and Greenberg's speeches on the Voice of America radio. We thus came to understand modern propaganda art not just as an object, but as a larger body of mediation through which the performance of power as art, was manifested.

At the same time, we have seen how Avant-Garde Propaganda Art during the early Russian revolution aimed at overcoming these processes of concealment. Rodchenko's productivist art aimed at making the means of production of propaganda – the substructures of power – visible through his work. He followed Lenin's paradigm of a propaganda for a revolutionary modernism as part of mass education and emancipation. Furthermore, Rodchenko fully abandoned the separation of his work as "art" from the larger aims of industrialization: he aimed for his work to be part of it, to mobilize its capacities, and to imagine a new world – and a new art – through it. Rodchenko consciously expanded the notion of art through the industrial and technological interface. His work was art, architecture, design, worker's club, library, radio station, conference room: none of which excluded another. From capitalist modernity's Modernist Propaganda Art to revolutionary modernity's Avant-Garde Propaganda Art we face two radically different propagandas and thus two different forms of propaganda art: the first conceals the larger interface of technology and industry to maintain the idea of a Greenbergian "autonomous art," whereas the second includes the interface of technology and industry, declaring it part of an expanded revolutionary art practice.

In the previous chapter on Contemporary Propaganda, we have come to understand the further acceleration of technological society in the 21st century as a heritage of the Cold War and the nuclear-industrial complex. The technological interface of propaganda has broadened, and as such, the propaganda filters defined by Chomsky and Herman in the late 1980s have increased their capacity to construct reality

after the interests of dominant monopolies of power. At the same time, we expanded the propaganda model through what we proposed as an “inverted propaganda model”: one that was not merely focused on dominant structures, but on emergent structures of power or unrecognized forms of power, such as popular mass movements and stateless peoples. As a result, we have been able to articulate three different actors that define the conflictual arena of the contemporary in the form of the War on Terror, popular mass movements, and stateless peoples, each of which bring about their own particular structures of power and propaganda: *War on Terror Propaganda* (which we analyze through the propaganda model), and *Popular Propaganda* and *Stateless Propaganda* (which we analyze through the inverted propaganda model). Through a close reading of the work of Masco, Butler, and Ould Slahi, we already grasp some of the cultural – even artistic – dimensions of the process in which these different propagandas aim to construct reality. We discussed the *imaginative* dimensions of the War on Terror (Masco), the *performative* stagings in popular mass movements (Butler), and the desperate *cultural* output of a stateless prisoner of war (Ould Slahi).

Masco, Butler, and Ould Slahi thus contributed to our final endeavor, namely to define *Contemporary Propaganda Art*, and the expanded definitions of the concept of “art” that it puts forward. Our aim will be to define the performance of power in the domain of art as *War on Terror Propaganda Art*, *Popular Propaganda Art*, and *Stateless Propaganda Art*. Within each of these categories of contemporary propaganda art, we will try to define the expanded histories of art that brought them about, the artistic styles and practices that they instituted, the artists and artworks they realized within these categories, and their overall role in constructing reality for the interests of their proprietors (War on Terror Propaganda Art) or the collective demands of their constituencies (Popular Propaganda Art, Stateless Propaganda Art).

We will do so by highlighting, in each different category, *the relation between art and the structure of power at hand, the process in which power is performed as art, and the reality that this performance of power aims to construct*. As War on Terror Propaganda, Popular Propaganda, and Stateless Propaganda each have their own art histories, styles, and categories, the structure of each section will be different, but this basic methodology, which could be summarized as *propaganda = power+performance*, will form our continuous guideline. Different from the previous chapters, in which we attempted to define the general framework of modern propaganda, modern propaganda art, and contemporary propaganda, we will also provide additional details on a variety of contemporary works of propaganda art to understand how our historical exploration of propaganda shapes our present-day reality.

As we discussed in the second chapter, what we call “art” is a product of historical processes, in which the changing nature of power structures impact the nature of art. In our contemporary age of accelerated technology and expanded interconnected industries described by Masco, this is more than ever before the case. We will observe this in particular with regard to the media of art privileged by contemporary propaganda. Dominant monopolies of power – such as those at work in War on Terror Propaganda – have largely abandoned the *beaux arts* that we inherited from the French Revolution. Different from the Nazi regime or the United States during the Cold War, fine art is no longer the dominant tool with which to communicate cultural superiority and civilizational legitimacy to the masses. Instead, we will observe that in the case of *War on Terror Propaganda Art* a variety of new cultural forms have been included in the expanded definition of art in propaganda. Next to more traditional forms of theater, visual art, and film, we encounter (video) games and completely new visual forms such as abstract “voids” that conceal archives and even whole territories and peoples from the public eye: a contemporary abstraction that represents the power of the expanded state in controlling the very visibility of the reality it constructs.

In the context of emerging structures of power this is different, because the access to large technological infrastructures is far more limited. Whereas we will still encounter new media in the form of video and film in both Popular Propaganda Art and Stateless Propaganda Art, we will note that we will only encounter the traditional media of painting and sculpture in the context of the latter. Whereas for a long time, fine arts were the exclusive property of ruling power, they might now have become the most accessible and – paradoxically – *democratic* of available media. The counterpoint to this is also that their reach tends to be far more limited, compared to the enormous technological interfaces and industries available to War on Terror Propaganda Art – although that does not by definition mean they are ineffective or incapable of playing a role in large-scale mobilization.

Let us now begin to explore the history, styles, artists, and artworks that belong to the first category of contemporary propaganda that we have defined as War on Terror Propaganda, in the form of War on Terror Propaganda Art.

#### 4.1 WAR ON TERROR PROPAGANDA ART

In the previous chapter, we discussed through the work of Masco how the power structures of the expanded state have a *creative capacity* of some kind, something which the American curator Nato Thompson even describes as an actual “cultural turn” in the US military-industrial complex during the War on Terror.<sup>1</sup> In Masco’s work we can thus find hints of something that we might be able to expand further into an “art history of the War on Terror,” which will be the main aim of this section. We will explore Masco’s different examples of the creative capacity of the expanded state, and build upon them to argue for a category of art proper: that of *War on Terror Propaganda Art*. We will explore the interdisciplinary character of this War on Terror Propaganda Art and try to map its institutions and its artists. We will do so by discussing and analyzing War on Terror Propaganda Art as comprising two distinct styles.

The first of these two styles is *expanded state realism*, which is essentially the practice through which the image of imminent societal destruction is created, staged, and witnessed. It is a realism that aims at constructing a concrete social reality, but it stands far from what we know in art history as “social realism.”<sup>2</sup> For whereas social realism originated from the social struggles of lower-class people in order to mediate suffering and oppression that ruling classes ignored or even actively maintained, the mass theatrical and cinematic spectacles that engage American families in enacting or witnessing their own potential destruction are of an entirely different kind. It is a form of realism that largely benefits the interests of the state rather than its population, as it stages the threat necessary to institutionalize a dependency on specific industries, legitimizes a politics of secrecy, and promotes the inevitability of perpetual warfare. As such, the realism projected by the nuclear state is much closer to what we have discussed in the second chapter as *socialist realism* than to social realism, as it projects reality not from the perspective of struggling lower classes, but reality as it ought to be in the perspective of a specific elite. This notion of realism also shows

- 1 Thompson starts from US lieutenant general David Petraeus’s rewriting of a “forgotten military document: the counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24.” Thompson observes that in the revision of the document “gun toting shock and awe-style methods” were replaced by emphasis on “the transforming of popular perception as a supplement to straightforward killing,” resulting in what Thompson calls a “cultural turn in the U.S. military.” Nato Thompson, *Culture as Weapon: The Art of Influence in Everyday Life* (Brooklyn/London: Melville House, 2017), pp. 127–28. An earlier draft of Thompson’s chapter that appeared as an essay in *e-flux journal* was criticized by Rijn Sahakian, former director of Sada in Baghdad, who argued that Thompson’s focus on the cultural turn in the period of the Iraq invasion made “no mention of the massive cultural cleansing campaign that took place in Iraq during and after the occupation.” Rijn Sahakian, “A Reply to Nato Thompson’s ‘The Insurgents, Part I,’” *e-flux journal*, No. 48 (Oct. 2013).
- 2 The history of social realism, starting with the realists in the 19th century, will be further elaborated through the work of art historian Alice Guillermo in the section *Popular Propaganda Art*.

overlaps with what writer and theorist Mark Fisher has discussed as *capitalist realism*: 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.<sup>3</sup>

We should therefore understand the type of realism produced by the Cold War as a form of state realism, and today, in the context of the War on Terror, as a form of expanded state realism, because it concerns a realism that is created to benefit the public–private infrastructures through which the War on Terror is waged. We will discuss the practice of expanded state realism in the domains of three of its dominant media, namely those of *theater, games, and television and cinema*, and its impact in the form of *extended performance*, in which all three come together through the perpetration of torture and warfare upon the bodies of those who are considered non-citizens.

The second style of War on Terror Propaganda is *expanded state abstraction*. With this term, we refer to the creation of blank spots and abstract voids in our political, economic, and legal system, but also in the domain of public knowledge in the form of libraries, the Internet, mainstream media and – as we will see – visual art. As we have discussed earlier, the War on Terror operates through classification, by turning public domain information into state secrets. This secrecy is manifested in abstractions: through black censorship rectangles and the disappearance of information what is present becomes absent. This abstract absence, in turn, strengthens expanded state realism, which gains the sole monopoly on the visualization of threat. When expanded state abstraction classifies our own history, what is taken from us is the chance to understand why the world is manifested – visualized – the way it is: whether in the form of a terrorist attack or the building of a war prison. Expanded state realism defines the image and reason behind imminent threats for us. As such, one could argue that in War on Terror Propaganda Art realism and abstraction exist in a state of *interdependence*. They structure one another in the creation of a new reality that benefit the expanded state.

Although such claims might come across as rather conspiratorial, we emphasize that we are not approaching the expanded state as a singular actor – as some kind of a “deep state” that has one common drive for domination. State and corporate agencies, while possibly sharing more interests in power monopolies than not, are not a homogeneous mass. In some cases, some parts of the state may be more consistent in addressing actual existential threats than others, for example the

3 In Fisher’s words, “[c]apitalist realism [...] entails subordinating oneself to a reality that is infinitely plastic, capable of reconfiguring itself at any moment.” While capitalist realism claims its legitimacy by rejecting the so-called totalitarianism of past socialist and communist regimes, Fisher perceives a form of “market Stalinism” in its hyper-bureaucratic and target-oriented bureaucracy, opening up the possibility of comparisons between socialist realism and capitalist realism. See: Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester/Washington: O Books, 2009), pp. 54, 42.

growing awareness of certain military agencies of 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.<sup>4</sup> In other cases, governmental agencies might even oppose a government, for example in the case of the CIA’s investigation of possible Russian ties of the present Trump administration.<sup>5</sup> Another example are private corporations that try to undermine instrumentalization by a state, for example by resisting access to their clients’ user data demanded by governments in the name of national security.<sup>6</sup> 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, reoccurring narratives in relation to the domain of art that we can trace. Defining such master narratives forms our key objective here – but we will keep in mind that arguing for the existence of such master narratives in the process in which the expanded state constructs reality is not the same as claiming that the expanded state is a homogeneous entity.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, when we use the term “art” in the context of War on Terror Propaganda Art, we refer back to the interdisciplinary nature of propaganda that we discussed in previous chapters. 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, propaganda must by definition be interdisciplinary. We will try to show how visual art, cinema, games, theater, and so on, will have to be understood as interrelated. Although we will discuss different styles and media of War on Terror Propaganda Art in sequence, we will continue to emphasize their interconnected nature.

Let us now begin to discuss the practice of War on Terror Propaganda in the form of expanded state realism and its interdisciplinary output.

4 As noted by my colleague Younes Bouadi, who at my request attended the *Future Force Conference*, organized by the Dutch Ministry of Defense at the World Forum, The Hague, Feb. 9–10, 2017.

5 The cause of the conflict lies in the CIA investigation into Trump’s campaign team for possible collusion with Russian secret services, as elaborated by Michael J. Morell, former deputy director of the CIA. See: Michael J. Morell, “Trump’s Dangerous Anti-C.I.A. Crusade,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 6, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/06/opinion/trumps-dangerous-anti-cia-crusade.html>.

6 As a result of growing public pressure, massive corporate social media such as Facebook and Instagram have been adopting increasingly strict privacy policies. See: Sam Levin, “Facebook and Instagram Ban Developers from Using Data for Surveillance,” *The Guardian*, Mar. 13, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/13/facebook-instagram-surveillance-privacy-data>.

7 In his analysis of spectacular Hollywood cinema in the period following the attacks of September 11, Terence McSweeney argues that “[e]ven if the traumatic event is highly contested, a master narrative soon emerges, which is a collective understanding of the incident. It is one that appears on the surface to be ideologically neutral, but is, in actual fact, highly politicized.” Terence McSweeney, *The ‘War on Terror’ and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 10.

## EXPANDED STATE REALISM: THEATER

The first medium of War on Terror Propaganda Art that we will discuss is rooted in the cultural practices of the Cold War: the mass rehearsals of fictional nuclear detonations, evacuations of cities and duck-and-cover drills, which Joseph Masco describes as “detailed renderings of theatrically rehearsed mass violence,” manifested in the form of “public spectacles.”<sup>8</sup> The notion of the spectacle here will be important throughout our analysis of War on Terror Propaganda Art. Situationist writer Guy Debord famously defined the notion of the spectacle in his *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) as follows:

The spectacle, grasped in its totality, is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice *already made* in production and its corollary consumption.<sup>9</sup>

This definition seems particularly appropriate to the theatrical spectacles that Masco discusses in the context of the Cold War, in which an imagined threat becomes the foundation for organizing a society. Theater historian Tracy C. Davis even emphasized the importance of such mass rehearsals as actual theater in her claim that the choreographic categories of “civil defense,” “civil preparedness,” and “emergency measures” that were central to these theatrical spectacles and were enacted in perfect synchronicity between “governing bodies, leaderships and chains of command, bureaucrats, public servants, technicians, laborers, and families,”<sup>10</sup> defined this cultural heritage of the Cold War as “the proper provenance of a theatre historian.”<sup>11</sup>

Just as the Cold War created the foundations for the War on Terror, the Cold War’s state realism created the foundations for expanded state realism. This shift was also characterized by a changing economic reality. For example, in 1967 Debord still wrote that “[t]he generalized cleavage of the spectacle is inseparable from the modern *State*, namely from the general form of cleavage within society, the product of the

division of social labor and the organ of class domination.”<sup>12</sup> But as we discussed earlier, the expanded state is defined through public–private ownership under the doctrine of neoliberalism – it is not just the state alone that holds power, but its expanded infrastructures controlled by the realm of private capital as well.

Lütticken claims that the contemporary spectacle under the doctrine of neoliberalism should rather be redefined as “performative spectacle.”<sup>13</sup> For under the “regime of immaterial labor” of post-Fordist neoliberalism, the worker has become a service provider working under flexible contracts, which turn the worker himself into a “living commodity”<sup>14</sup> forced to live in a condition of “perpetual performance.”<sup>15</sup> So whereas the notion of the spectacle is suitable for the condition of the Cold War state, the performative spectacle suits the expanded state of the War on Terror. Human life is the raw performative capital imported into War on Terror Propaganda Art to make its imaginaries of imminent societal destruction into a new reality. Or, in other words, citizens in the expanded states are forced to provide their performative labor to uphold the reality of the War on Terror. They “work” for the expanded state, without contracts and, of course, without actual payment.

Masco traces how the spectacular theater of the Cold War has been translated into new contemporary forms. He discusses, among others, the post-September 11 two-yearly exercises organized by TOPOFF (Top Officials), consisting of contemporary mass theatrical spectacles focused on attack scenarios involving so-called weapons of mass destruction used by supposed terrorist agents: “[I]n 2003, a dirty bomb was imaginatively detonated in Seattle and a biological weapon used in Chicago; in 2005, a car bombing, a chemical attack, and an unknown biological warfare agent were acted out in New Jersey and Connecticut; and in 2007, nuclear materials were theatrically detonated in Portland, Phoenix and Guam.”<sup>16</sup> The first TOPOFF spectacle had already taken place in 2000, in Denver and Portsmouth, but its importance and scale were amplified after the attacks of September 11.<sup>17</sup> The TOPOFF 2 spectacle involved eight thousand participants in Seattle and Chicago and was the first in the post-September 11 era. The choice for Seattle was not coincidental. The city that had witnessed the massive anti-globalist protests of 1999, also known as the “Battle of Seattle,” and had been the site of arrest of Ahmed Ressam, an Algerian

8 Masco, *Theater of Operations*, p. 47.

9 Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 2005), §6.

10 Tracy C. Davis, “Between History and Event: Rehearsing Nuclear War Survival,” *The Drama Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Winter 2002): pp. 11–45, at p. 14.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

12 Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, §24.

13 Lütticken, *Idols of the Market*, p. 169.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Lütticken, *History in Motion*, p. 189.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

17 US Department of State, “Top Officials” (TOPOFF) information page, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/about/c16661.htm>.

al-Qaeda member who formed one of the key protagonists in the failed Millennium Plot. It was a city whose identity was characterized by a confrontation with what many consider a form of “leftist terrorism” as well as a near-September 11 experience, both of which provided additional legitimacy for the city council to wholeheartedly embrace TOPOFF 2.<sup>18</sup>

Performance theoretician Michelle Dent witnessed TOPOFF 2 directly as a writer and spectator, describing how the scenario began with a fictional Middle-Eastern terrorist network known as GLODO (Group for the Liberation of Orangeland and the Destruction of Others) enacting a large scale radiological attack.<sup>19</sup> Dent notes that very different from the mass spectacles staged in the Cold War, TOPOFF 2 was marked by the fact that the attack for which participants were supposed to prepare themselves had essentially already happened, as, “TopOff2 was performed in the shadow of 9/11.”<sup>20</sup> Simultaneously, the TOPOFF 2 spectacle happened to take place simultaneously to the bombing of the American embassy in Riyadh, Saudi-Arabia, bringing actual officials to raise the terror alert in real time while officials participating as actors in TOPOFF 2 were raising the terror alert as part of their spectacular theater in defense against GLODO. The parallel presence of these different events and non-events – the Millennium Plot that did not happen; September 11 that did happen; TOPOFF 2 as exercise; the Riyadh bombings in real time – are connected in the theatrical spectacle. TOPOFF 2 becomes a site where realities and fictions merge. For how much is TOPOFF 2 about exercise, and how much is it about constructing a new reality altogether through spectacular performance?

Dent notes that during the performance of TOPOFF 2’s two-hundred-page script within the dramatic decors of scenery production house Production Support Services, officials leading the spectacle continuously told journalists assembled at the TOPOFF 2 Venue Control Center “that everything is going smoothly, that all the players are doing an outstanding job, that there have not been too many mistakes, and that the citizens of Seattle need not worry that terrorists will use this information against them.”<sup>21</sup> The journalists present were supposed to enact a dual role: they were to photograph and document the decors of a destroyed city to show the terrifyingly real threat of a terrorist attack through weapons of mass destruction, thus legitimizing

18 Michelle Dent, “Staging Disaster: Reporting Live (Sort of) from Seattle,” *The Drama Review*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Winter 2004): pp. 109–34, at pp. 128–30.

19 Ibid., p. 109.

20 Ibid., p. 114.

21 Ibid., p. 123.

the Bush administration’s expansion of the government’s reach, but they were also supposed to show the government as a trustworthy partner in regulating the ruins of society after the act. Dent rightly asks who in this staging of reality through spectacular theater is actually the audience: “the virtual citizens of Seattle? The government officials in-play? The real-time media? The would-be terrorists?”<sup>22</sup> The answer, located in this spectacular theater of expanded state realism, seems to be *all at the same time*, but they are not only spectators, but actors as well – they are “spect-actors” as the progressive Brazilian theorist and theater maker Augusto Boal termed it.<sup>23</sup> In the process of collectively enacting and witnessing one’s own destruction the new reality of the War or Terror are established. We witness in TOPOFF 2 a spectacle so extreme and detailed, and so inclusive of all segments of society, that it literally transforms an existing reality into a new one through a totalizing spectacular theater – through *art*. In this performative spectacle of War on Terror Propaganda Art’s expanded state realism, all of society labors in a perpetual performance.

To summarize, in the case of spectacular theater in the style of expanded state realism, we observe how War on Terror Propaganda consists of a performative spectacle, in which citizens and officials collectively enact the fantasy of their own imminent destruction and possibility of survival. Citizens literally act themselves, but in a new reality whose outcomes benefits the public–private infrastructures of the expanded state. We define performance in this context as the physical theatrical enactment of scripts with the aim to construct reality after the interests of the expanded state.

#### EXPANDED STATE REALISM: GAMES

A second spectacular form of War on Terror Propaganda Art discussed by Masco are games. While these also call upon the performative involvement of their players, they concern much smaller groups than spectacular theater. Whereas a game can of course be played by many different people at the same time – even in the millions in the case of

22 Ibid., p. 126.

23 The concept of “spect-actor” is theorized by Boal as part of his famous concept of the *Theater of the Oppressed* (1974). The central idea is that participants stage their own external and internalized conditions of oppression, acting out their oppression, while being spectators to it at the same time. As Boal writes: “The members of the audience must become the Character: possess him, take his place – not obey him, but guide him, show him the path they think right. In this way the Spectator becoming Spect-Actor is democratically opposed to the other members of the audience, free to invade the scene and appropriate the power of the actor.” Boal thus proposes his methodology as a transgressive theater practice, which in the context of War on Terror Propaganda is radically perverted. Here spect-actors are supposed to enact a disaster and witness its impact to transpose their agency to that of the expanded state, rather than to claim this agency themselves. See: Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. xxi.



multiplayer online video game platforms – the experience of the game is a more individual one. We will look at so-called scenario exercises and tabletop games – expansions of the board game – but also at the rise of the virtual game and video game industry.

Masco claims that the increased scale and professionalization of spectacular theater and spectacular games have their origins in the Cold War. He discusses games as elaborate theatrical means for preparing for nuclear disaster, and how they were developed by the RAND Corporation, an American nonprofit global policy think tank founded in 1948 to provide research to the United States Army.<sup>24</sup> RAND Corporation pioneered political war games, which Cold War historian Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi describes as “role-playing crisis games and man-machine simulations,”<sup>25</sup> aimed at the “cadres of the military, defense industry, universities and opinion makers.”<sup>26</sup> The role-playing crisis games were staged in seminar rooms. One such scenario from the late forties enacted the consequences of Stalin’s looming death.<sup>27</sup> The man-machine simulations consisted of far more elaborate simulations, staged in the early fifties in exact replicas of the Tacoma air defense radar station.<sup>28</sup> The essence of these various scenarios was always rooted in potential geopolitical shifts in the Cold War that could lead to nuclear disaster. According to Masco, RAND Corporation games were focused on “tested outcomes and modeled tactics in an effort to give leaders more options in a time of nuclear crisis.”<sup>29</sup>

The character of these games in the context of the War on Terror changed due to the acceleration of threat production. The Soviets were no longer the only more or less contained enemy, now Them – the terrorist or the microbe, or a terrifying combination of the two – had become the basis of ever-multiplying forms of possible danger and destruction. In that light, Masco discusses the *Atlantic Storm* game, which was staged by the Center for Biosecurity at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center in 2005 as a ministerial table-top exercise.<sup>30</sup> *Atlantic Storm* took as its starting point “a terrorist use of smallpox on multiple

24 R. Kent Weaver notes that “[t]he Rand Corporation [...] is essentially a contract researcher for the Department of Defense, although it does some research for other government agencies and for foundations.” R. Kent Weaver, “The Changing World of Think Tanks,” *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Sep. 1989): pp. 563–78, at p. 566. Currently, the RAND Corporation presents itself as “widely respected for operating independent of political and commercial pressures. [...] RAND’s research is commissioned by a global clientele that includes government agencies, foundations, and private-sector firms.” <http://www.rand.org/about/history.html>.

25 Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi, “Simulating the Unthinkable: Gaming Future War in the 1950s and 1960s,” *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Apr. 2000): pp. 163–223, at p. 169.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 173.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

29 Masco, *Theater of Operations*, p. 175.

30 Center for Biosecurity at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, “Atlantic Storm” information page, [http://www.upmchealthsecurity.org/our-work/events/2005\\_atlantic\\_storm/flash/index.html](http://www.upmchealthsecurity.org/our-work/events/2005_atlantic_storm/flash/index.html).

nations during a summit meeting in Washington D.C.”<sup>31</sup> Current or former senior government leaders played the role of heads of state assembled at the summit when the terrorist attack is first reported, with former United States secretary Madeleine Albright playing the President of the United States, and former Foreign Minister of Canada Barbara McDougall playing the Prime Minister of Canada.<sup>32</sup> Gathered around a large oval mock-summit table, an LCD screen is placed in front of the leaders, displaying a newsflash of the fictional global news channel *GNN*. A news anchor going by the name of Peter Elliott announces the first victims of the attack in Europe, and historicizes the smallpox disease as having caused three hundred million deaths in the twentieth century, noting that “[t]hat is more than twice the number of military and civilians killed in all the wars of the past century.”<sup>33</sup> The message of the game scenario, manifested in summit props and mock news is clear: the combination of disease and terrorism poses a threat greater than all the wars of the past century combined. After having played the high-tension game of unfolding disaster in real time from 9:00 to 16:00, Sir Nigel Broomfield, a former English ambassador who played the role of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, concluded that “[i]n the world that’s coming up [...] we will need such organizations [as the World Health Organization] which have pre-allocated powers and responsibilities”.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the staged threat of bioterrorism in the *Atlantic Storm* game successfully embedded the World Health Organization in a new, real frontline of the War on Terror.

The difference, Masco notes, between the war games in the Cold War and the War on Terror, is that the *Atlantic Storm* scenario had no possible good outcome. There was no scenario in *Atlantic Storm* in which the unfolding global disaster could in any way be contained, and as such it was “designed to demonstrate the contemporary limits of federal governance and to create a productive panic among security professionals charged with preempting collective dangers.”<sup>35</sup> This “productive panic” is a result of the experiences of the Bush Administration in the direct aftermath of the attacks on September 11, which we discussed above. Rather than aiming at rational governance or diplomacy, the *Atlantic Storm* game cultivates a scenario in which only the most drastic responses are imaginable: radical securitization,

31 Masco, *Theater of Operations*, p. 173.

32 Bradley T. Smith et al., “Navigating the Storm: Report and Recommendations from the Atlantic Storm Exercise,” *Biosecurity and Bioterrorism: Biodefense Strategy, Practice, and Science*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2005), pp. 256–76, at p. 258, [http://www.upmchealthsecurity.org/our-work/events/2005\\_atlantic\\_storm/pdf/Atlantic%20Storm%20After-Action.pdf](http://www.upmchealthsecurity.org/our-work/events/2005_atlantic_storm/pdf/Atlantic%20Storm%20After-Action.pdf).

33 See the video reconstruction of the “Atlantic Storm” exercise, including the full *GNN* item, on the *UPMC Center for Biosecurity* website, [http://www.upmchealthsecurity.org/our-work/events/2005\\_atlantic\\_storm/flash/flash.htm](http://www.upmchealthsecurity.org/our-work/events/2005_atlantic_storm/flash/flash.htm).

34 Smith et al., “Navigating the Storm,” p. 263.

35 Masco, *Theater of Operations*, p. 175.

a disregard of any previously existing law, militarization of public health infrastructures, 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. Destruction is imminent and absolute, and that means that a proper response is one of immediate defense, which by definition must bypass the morals and rules of the old world. And because destruction is imminent, Butler's resurrected sovereignty must be also made imminent, to make survival – not governance – possible.

We find the civil equivalent of *Atlantic Storm* in the enormous contemporary industry of videogames, in which the United States military itself has become stakeholder, particularly in a domain that Roger Stahl calls “militainment.”<sup>36</sup> A 2016 budget request by the United States Department of Defense asks for fifty-five million dollars in the domain or war gaming, including that of videogames, stating:

Recognizing the immense value that war gaming has historically had in strengthening our force in times of strategic, operational, and technological transition – such as during the interwar years between World War I and World War II, when air, land, and naval war gamers developed innovative approaches in areas like tank warfare and carrier aviation – this budget makes significant new investments to reinvigorate and expand war gaming efforts across the Defense Department.<sup>37</sup>

One of the most telling products of this policy is *America's Army* (2002), a free multi-player shooter game conceived by Colonel Casey Wardynski, and developed as a recruiting and training platform for the army, followed by several sequels, up until its latest iteration *America's Army: Proving Grounds* (2013).<sup>38</sup> Tapping into the approximately three hundred and fifty million gamers that existed by the time of the release of its third chapter.<sup>39</sup> The game requires players to log in through the army's recruitment website and places them in wartime scenarios based on actual – although sanitized – experience of soldiers in war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq, reconstructed into fictional regions such as the country of Czervenia.<sup>40</sup> Different from games developed by the Hez-

36 P.W. Singer, “MEET THE SIMS ... and Shoot Them,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 178 (Mar./Apr. 2010): pp. 91–95, at p. 92.

37 Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, “Submitted Statement – House Appropriations Committee-Defense (FY 2017 Budget Request),” Washington, DC, Feb. 25, 2016, <http://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/672855/submitted-statement-house-appropriations-committee-defense-fy-2017-budget-reqeue>.

38 *America's Army*, <https://www.americasarmy.com/>.

39 P.W. Singer, “MEET THE SIMS ... and Shoot Them,” p. 92.

40 The creation of these types of in-existent countries in *America's Army*, which nonetheless sounds particularly real and invoke actual conflicts past and present, goes hand in hand with a similarly

bollah 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 non-descriptive black uniforms resulting in “faceless enemy avatars” upon which the player can project any possible future enemy of the US.<sup>41</sup> The success of *America's Army* has been enormous: “By the summer of 2013, over thirteen million people had played the game, accumulating around 260 million hours of combined gameplay.”<sup>42</sup> A study from 2008 showed that “30 percent of all Americans age 16 to 24 had a more positive impression of the Army because of the game and, even more amazingly, the game had more impact on recruits than all other forms of Army advertising combined.”<sup>43</sup>

Exploited commercially through the Microsoft *X-Box* game system and other game consoles and mobile carriers, *America's Army* became internationally successful in promoting its “honor system”: different from popular games such as *Grand Theft Auto*, which award criminal behavior, players in *America's Army* get more points through cooperation with their team, and an indefinite online ban is imposed when killing another player through “friendly fire” – essentially transposing an instant military tribunal into the digital sphere.<sup>44</sup> The game is emblematic for the militarization of the game industry, turning the massive constituency of gamers into potential army recruits, while projecting a positive image of the United States Army honor system abroad. And, vice versa, the military industrial complex learned from the game industry as well. Unmanned flying vehicles such as drones are often operated through game-like consoles, and digital training spans much further than *America's Army* alone; the army developed games to train not only drone pilots and soldiers, but also to practice the removal of mines, train the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse, and to provide therapeutic support of veterans with post-traumatic stress syndrome.<sup>45</sup> What is presented by the United States Army as free entertainment is actually a site of concrete propaganda labor of its users, which provide recruits and familiarizes masses of civilians, both in the

abstract and recognizable enemy. Robertson Allen notes that, in order for the army not to come across as prejudice or racist, it was crucial to design an abstract enemy figure, without too many specific ethnical, physical, or external features: “The unreal enemy is an enemy with minimal cultural, linguistic, or ethnic indicators and therefore one which is simultaneously anonymous yet potentially anyone. Everywhere and nowhere at once, the unreal enemy is a tabula rasa on which any enemy can be extrapolated.” See: Robertson Allen, “The Unreal Enemy of America's Army,” *Games and Culture*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2011): pp. 38–60, at p. 52.

41 Marcus Schulzke, “America's Army,” in Pat Harrigan and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum (eds.), *Zones of Control: Perspectives on War Gaming* (Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2016), p. 307.

42 Ibid, p. 303.

43 Singer, “MEET THE SIMS ... and Shoot Them,” p. 93.

44 Ibid. Another form of punishment described by Schulzke is that “[p]layers who attack civilians or teammates are penalized and repeat offenders can be sent to a virtual prison cell in Leavenworth.” See: Schulzke, “America's Army,” in *Zones of Control*, p. 304.

45 Singer, “MEET THE SIMS ... and Shoot Them,” pp. 94–95.

United States and abroad, with the honor system of the military.

The fact that the United States Army is an actual stakeholder in the video game industry allows it to deal with its more prominent competitors, such as the *Call of Duty* franchise published by Activision Blizzard. When *Call of Duty* game developer Dave Anthony left the company, he was contacted by former Pentagon official Steve Grundman, who was impressed by the depiction of a “second Cold War conflict in 2025” set in *Call of Duty: Black Ops 2* (2012), which was based on a scenario in which “the conflict is defined not by mutually assured destruction via nuclear missiles, but rather by system-crashing cyber-attacks, capable of toppling the Stock Exchange or turning a fleet of drones against their own country.”<sup>46</sup> Consequently, Anthony was offered an unpaid fellowship at the neoconservative Washington think tank Atlantic Council. The game designer describes his task as “to advise outside-the-box thinking on the nature of future threats, and propose proactive solutions to mitigate against them.”<sup>47</sup> This professional switch from imagining future warfare for the game industry to imagining future warfare for the United States Army is not surprising. Anthony had already gained direct help from military advisers in developing *Call of Duty: Black Ops 2*, praising them for “[t]heir wisdom and experience” which “added a great deal of authenticity to the games.”<sup>48</sup> Explaining his mission as an artist working for Atlantic Council, he explains:

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. [...] It’s timely as the threats we face today don’t play by established rules. Our enemies are starting to use our own technologies and systems faster and more efficiently than we are.<sup>49</sup>

The switch from game developer to government advisor is potentially as small as the one between a gamer and a soldier. The relation 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 what is known as the “Sandbox,” a physical reconstruction of an Iraqi province in the Mojave Desert in California. Here, the spectacular video game switches to a spectacular theater, with an elaborate set consisting of townspeople “portrayed by Arabic-speaking Iraqi expatriates from Detroit, San Diego, and other

46 Simon Parkin, “Call of Duty: Gaming’s Role in the military-Entertainment Complex,” *The Guardian*, Oct. 22, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/oct/22/call-of-duty-gaming-role-military-entertainment-complex>.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

cities with established Middle Eastern American populations” who provide the setting for soldiers to exercise in “guerilla combat, convoy ambushes, IED (improvised explosive device) encounters, and televised beheadings.”<sup>50</sup> From there, the step to an actual battlefield has become imperceptibly small.

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. This proves that the War on Terror constructs a new reality, rather than that it repeats an existing one.

To summarize, in the case of *spectacular games* in the style of expanded state realism, we observe how War on Terror Propaganda consists of a performative spectacle, in which citizens and policy makers reenact themselves in simulations staging imminent destruction. Citizens act themselves, but in the form of virtual identities in a new reality whose outcomes benefit the public-private infrastructures of the expanded state. We define performance in this context as the virtual enactment of scripts with the aim to construct reality after the interests of the expanded state.

#### EXPANDED STATE REALISM: TELEVISION AND CINEMA

A third form of War on Terror Propaganda, also discussed by Masco, is cinema, in particular the spectacular Hollywood disaster blockbuster, to which we will add some case studies of televised spectacles. Just like the spectacular theater and game, the spectacular cinema of War on Terror Propaganda is grounded in the heritage of Cold War cinema, which spectacularized nuclear disaster, embracing both the destruction of society and the strengthening of the nation in films such as *Duck and Cover* (dir. Anthony Rizzo, 1951) and the TV production *The Day After* (dir. Nicholas Meyer, 1983). The spectators of such televised spectacles were, paradoxically, also its actors, as they “watched from homes and apartments that were the explicit models for the test city, and saw mannequin families posed in casual everyday moments (at the kitchen table, on the couch, in bed – or watching TV) experience the atomic blast.”<sup>51</sup>

Spectacular cinema in the War on Terror is not limited to a nuclear threat or all-out attack of the Soviets, but instead conceives of highly

50 Scott Magelssen, “Rehearsing the ‘Warrior Ethos’: ‘Theatre Immersion’ and the Simulation of Theatres of War,” *The Drama Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring, 2009): pp. 47–72, at p. 48.

51 Masco, *Theater of Operations*, p. 57.

realistic digital renderings of an endless series of “fearsome life-ending asteroids, alien invasions, earthquakes, floods, and wars” that continue to allow “Americans to rehearse the destruction of their nation-state much as their parents and grandparents did in the 1950s and 1980s.”<sup>52</sup> The theatrical element of the rehearsal here lies in either the mass collective witnessing of one’s own destruction in the cinema, or within the family unit at home. 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.

Masco invokes pre-September 11 disaster cinema such as *Armageddon* (dr. Michael Bay, 1998) and *Deep Impact* (dir. Mimi Leder, 1998), in which gigantic asteroids threaten all life on earth. In both scenarios, nuclear weapons prove to be the only means to protect the earth, thus replacing the Soviet threat with a natural one that can only be overcome by the benevolent use of American nuclear force. Both scenarios also made sure that some smaller asteroids manage to hit the earth, in the case of *Deep Impact* resulting in gigantic tidal waves that destroy the whole of New York City. In these instances, digital technology allows for a heightened visual realism to showcase the detailed destruction and death resulting from the natural disaster. In such spectacular films, disaster helps society to overcome dysfunctional families and broken communities, while simultaneously forcing them into dependency on the state. Family conflicts or race divisions seemingly become futile when the whole planet is faced with destruction, and only the expanded state has the means to sustain survival. At the same time, scientists, doctors, and average citizens turn into heroes and instant recruits of the 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 state, through a state of emergency.<sup>53</sup>

This continuous imaginative rehearsal of destruction of Western civilization from the Cold War to our present day has provided absurdly

52 Ibid., p. 69.

53 With regard to the changing politics displayed in disaster films from the Cold War to the present, Despina Kakoudaki observes a shift from negotiable threats to un-negotiable ones: “If negotiation is possible, in the case of a human enemy, a purposeful aggressor or a sentient and reasonable alien, for example, then the disaster premise highlights issues of responsibility both for the enemy, for threatening or causing the disaster, and for the human negotiators, for working to avert it. This is the primary modality of nuclear threat films of the 1950s and 1960s, in which the threat of destruction is translated into narratives of political choice, ethical obligation, and public and private responsibility. If, on the other hand, the agent of the disaster appears to be non-sentient, a non-sentient alien, a zombie, an insect or a natural force such as a comet, earthquake or volcano, then the focus shifts to questions of response: since there is no way to negotiate with the agent of the disaster or to avoid the destruction altogether, all we can do in these stories is launch a merely reactive counter-attack.” Despina Kakoudaki, “Representing Politics in Disaster Films,” *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, Vol. 7, No.3 (2011): pp. 349–56, at p. 351.

detailed images of catastrophes. Indeed Masco observes that “[i]f the September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington felt strangely familiar to many U.S. citizens, it was because American society has been imaginatively rehearsing the destruction of these cities for more than three generations.”<sup>54</sup> Film director Roland Emmerich, creator of another pre-September 11 film, *Independence Day* (1996) – in which the Twin Towers are destroyed by aliens – questioned his own complicity when stating that “I had this feeling that there is some terrorist watching my movie in some cave and saying he should do it like the aliens.”<sup>55</sup> But the disasters that have been rehearsed through theaters, games, and cinema before September 11 are far greater and far more detailed in their gruesome impact than the actual disasters of real life. Although the attacks of September 11 were documented through live television, compared to the cinematic splendor of disaster cinema the actual murder of thousands seemed rather modest. That did not stop disaster cinema from becoming even more spectacular after September 11. Think of the planet-wide high-resolution destruction of films such as Emmerich’s *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *2012* (2009), Michael Bay’s *Transformers* franchise (2007–2017), or Zack Snyder’s Superman film *Man of Steel* (2013) and subsequent *Batman Versus Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016). By contrast, pre-September 11 disaster cinema – which seemed extreme compared to the actual terrorist attack in New York and Washington – has now been turned into the new normal. 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 displayed in spectacular disaster cinema, the indiscriminate employment of nuclear weapons by the expanded state and the selection of the fittest that have 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 and witness through spectacular cinema turns the actual disaster enacted in our name in the present into the negligible incidents of the new normal.

In his book *War, Politics and Superheroes* (2011), English and film scholar Marc DiPaolo discusses how “fictional heroes” in the realm of disaster films and superhero movies have “the potential to influence decisions made by real people in the real world.”<sup>56</sup> A prominent

54 Masco, *Theater of Operations*, p. 73.

55 McSweeney, *The ‘War on Terror’ and American Film*, p. 7. It seems relevant to note both Emmerich’s overestimation that everyone – including Al-Qa’ida militants – would want to watch his films, while simultaneously underestimating these militants in his presumption that terrorists live in caves. Goss’s reference to the Orientalist framing – the terrorist as caveman – seems highly accurate in this regard.

56 Marc DiPaolo, *War, Politics and Superheroes* (North-Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2011), p. 200.

example in this case is the by now notorious figure of Counter Terrorism Unit agent Jack Bauer, played by Kiefer Sutherland in the eight seasons of the Fox TV series *24* (2001–2010) – the same Fox network that is part of Rupert Murdoch’s media empire that supported the invasion in Iraq. By the end of this post-September 11 TV series, agent Bauer has “prevented the nuclear destruction of Los Angeles, halted the release of the deadly Cordilla virus, and stalled a neoconservative conspiracy to push the U.S. into a war with a country under false pretenses.”<sup>57</sup> While it might seem that Bauer’s effort to stop a conservative conspiracy for foreign invasion was *24*’s critique of the Bush administration’s invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the excess of state violence displayed in the series rather serves to display Bush’s war as a modest and rational – even democratic – endeavor. The most important indication of this is that Bauer, to prevent the endless sequence of threats to the United States, relies on a great variety of torture techniques to acquire the necessary information to locate a given terrorist suspect.<sup>58</sup> More often than not, via caricatures of terrorists, depicted as Muslims and/or peoples of color.<sup>59</sup>

The excesses of Rumfeld’s state-sanctioned torture in *24* in fact led the U.S. military to ask *24*’s producers to tone down their depictions in order not to inflict damage on the country’s image abroad.<sup>60</sup> This request allowed the U.S. military to project itself as rather modest, compared to the exaggerated depiction in *24*. The torture employed in the War on Terror suddenly came across as measured compared to Bauer’s extremist disregard of any law, foreign or domestic. Fiction blended with reality when a Canadian judge at a 2007 law conference in Ottawa voiced criticism at the figure of Bauer and the kind of legal disregard he embodies, when none other than the late Supreme Court

57 Ibid., p. 196.

58 Mike Dillon notes that “Bauer’s ability to withstand torture becomes one of the program’s key methods of distinguishing ‘America’ from enemy entities that always prove less resistant to physical pain. This, I argue, helps to establish categorical distinctions between good and evil, moral superiority and inferiority, that mirror neoconservative discourses around the moral stakes of torture. Jack Bauer’s body is an integral object for understanding the life-affirming and life-denying valuations that underwrite *24*.” See: Mike Dillon, “Bauer Power: *24* and the Making of an American,” *Reconstruction*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2011), <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/114/Dillon.shtml>.

59 Parvin Sultana, “Essentialising the Other: Representing Muslims in media post 9/11,” *The Indian Journal of Media Studies*, Vol. 7, Nos. 1–2 (2013): pp. 63–71.

60 A *New Yorker* article describes how US Army Brigadier General Patrick Finnegan, dean of the United States Military Academy at West Point, flew to Southern California to meet with the team of *24* to “voice their concern that the show’s central political premise—that the letter of American law must be sacrificed for the country’s security—was having a toxic effect. In their view, the show promoted unethical and illegal behavior and had adversely affected the training and performance of real American soldiers.” See: Jane Mayer, “Whatever It Takes: The Politics of the Man behind ‘24,’” *The New Yorker*, Feb. 19, 2007, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/02/19/whatever-it-takes>. Finnegan’s meeting with Hollywood producers has been documented by human rights advocate David Danzig in his article “Countering the Jack Bauer Effect: An Examination of How to Limit the Influence of TV’s Most Popular, and Most Brutal Hero,” in *Screening Torture: Media Representations of State Terror and Political Domination*, pp. 21–33 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Justice Antonin Scalia came to Bauer’s rescue, saying:

Jack Bauer saved Los Angeles [...]. He saved hundreds of thousands of lives [...]. Are you going to convict Jack Bauer? Say that criminal law is against him? [...] Is any jury going to convict Jack Bauer? I don’t think so.<sup>61</sup>

Similar but more subtle TV series would be developed in the wake of *24*, such as *Homeland* (2011–ongoing). In *Homeland*, protagonist Carrie Mathison, a CIA agent with bipolar disorder, uncovers internal plots in her agency. Although the series seems to strike a more critical tone towards the expanded state, the madness of its narrative is that it takes a rogue bipolar agent to uncover 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 former president Barack Obama’s praise.<sup>62</sup> But its core narrative is not a critique of the system through which the War on Terror is waged, but rather that an even more extreme “bipolar” policy is necessary to increase its brutal efficiency.

Bauer and Mathison were not the only figures who formed the bizarre new avant-garde of fictional protagonists promoting excessive forms of legalized state violence. DiPaolo observes a whole variety of superheroes who began to embrace torture and radicalization of the policies of the War on Terror in the post-September 11 era. While the universes of comic book heroes from *DC* to *Marvel* are filled with moralistic insertions of family values and enduring friendship, DiPaolo notes that “very few American superheroes consistently stood firm against the excesses of the Bush administration, passionately opposing torture, the Iraq invasion, the Patriot Act, and even Bush’s disastrous environmental policy.”<sup>63</sup> At the heart of this, DiPaolo notes, lies the fact that a variety of American superheroes were conceived in the period of the fight against the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, as all

61 DiPaolo, *War, Politics and Superheroes*, p. 198. Mike Dillon further describes broad and prominent support for Bauer: “In November, 2006, conservative commentator Laura Ingraham argued on Fox News’ *The O’Reilly Factor* that the popularity of the hit series *24* (also on Fox) was sufficient evidence that the average American approved using torture on terror suspects if it assured victory in the War on Terror. [...] [O]ther prominent conservatives – including former Fox host John Gibson, former CNN and Fox host Glenn Beck – have similarly invoked *24*’s frequent representations of ‘justifiable’ torture as indicative of the need for an aggressive foreign policy that cannot, *must not*, waver in saving American lives. Conservative economist Stephen Moore has insisted that ‘Jack Bauer justice’ is both what the country demands and what policymakers should implement.” See: Dillon, “Bauer Power.”

62 Michael D. Shear, “Obama’s TV Picks: Anything Edgy, With Hints of Reality,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 29, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/30/us/obamas-tv-picks-anything-edgy-with-hints-of-reality.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/30/us/obamas-tv-picks-anything-edgy-with-hints-of-reality.html?_r=0)

63 DiPaolo, *War, Politics and Superheroes*, p. 205.

American super-soldiers that would contribute to the war endeavor. Figures such as Tony Stark, the hero of Marvel's *Iron Man* franchise, conceived his first battle suit to escape from a Communist prison camp in South-Vietnam,<sup>64</sup> and returned in the post-September 11 age to become President Bush's Secretary of Defense in the comic book *Iron Man: The Best Defense* (2004). He was then rebooted in the realm of post-September 11 cinema as a supporter of American forces by successfully pacifying an insurgence in Afghanistan, with no civil casualties – “collateral damage” – as a result.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the figure of Batman returned to shape the post-September 11 consciousness through a series of films directed by Christopher Nolan, *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). The films depict multi-billionaire Bruce Wayne enacting rogue law, dressed up in a bat-shaped high-tech outfit. He fights against the Arab members of the League of Shadows – who writer David S. Goyer stated were modeled after Osama Bin Laden<sup>66</sup> – who threaten to decimate Gotham City with weapons of mass destruction. All the while, Batman applies torture methods far beyond the limits of enhanced interrogation techniques against his nemesis, the anarchist terrorist Joker.<sup>67</sup>

As former journalist David L. Robb argues in his extensively documented *Operation Hollywood* (2004), the interdependency between the expanded state and the production of spectacular disaster and torture television and cinema is not only ideological, but also material in nature. From state-produced war cinema such as the World War II film series *Why We Fight* (dir. Frank Capra, 1942–45) or Vietnam cinema such as *The Green Berets* (dir. Ray Kellogg, John Wayne, and Mervyn LeRoy, 1968), there is a long history in which Hollywood supported and promoted the war effort. The national post-Vietnam trauma and the critical films emerging from it formed a brief period of exception that would be quickly overcome through Tony Scott's *Top Gun* (1986), featuring Tom Cruise as a handsome all-American fighter pilot. Cinemas screening *Top Gun* also installed recruiting booths of the American military resulting to Air Force enlistment to grow five hundred percent.<sup>68</sup> The involvement of the Pentagon in the production of films

64 Ibid., p. 12.

65 Ibid., p. 57.

66 McSweeney, *The 'War on Terror' and American Film*, p. 117.

67 Slavoj Žižek discusses the paradox of the scene in which Batman (rogue law) tortures the Joker (the anarcho-terrorist), arguing that the Joker is actually not wearing a mask, whereas Batman is. The latter tries to use violence upon the former, only to affirm the schizophrenic character of his own being. In this reading, the torture reflects the truth of Batman, not the Joker: “He [the Joker] is not a man without a mask, but, on the contrary, a man fully identified with his mask, a man who is his mask – there is nothing, no ‘ordinary guy,’ beneath it. This is why the Joker has no back-story and lacks any clear motivation: he tells different people different stories about his scars, mocking the idea that some deep-rooted trauma drives him.” See: Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, p. 60.

68 DiPaulo, *War, Politics and Superheroes*, p. 182.

that benefit its aims is carefully orchestrated in order not to disrupt the democratic ideal of film directors' freedom of expression. Instead, as Robb shows, the Film Liaison Unit at the Pentagon, with offices in the Pentagon and Los Angeles, can be contacted voluntarily by film directors that are in need of military arsenal. Their scripts are subsequently reviewed based on the terms and conditions laid out in *A Producer's Guide to U.S. Army Cooperation with the Entertainment Industry*:

Millions of dollars can be shaved off a film's budget if the military agrees to lend its equipment and assistance. And all a producer has to do to get that assistance is submit five copies of the script to the Pentagon for approval; make whatever script changes the Pentagon suggests; film the script exactly as approved by the Pentagon; and prescreen the finished product for Pentagon officials before it's shown to the public.<sup>69</sup>

Essentially, the Film Liaison Unit “lends” its materials but only when the military is represented in a way they consider accurate. As Phil Strub, entertainment liaison at the Department of Defense since 1989, states: “We're after military portrayal and they're after our equipment.”<sup>70</sup> Critical Vietnam War films, such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) were denied support. In Strub's words, these films were unrealistic, for “every time soldiers and marines went out into the field, they murdered officers, massacred civilians, they took drugs,” leading to what he claims to be a “quite inaccurate portrayal.”<sup>71</sup>

The Pentagon is not the only government organization engaged in such revisionist processes as Tricia Jenkins points out in *The CIA in Hollywood: How the Agency Shapes the Movies* (2012), in which she highlights the work of the CIA's entertainment liaison. As the CIA does not have the same material means available to “sponsor” script changes, the agency focuses instead on getting involved in the early stages of script writing, and in return for “accurate portrayal” offers access to its campus and officers – otherwise considered as classified.<sup>72</sup> An

69 David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), p. 25.

70 Chapter 4, noot 70 moet zijn: Al Jazeera Empire reportage “Hollywood and the War Machine,” Aug. 9, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/empire/2010/12/2010121681345363793.html>. Phil Strub's filmography on the IMDb database brims with spectacular cinema favoring the US military, such as *Deep Impact*, *Day After Tomorrow*, *Transformers*, *Iron Man*, and *Man of Steel*. See Phil Strub's complete filmography on IMDb: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0835243/>.

71 Robb, *Operation Hollywood*, p. 25.

72 Tricia Jenkins, *The CIA in Hollywood: How the Agency Shapes Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), p. 134.

important example of its impact is Mike Nichols *Charlie Wilson's War* (2007), which tells the story of the CIA operation that engaged the Afghan mujahedin in fighting the Soviets. Crucial script interventions of the CIA's entertainment liaison had scenes that effectively linked the support to the mujahedin to the September 11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror removed.<sup>73</sup> 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, and thus shows the power of the CIA as co-director of Hollywood cinema.

It might be telling for the future of spectacular cinema's implication in governmental policy that the campaign of Donald Trump in 2016 offered free screenings to Iowans of Michael Bay's *13 Hours* (2016), a dramatic and action-ridden interpretation of the attacks on two United States military facilities in Benghazi, Libya, that resulted in two American deaths.<sup>74</sup> Republicans and alt-right supporters of Trump had used the event continuously to criticize then Secretary of Foreign Affairs Hillary Clinton for severe negligence in the protection of American troops, which made the timing of the film exceptionally fruitful for Trump.<sup>75</sup> Heavily influenced by his former campaign manager and White House chief strategist Steve Bannon, who is himself a former producer and filmmaker of apocalyptic documentaries such as *Generation Zero* (2010) and *Occupy Unmasked* (2012), the future of government-subsidized spectacular cinema under Trump is unsure.<sup>76</sup> But as the president has quickly let go of his isolationist "America First" doctrine through military interventions in Syria and Afghanistan and sparking conflict with North-Korea, the continuous construction of reality through expanded state realism in the face of an ever-multiplying Them will inevitably prove detrimental as he inherits and accelerates the War on Terror on his own terms. Bannon's films, developed in what he terms as his own brand of "kinetic" cinema inspired by the work of

73 Matthew Alford's research mentions the film's downplaying of the CIA's support for Afghan militants due to its focus on "moderate" rebels, which was absent in the original script. He also mentions the CIA's request to remove the final scene in which Wilson hears the explosion of Al-Qa'ida's attack on the Twin Towers, clearly emphasizing the historical link between US involvement in the Soviet–Afghan War and the beginning of the War on Terror. See: Matthew Alford, *Reel Power: Hollywood Cinema and American Supremacy* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), pp. 69–73.

74 Eliana Dockterman, "Donald Trump Offers Iowans a Free Screening of Benghazi Movie 13 Hours," *TIME*, Jan. 15, 2016, <http://time.com/4182281/donald-trump-benghazi-13-hours-movie-iowa-screening/>.

75 Different from Bay's earlier films, *13 Hours* was made without support from either the Pentagon or the CIA due to its depiction of a rather unfavorable event for the military. As such, the choice of its screening is characteristic of Trump's clash with several government agencies, especially the secret agencies.

76 Ann Hornaday, "We Can Learn a lot about Steve Bannon by Watching the Films He Made," *Independent*, Jan. 6, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/steve-bannon-films-hollywood-executive-producer-nsc-donald-trump-us-president-a7565501.html>.

Sergei Eisenstein, Leni Riefenstahl, and Michael Moore, possibly can shed some light upon the Trumpist Propaganda Art to come.<sup>77</sup>

Bannon's most recent film, *Torchbearer* (2016), is shot as a documentary that introduces a revisionist history presented by the extremely religious conservative republican Phil Robertson, who gained notoriety as a participant in the reality show *Duck Dynasty* and through a series of aggressively homophobic and anti-abortion statements, made among others during a heavily mediatized keynote lecture at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in 2015. *Torchbearer's* core narrative is American political and religious exceptionalism, presenting the United States as the first country not founded on the desire for conquest, but by the desire of prosecuted Christians of Europe to create a nation of religious worship *and* democratic human rights. Bannon claims that the Christian-democratic nation has suffered increasing corruption in the past decades by secular progressives, lower-class people of color terrorizing inner cities, and Islamic fundamentalist sleeper cells, and he argues that a great clash of civilizations is about to emerge. Accompanied by a threatening film score, a collage is presented to us of torture and executions perpetrated by the Islamic State and other fundamentalist groups, suggesting an ultimate confrontation between what the film frames as democratic American Christians and Islamic terrorism. In Robertson's words: "[A]nother worldview gains ground, one rooted in dominance and submission: a death cult. [...] Violence, decadence, political anarchy: welcome to the city of man."

Although it's hard to believe that Trump is in any way the example of the devout Christian-democratic leader that would head Bannon's crusade, support for Trump among Christian-conservatives and evangelicals has been exceptionally high. Bannon's mission to narrate an inevitable clash of civilizations and introduce Trump as the Christian-democratic warrior to fight it has proven successful, despite the fact that he no longer occupies a position in the White House. Bannon's own cinematography seems to fully correspond with the conditions of spectacular cinema and television as we have discussed so far. It displays an image of imminent destruction by Islamic fundamentalists to forge a Christian-democratic nation under the growing authoritarianism of Trump. Bannon's artistic construction of reality is the one we see emerging in politics under the name of Trumpism today.

77 With this kinetic style Bannon aims to "almost overwhelm an audience" by to sheer density of material and content. See: Ted Johnson, "Docmakers Get Right to the Point," *Variety*, Jun. 18, 2011, <http://variety.com/2011/film/news/docmakers-get-right-to-the-point-1118038731/>. Bannon discusses his influences in an interview from the same year, in which he explains: "I'm a student of Michael Moore's films, of Eisenstein, Riefenstahl. Leave the politics aside, you have to learn from those past masters on how they were trying to communicate their ideas." See: Anthony Kaufman, "Sarah Palin, Movie Star?," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jul. 13, 2011, <https://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2011/07/13/the-undefeated-sarah-palin-movie-star/>.

Spectacular cinema has actually turned into reality, or we might even witness a moment in which reality has reached beyond the imagination of spectacular cinema.

To summarize: In the case of *spectacular cinema and television* in the style of expanded state realism, we observe how War on Terror Propaganda consists of a performative spectacle, in which citizens witness themselves being destroyed as family units (at home) or as a collective (in the cinema) while simultaneously rebuilding their nation in a reality that benefits the public–private infrastructures of the expanded state. We define performance in this context as the collective act of witnessing (watching) on the one hand, and in the enactment that is witnessed (actors simulating viewers) on the other, with the aim to construct reality after the interests of the expanded state.

We have discussed three domains of the dominant style of expanded state realism in War on Terror Propaganda Art: *theater, games, and television and cinema*. We have seen how each of these media are formed by an intricate web of military-industrial and cultural institutions, but also how they interact with one another. In the process, we have observed that the style of War on Terror Propaganda Art in the form of expanded state realism aims at creating a new reality, and that it does so by converting cultural industries into military ones, artists into policy makers, gamers into soldiers, and vice versa. Its theatrical, game, and cinematic spectacles might seem innocent at first due to their staged nature, but in actuality they form the foundation for the construction of reality. We thus conclude that the style of expanded state realism in War on Propaganda Art does not merely create art, it develops new forms of propaganda art and propaganda art institutions to establish a new reality that indefinitely separates itself from the previous one.

#### EXPANDED STATE REALISM: EXTENDED PERFORMANCE

So far, we limited our exploration of the performance of power in War on Terror Propaganda Art mainly to citizens considered to be part of Us. What we will now discuss is how the creation of Us through theater, games, and cinema, is also employed against the bodies of Them: the non-human, the terrorist. So far we discussed the micro-performative dimension of propaganda mainly in relation to the way that citizens in predominantly Western societies come to embody and enact its dominant narratives and value systems, but in the case of extended performance we will focus on the process in which the creation of reality through expanded state realism result in concrete violence imposed upon Them. And what other histories of art, apart from those

developed during the Cold War, can inform us about the consequences of War on Propaganda Art in the form of what we will now discuss as extended performance?

These questions go beyond the scope of our sketch of an art history in the War on Terror, but they are central to art historian Stephen F. Eisenman's 2007 book *The Abu Ghraib Effect*. Eisenman begins his analysis of the role of art in constructing the new reality of the War on Terror, with a series of photographs leaked from the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, displaying the torture of women and men at the hands of US Army and CIA personnel, made by the torturers themselves. In the photos from Abu Ghraib we not only see the hooded prisoners placed in stress positions, covered in excrement, or forcefully composed in suggestive, erotic postures, but also the soldiers themselves, most infamously the soldier couple Charles Graner and Lynndie England, forcing the prisoners in degrading sexualized positions.

While the news of the Abu Ghraib torture was discussed widely, Eisenman observes how little this discussion actually altered the perception of the legitimacy of the War on Terror. During the 2004 Presidential campaign, the issue was hardly discussed, and did not prevent Bush from being re-elected: "While a Gallup Poll conducted immediately after the release of the Abu Ghraib photographs indicated that 54 per cent of Americans were 'bothered a great deal' by the revelations, a year later the number had declined to just 40 per cent."<sup>78</sup> Eisenman explains this lack of consternation as the result of "the long Western history of the representation of torture that has helped inscribe an oppressive ideology of master and slave on our bodies and brains, enabling (especially at times of fear) a moral forgetfulness or even paralysis to set in." He call this phenomenon the "Abu Ghraib Effect."<sup>79</sup> This means that Eisenman does not perceive the photographs of Abu Ghraib as an exceptional feature of an exceptional war, but as images standing in a long tradition.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Stephen S. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>80</sup> Eisenman is far from the only thinker who engaged the domain of art to contextualize these images, although he specifically affirms his belief that the photos themselves are not art. Other prominent voices were Slavoj Žižek, who references the work of avant-garde artists and cinematographers when explaining that "recording the humiliation with a camera, with the perpetrators included in the picture, their faces stupidly smiling beside the twisted naked bodies of the prisoners, was an integral part of the process, in stark contrast with the secrecy of the Saddam tortures. The very positions and costumes of the prisoners suggest a theatrical staging, a kind of tableau vivant, which brings to mind American performance art, 'theatre of cruelty,' the photos of Mapplethorpe or the unnerving scenes in David Lynch's films." Slavoj Žižek, "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib," *In These Times*, May 21, 2004, <http://inthesetimes.com/article/747/>. Through her extensive historical work on the photographic image, Susan Sontag wrote about the "artistic" nature of the production and dissemination of the images – referencing Andy Warhol and Piero Paolo Pasolini, among others: "Where once photographing war was the province of photojournalists, now the soldiers themselves are all photographers – recording their war, their fun, their observations of what they find picturesque, their atrocities – and swapping images among themselves and e-mailing them around the globe."



Eisenman's reference to "times of fear" is crucial to understand the conditions for the existence of these images. The staging of fear that legitimates relentless revenge and punishment on the bodies framed as Them has been the driving force behind resurrected sovereignty, emerging as a legitimate form of rogue law in the process of rehearsing our own destruction in the form of spectacular mass theater, games, and cinema. Eisenman considers this to be an inherent part of art history, with its own aesthetic imperative:

The expressive suffering revealed in the greatest monuments of Hellenistic art marks the onset of an expressive, propagandistic tradition that would survive more than 2,000 years. Indeed, the Hellenistic aestheticizing, eroticizing and rationalizing of pain and suffering – the insistence upon the value and necessity of *basanos* [torture] – constitutes the beginning of an artistic pathos formula.<sup>81</sup>

Eisenman recognizes this manifestation of a "pathos formula" – the depiction of passionate suffering – throughout art history "from Athens, Pergamon, Renaissance, Florence and Baroque Rome," in which victims "were taking pleasure, or at least accepting the rationality of their own annihilation."<sup>82</sup> Possibly most telling in relation to the images of Abu Ghraib is Eisenman's analysis of Raphael's fresco *Battle of Ostia* (1514–17), a depiction inspired by the 849 naval battle between the Christian League of Papal, Neapolitan, and Gaetan ships on one side, and the Saracens (Muslims) on the other. Subjected Saracen captives are depicted kneeling, surrendering to Pope Leo IV who gazes to the heavens for Godly sanction of his subjection of the Muslim people. Eisenman considers this image to be the art-historical foundation of the Abu Ghraib photographs. In Raphael's fresco "[t]he origin of the Modern Western antagonism toward Islam is [...] illustrated here by the Vatican, in a fresco commemorating 700 years of crusades, and in the image of a conquered and abject race."<sup>83</sup> Important here is the fact that this subjugation of a "conquered and abject race" is not merely an act deriving from a brute quest for power, but from a divinely sanctioned civilizational mission. In that sense, they are a historical equivalent to the crusades of the Bush administration aiming to bring

Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2004, [http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/regarding-the-torture-of-others.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/regarding-the-torture-of-others.html?_r=0). Film maker Errol Morris controversially challenged the question at what level the images from Abu Ghraib could operate as evidence at all, due to the very nature of photography, writing that: "What we see is not independent of our beliefs. Photographs provide evidence, but no shortcut to reality. Photographic evidence – like all evidence – needs to be seen in context. It needs to be evaluated. If seeing itself is belief-laden, then there is no seeing independent of believing, and the 'truism' has to be reversed. Believing is seeing and not the other way around." Errol Morris, "Will the Real Hooded Man Please Stand Up," *The New York Times*, Aug. 15, 2007, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/08/15/will-the-real-hooded-man-please-stand-up/>.

81 Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, p. 3.

82 Ibid., p. 79.

83 Ibid., p. 66.

democracy to Afghanistan and Iraq. Once the false gods Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein would be destroyed, the savage bodies they held in their power could become civilized. In this logic, violence, subjection, and torture become part of an arsenal representing divinely sanctioned liberation. Violence and subjection, in Raphael's aesthetic vocabulary, are essentially transformed into an act of mercy toward the "abject race." This is how the pathos formula operated in the century leading up to the *congregation de propaganda fide* that we discussed in the first chapter, and this is how it reappears through the resurrected sovereignty of the Bush administration in the 21st century.

In the context of Abu Ghraib, the process of inscribing an oppressive ideology of master and slave into our bodies and brains, and subsequently into the bodies and brains of the subjected Them, results in what Eisenman describes as an "intimate theater of cruelty."<sup>84</sup> This is not the conception of cruelty in transgressive theater described by playwright, actor, and poet Antonin Artaud in his *First Manifesto for a Theatre of Cruelty* (1931). For Artaud, the notion of cruelty did not entail the promotion of an act of violence against another person, but rather articulated an existential condition that, in all its meaninglessness and desperation, should be embraced and expressed collectively through the cathartic space that is the theater.<sup>85</sup> Abu Ghraib's cruelty is Artaud in reverse, by enacting unacknowledged, orientaling violence upon another through a pathos formula that eroticizes suffering.

The photos of naked prisoners, sometimes covered with women's underwear, sometimes with the heads of one prisoner forcefully placed in direct contact with the genitals of another, sometimes in piles of suggestive orgies, depict the "supposed, perverse desires of Islamic detainees" from the perspective of the torturers.<sup>86</sup> The message is that while these Muslim bodies claim to strive for religious purity and fundamentalist devotion, their actual sexuality is not different from – or even more perverse than – Western subjects seeking pleasure in pornography and liberated sexual exchanges.<sup>87</sup> The master narrative is thus

84 Ibid., p. 101.

85 In Artaud's words: "The theater will never find itself again – i.e., constitute a means of true illusion – except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior." Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 92.

86 Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, p. 101.

87 It is also in this light that we should see the media obsession with the "discovery" of Osama bin Laden's collection of pornography, presented as some form of evidence that the actual frustrated desires of Islamist militants would be the same as those of citizens in the "liberal" West. See: Spencer Ackerman, "Osama bin Laden's Pornography Stash to Remain under Wraps, US Decides," *The Guardian*, May 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/20/osama-bin-laden-porn-stash-remain-under-wraps-us-intelligence-decides>. A similar case concerns current UK Foreign Minister Boris Johnson, who implied that pornography found in the possession of Islamic State militants would explain their violence as an expression of the suppression of sexual frustration, different from the liberal West that would already have overcome such "backward" repression. See: Frances Perraudin and Shiv Malik, "Boris Johnson:

that the acts depicted in the Abu Ghraib photographs are not torture, but a process of “emancipating” the prisoners into embracing their actual desires through the benevolence of the crusaders. Simultaneously, these desires are also criminalized, for homosexual in nature: the sexual desire of the Muslim captive body is thus not to enjoy the same sexuality as the crusader, but a supposedly oppressed kind of sexuality, which continues to be problematic in various ways within the US military itself.<sup>88</sup>

But not only the supposedly oppressed desire of the prisoner is at play here. There are also the “actual, un-repressed desires of the US prison guards who freely wield guns, fists, handcuffs, dogs and leashes” at their prisoners.<sup>89</sup> The supposed bestiality of their prisoners grants the guards the right – in the light of Raphael’s *Battle of Ostia*, even the *divine task* – to shame them, and thus to affirm their own “feeling of national and racial superiority”<sup>90</sup> and 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.”<sup>91</sup> At best, the prisoners of Abu Ghraib – following Ould Slahi’s writings – can gain redemption as slaves in their master’s house, for no torture method in the world could ever elevate them to the level of actual equality with the torturer. We thus see how the new reality of expanded state realism in the West are enacted by Us as cruel and divine mercy upon the bodies of those declared non-human in the war prisons of Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib.

Different from the theatrical spectacles discussed earlier, the intimate theater of cruelty staged by the guards in Abu Ghraib was never meant to become public. But once it did, its underlying logic was not challenged, but normalized. Popular Fox talk-show host Rush Limbaugh didn’t consider torture at Abu Ghraib to be any different from “a Skull and Bones initiation.”<sup>92</sup> This proves that the intimate theater of cruelty thus can be easily incorporated in the performative spectacle characteristic of expanded state realism. Enacted at home first, the new reality of expanded state realism is subsequently inscribed upon the bodies of others, and the images resulting from this extended per-

Jihadis are Porn-Watching ‘Wankers,’ *The Guardian*, Jan. 30, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/jan/30/boris-johnson-jihadis-are-porn-watching-wankers>.

88 Katie Miller and Andrew Clay, “The Battles that Remain: Military Service and LGBT Equality,” *Center for American Progress*, Sep. 20, 2013, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/LGBTmilitary-11.pdf>.

89 Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect*, p. 101.

90 Ibid., p. 98.

91 Ibid., p. 99.

92 A radio interview even quoted him saying “I’m talking about people having a good time! [...] We have these pictures of homoeroticism that look like standard good-old American pornography.” Ibid., p. 98.

formance finally return to become part of the spectacle at home.

The transformation of the public spectacle of expanded state realism into the intimate theater of cruelty and back again is discussed in the book-project *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators* (2008) by performance artist Coco Fusco. Fusco expands the analysis of Eisenman by showing how expanded performance does not only destroy the bodies of Them, but strategically includes the destruction of emancipatory feminist and LGBTQI+ heritage at the same time by effectively introducing this heritage as part of torture and war techniques.

Similar to Eisenman, Fusco recognizes in Abu Ghraib a “theater of cruelty,”<sup>93</sup> which manifests itself in the form of an “intercultural theater imposed upon an unwilling audience of one.”<sup>94</sup> Carefully avoiding the idea that using the notion of theater could be interpreted as a way of softening the reality of torture, Fusco emphasizes that “torture is painfully real,” but that this indisputable reality does not change the fact that “theater and performance are crucial to make it work.”<sup>95</sup> An important part of Fusco’s analysis of the mechanisms of the intimate theater of cruelty, is the use of female bodies in the process of torturing prisoners. When a woman enacts torture, the act becomes framed through motherhood and care, while it could even simultaneously be codified as a sexual act. It replaces the brutal image of the male torturer by “young and naïve white women,” constituting a new sexualized category of women in the form of “torture chicks.”<sup>96</sup> Torture perpetrated by a woman can by definition not be torture, it is suggested, because the nature of women is incapable of torture as such.<sup>97</sup> Rather, a prisoner should be delighted with free stripteases and BDSM-type subjection. Women become military leaders, soldiers, and torturers – suggesting the realization of feminist demands by showing them as equals to men in the war effort – but the way in which the stereotypes of their gender are employed shows that this formal equality is structured on the inequalities of the past.<sup>98</sup>

93 Coco Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), p. 51.

94 Ibid., p. 68.

95 Ibid. On the relation between torture, art, and performance, see further: Wafaa Bilal, *Shoot an Iraqi* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2008); Sandra Johnson, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt: An Investigation of Doubt, Risk and Testimony Through Performance Art Processes in Relation to Systems of Legal Justice* (Zurich/Münster: Lit, 2014).

96 Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, p. 20.

97 With regard to the use of women torturers at Abu Ghraib, Zillah Eisenstein notes: “These women should be held responsible and accountable; but they also are gender decoys. As decoys they create confusion by participating in the very sexual humiliation that their gender is usually victim to. This gender swapping and switching leaves masculinist/racialized gender in place. Just the sex has changed; the uniform remains the same. Male or female can be a masculinized commander, or imperial collaborator while white women look like masculinist empire builders and brown men look like women and homos.” Zillah Eisenstein, “Sexual Humiliation, Gender Confusion and the Horrors at Abu Ghraib,” *Znet*, Jun. 22, 2004, <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/sexual-humiliation-gender-confusion-and-the-horrors-at-abu-ghraib-by-zillah-eisenstein/>.

98 Lindsey German, for example, notes that while first ladies Laura Bush and Cherie Blair actively campaigned for the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as a form of women’s liberation

Enlisting herself and her students in a so-called Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) training, Fusco attempts not just to analyze the employment of women as instruments of war and torture in the War on Terror, but also to learn to embody and enact the scripts in which they are implicated.<sup>99</sup> During a 2007 symposium in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) entitled “The Feminist Future,” Fusco appeared in full army uniform, acting as a United States Army representative addressing the importance of women in the War on Terror. Claiming she has for months been informing the civil population on the issue, Fusco introduces the importance of women and their “use of sexual innuendo as a crucial weapon in the fight against global terrorism.”<sup>100</sup> Bypassing any use of covert language, Fusco continues:

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.<sup>101</sup>

In the course of her speech, Fusco does not merely over-identify the role of a United State army representative. She slowly but surely begins to name the ties between the military world and the world of arts. “Many of us in the military feel kinship with those of you in the arts,” she continues, “[m]ilitary intelligence involves the careful study of culture, and like you, we seek to understand people’s beliefs and learn how to shape them.”<sup>102</sup> Comparing the role of the interrogator to that of the performance artist, Fusco turns to the infrastructural composition of both the military and art institution, observing that “[b]oth institutions are guardians of this country’s sacred freedoms,”<sup>103</sup> and both “maintain amicable and productive relations with multinational corporations, and our operations run best when unsavory details re-

from patriarchal Islamist rule, equal rights at home were not granted: “[T]he US has failed to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to its constitution and [...] this particular president has repeatedly supported attacks on abortion rights and choice, as well as cutting off funding to international family planning organizations that were involved in abortion advice or counselling, the high-minded aims of liberating Afghan women by bombing them has also failed in its own terms.” Lindsey German, “Women and the War on Terror,” *Feminist Review*, No. 88: War (2008): pp. 140–49, at p. 143.

99 Fusco’s book includes a series of pictures illustrating sixteen torture techniques actively used in Abu Ghraib and later in Guantánamo Bay, such as “Dietary Manipulation,” “Use of Loud Music,” and “Sleep Management.” But Fusco’s book project also includes specific torture techniques that are scripted specifically for women, such as “Mild Non-Injurious Physical Contact,” illustrated by a female interrogator touching the face of a prisoner with what is supposedly her underwear; “Stress Position,” which – rather than imposing durational stress on the muscles of a prisoner – is depicted here as sexualized contact with a woman’s body, moving in an eroticized striptease-like manner upon the prisoner; and “Fear Up Harsh,” in which a woman interrogator smears the face of a prisoner with fake menstrual blood, retrieved from her vaginal area. The use of the female torturer here is supposed to impact the prisoner in an amplified way, following the presumption that Muslims have a cultural phobia for liberal sexuality and the very idea of a woman-master, while simultaneously secretly desiring her at the same time.

100 Fusco, *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators*, p. 97.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., p. 98.

103 Ibid., p. 97.

main far from the public view.”<sup>104</sup> Ending with six proposals to actively continue the instrumentalization of feminist history as a weapon of cultural warfare, Fusco lays bare the intimate theater of cruelty: not as a site of violent excess, but as a site where macro-politics is performed on a micro-political scale. The use of female torturers is part of a recuperation of the emancipatory gestures of the feminist and LGBTQI+ movements, transformed into symbols of Western civilization and exceptionalism, and thus into effective weapons in a new crusade that is essentially antithetical to everything these movements stood for.

Through the work of Eisenman and Fusco we see how the aesthetic category of a pathos formula that eroticizes suffering is enacted through extended performance in the intimate theater of cruelty, based on dehumanizing depictions of Them created through spectacular theater, games, and cinema of expanded state realism. We further note that this category of Them is preliminarily focused on the body of the so-called terrorist, but can further instrumentally include other dissident and critical emancipatory heritage such as that of feminist and LGBTQI+ movements. Engaging them as torturers or as torture instruments not only tortures the body of a prisoner that represents Them, but also tortures a culture of emancipation.

Expanded state realism thus creates performative spectacles in the domains of theater, games, and cinema to establish a new reality. We observe how War on Terror Propaganda consists of an extended performance in which this reality is transposed onto bodies of those whom we do not define as citizens. The image of imminent destruction and survival is now enacted in real time, in the form of war and torture, establishing an imagined reality as a material one that benefits the public–private infrastructures of the expanded state. We define performance here as a part of the final act through which an imagined reality is constructed into a material one, in the form of intimate theaters of cruelty in the interest of the expanded state.

To finish our inquiry of War on Terror Propaganda Art, let us now turn to the second dominant style of expanded state abstraction, and see in what way it connects to and supports what we have so far discussed as expanded state realism.

#### EXPANDED STATE ABSTRACTION: VOIDS AND VISUAL ART

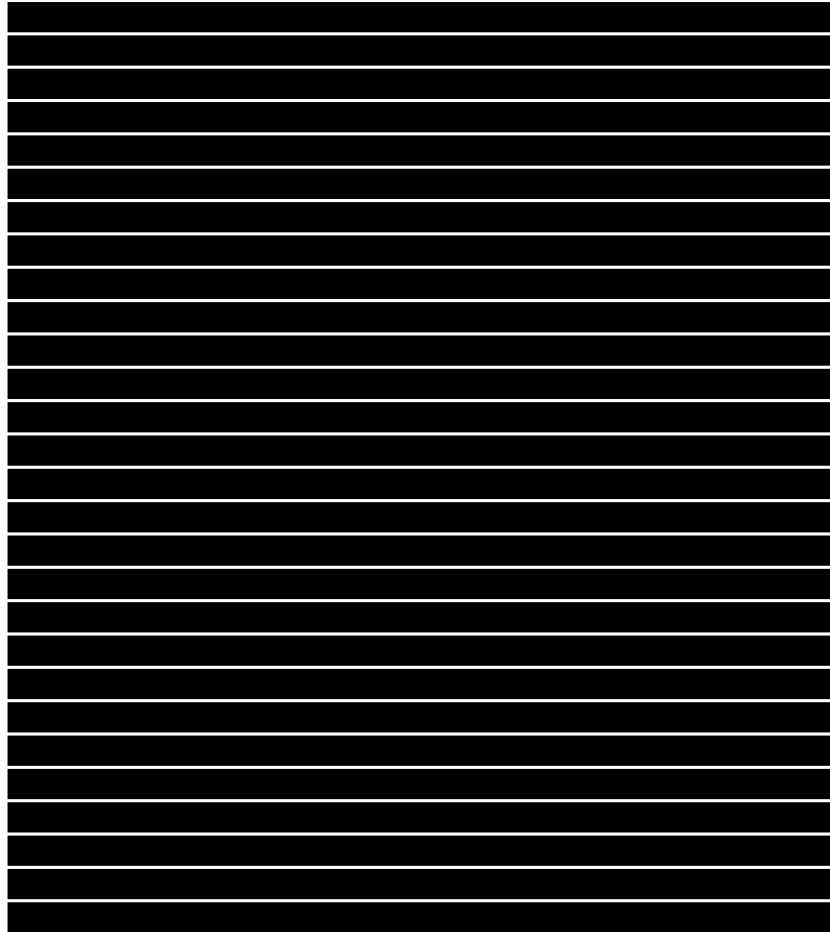
As we mentioned above, expanded state realism is but one of two interrelated styles; the other is what we propose as expanded state abs-

104 Ibid., p. 99.

traction. It is an abstraction that takes the form of the black censorship rectangles on Mohamedou Ould Slahi's *Guantánamo Diary*. By blocking our understanding of the world an abstraction emerges, which is then substituted by the images of imminent societal destruction and an ever-threatening Them through the style of expanded state realism. In this section, we will discuss case studies of this aesthetics of expanded abstraction, to understand how its style relates to expanded state realism and even makes it possible.

In Mohamedou Ould Slahi's *Guantánamo Diary*, there is a passage in which the author contrasts the subtlety of Arab music and poetry to what he perceives as the violence and rudeness of American culture. To prove his point, Ould Slahi adds a poem of his own, which did not pass the censorship regime of Guantánamo Bay. It reads as follows:

One of my poems went



—by Salahi, GTMO<sup>105</sup>

While we could consider Ould Slahi's Stateless Propaganda as a form of contemporary social realist literature, it is here confronted with the subtractive art of expanded state abstraction. Two very different forms of contemporary propaganda work against one another on the same pages. The erasure of Ould Slahi's poem shows us the iconoclastic production of an abstract image that represents the sheer power of the expanded state.<sup>106</sup> This practice of expanded state abstraction knows many forms. It manifests itself in government documents that appear fully censored, containing nothing more than black rectangles on a white sheet of paper. It manifests itself in the disappearance of entire public archives that leave us behind with the blank spots of absent histories. It manifests itself in the erasure of actual humans, which, declared non-human, can be assassinated through drone warfare or destroyed by torture. What fuels the emergence of this expanded state abstraction is the notion of secrecy cultivated in an unprecedented manner and scale by the expanded state in the War on Terror, described by Masco as the "theatrical performance of secrecy as a means to power."<sup>107</sup>

One of the most prominent researchers of the culture of secrecy and

<sup>105</sup> Ould Slahi, *Guantánamo Diary*, pp. 359–61.

<sup>106</sup> This notion of iconoclasm as not only the destruction of an image, but also its simultaneous creation, thus interrogating the very question of what constitutes an image as such, is theorized and problematized by Sven Lütticken, who clarifies that what appears as image sometimes forms its mere abstraction. This is the case with the symbol of the Twin Towers, which Lütticken describes as a "double abstract effigy," an abstraction of capital in the form of hyper-modernist architecture "as much beyond representation as a monotheistic deity." Thus, the "iconoclastic" event of September 11 was not a creation of a void, but an event that made an existing void (the abstraction of capitalism) visible. See: Lütticken, *Idols of the Market*, pp. 125–26. See also Lütticken's exhibition *Art of Iconoclasm*, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht/Centraal Museum Utrecht, Nov. 30, 2008–Mar. 1, 2009.

<sup>107</sup> Masco, *The Theater of Operations*, p. 124.

its practice of expanded state abstraction is artist and geographer Trevor Paglen. It is in his double role that Paglen has attempted to map what “military and intelligence insiders call the ‘black world.’”<sup>108</sup> Mapping in this case means both making the infrastructures of the expanded state – in Paglen’s words, the “secret state”<sup>109</sup> – as well as the visual output generated by these very same structures visible. The former relate to how the expanded state operates outside of public view in the form of secret sites, classified aircraft and corporate offices, whereas the second relates to how the expanded state wants to be known – how it wants its *secrets to be visible* – to the public in the form of expanded state abstraction. The difference between the infrastructure and the visual output is that the first is a secret that is to remain secret, whereas the second is a secret that is supposed to be publicly known as secret.<sup>110</sup>

Geography, Paglen explains, finds its origins “in Renaissance exploration and the imperial mapmakers of royal courts,” while contemporary geography “accommodates a wide range of research methods and topics all united by the axiom that everything happens somewhere, that all human and natural phenomena have [...] a geography.”<sup>111</sup> The complexity of mapping the expanded state in the War on Terror is that its infrastructures are by definition conceived as a “secret geography,” one that is not merely hidden by the state, but “designed to exist outside the law.”<sup>112</sup> Paglen writes in this regard:

The black world has sculpted the United States in numerous ways. Creating secret geographies has meant erasing parts of the Constitution, creating blank spots in the law, institutionalizing dishonesty in the halls of government, handing sovereign powers – what used to be the unlimited powers of monarchs over their subjects and territories – to the executive branch, making the nation’s economy dependent upon military spending, and turning our own history into a state secret.<sup>113</sup>

So how does one fill in the blank spots on the map of a secret geography that is aimed at turning our own histories into a state secret? Weary of his work being implicated in the domain of conspiracy theory,

108 Trevor Paglen, *Blank Spots on the Map: The Dark Geography of the Pentagon’s Secret World* (London: New American Library, 2010), p. 4.

109 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

110 This is not exactly the same as what Lütticken describes as “the public sphere as a structural conspiracy,” with which he refers to the “silence and selectiveness in the mass media” and the “aversion to investigating the neoconservatives’ plan to wage war in Iraq, which existed even before 9/11.” In that sense, the notion of the public sphere a structural conspiracy comes closer to what Chomsky and Herman describe as the effect of the anti-communist filter in the propaganda model, which indeed structurally “conspires” against questioning the conditions of normative reality. See: Sven Lütticken, *Secret Publicity* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2005), pp. 194–95.

111 Paglen, *Blank Spots on the Map*, p. 8.

112 *Ibid.*, p. 140.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 275.

Paglen’s approach is to keep “[i]nsisting on the black world’s materiality,”<sup>114</sup> which translates into a vast body of field work building concrete evidence of the secret geography’s existence, of the people it impacts and the sites it creates. For even a site designated as a nowhere, Paglen argues, “must exist somewhere.”<sup>115</sup> For a large part, Paglen’s research relies on the work of activists and amateur investigators who have in one way or another been confronted with the expanded state. One example is native American activist Carrie Dann, whose native claim to the land Newe Sogobia failed because its history was classified as it was turned into a military test site. Another example is amateur astronomer Ted Molczan, who came across spy satellites, and began to map their behaviors. Finally, there are the families of engineer Robert Palya and sheet metal worker Walter Kaszka, both of whom died due to government negligence during their work in classified government operations, and whose cause of death became a secret. In other words, Paglen allies himself with people who have observed, lived, or even became part of the abstractions produced by the expanded state: bodies, sites, even skies turning into voids – into abstractions.

Paglen essentially juxtaposes this material evidence with the blank spots in military budgets. His main focus here is on what is known as the “black budgets,” the covert funding structures that are meant to keep the infrastructures of the expanded state afloat.<sup>116</sup> Taking the public 2007–2009 Air Force budget of research, development, testing, and evaluation programs as a starting point, Paglen maps items with either cryptic indications such as “COBRA BALL” or “FOREST GREEN,” or items with non-descript indications such as “Special Activities” or simply “Classified Programs,” of which allocated budgets are not mentioned. But taking the whole of the expenditure indicated in the document, the blind spots of the total budget translate into a concrete sum:

By adding up all of the individual items in the various parts of the defense budget and comparing that number to the published total, one can derive a basic sketch of the black budget’s scale. For the fiscal year 2009 RDT&E budget, for example, the sum of all the line items is about \$64,091,301,000. The published total is \$79,615,941,000. The difference between the two numbers is the total cost of unacknowledged programs: about \$15,524,640,000.

114 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 253.

116 See also Marieke de Goede’s detailed study of on terrorist and counter-terrorist finance in the War on Terror: Marieke de Goede, *Speculative Security: The Politics of Pursuing Terrorist Monies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

This number is the black budget's cornerstone, but is only a part of the overall black budget.<sup>117</sup>

This secret geography funded by the black budget and operated by four million people with security clearances, Paglen argues, represents an industry of public-private character that is essentially larger than the civil servants operating in the "white" world: "The black world, then, is much more than an archipelago of secret bases," for "[i]t is a secret *basis* underlying much of the American economy."<sup>118</sup> But what is invisible in this budget can be made visible by constructing, step by step, a parallel budget that shows what is designated as non-existent is actually materially existent. This in turn provides leads for further fieldwork.

In his book project *I Could Tell You But Then You Would Have to Be Destroyed By Me* (2008), Paglen further showcases the aesthetics of expanded state abstraction. The project is essentially a catalogue of badges produced by the Pentagon to be worn by operatives involved in classified missions which display a wide array of symbols, such as magicians, dragons, eagles, aliens, swords, geometrical patterns, skulls, panthers, satellites, planets, and aircraft, accompanied by short titles such as "A LIFETIME OF SILENCE BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR," or "ALONE AND UNAFRAID." Paglen considers these badges to be a "language" with its own "grammar," whose "number of stars on an image might represent a unit number or an operating location; the symbols on a patch could be clues to the purpose of a hidden program or a cover story designed to divert attention away from the program."<sup>119</sup> Even a classified program and its members must be recognizable in some way, at least among themselves. The badges thus serve both an internal and an external function. Internally, they provide the badge holder with a mystical symbolism of a secret society, which counters what Paglen calls the "hopeless banality" of the concrete, everyday functioning of the infrastructures of the expanded state.<sup>120</sup> Externally, they communicate an image of mystical and impenetrable power that aims at keeping the likes of Paglen and his alliance of amateur geographers and activists at a distance. These badges show us how the expanded state wishes to understand its own power internally and externally

117 Paglen, *Blank Spots on the Map*, p. 181.

118 *Ibid.*, p. 277.

119 Trevor Paglen, *I Could Tell You But Then You Would Have to Be Destroyed by Me* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2010), p. 7.

120 Paglen, *Blank Spots on the Map*, p. 275. Inevitably this provokes a reference to Hannah Arendt's notion of the "banality of evil" from her reports of the Eichmann process in Jerusalem, in which she described the unbearable contradiction between the theatrical staging of Eichmann as an embodiment of Nazi evil, and the rather dull and bureaucratic – banal – presence and logic of Eichmann himself.

through codified visual symbols. These are symbols that, in the hands of Paglen, become recognized as a *form of art* and can be analyzed as such, just as we have come to understand how other cultural elements of War on Terror Propaganda, from games to television, can be understood as part of an expanded definition of art in the context of contemporary propaganda.

The badges collected by Paglen suggest that the aesthetic theory of expanded state abstraction essentially aims at visualizing what is engineered to be invisible. It represents a paradoxical visible invisibility.<sup>121</sup> But the visible invisibility of expanded state abstraction in the work of Paglen is more than an object of research, for it simultaneously structures his own aesthetic output in the form of artworks. Sometimes Paglen's artworks consist of collected materials – found footage such as the badges – but in other cases, Paglen displays images that he has taken to document the infrastructures of the expanded state. A project such as *The Other Night Sky*, takes the research of amateur astronomers as its starting point. A work such as *STSS-1 and Two Unidentified Spacecraft over Carson City (Space Tracking and Surveillance System; USA 205)* from 2010 consists of seemingly abstract photographic prints showcasing neat red whirlpools of light. Another work, *PAN (Unknown; USA-207)* from 2010–11, displays a diagonal set of bright rays set against a sky of shaded blues. Through their titles these artworks indicate the presumed presence of a classified aircraft or satellite, but the images essentially contains no information at all – not more than the badges of classified operations that Paglen collects. Something similar is at stake in *Limit Telephotography*, in which Paglen shows images resulting from his attempt to photograph classified military bases and installations, varying from a blurred image of what seems to be a rectangular building (*Open Hangar, Cactus Flats, NV, Distance ~ 18 miles, 10:04 a.m., 2007*) to an image of a horizontal string of faraway lights at night (*Detachment 3, Air Force Flight Test Center #2, Groom Lake, NV, Distance ~26 Miles, 2008*).<sup>122</sup>

Despite Paglen's crucial deconstruction of the impenetrable and mystical projection of expanded state abstraction, these artworks seem

121 Somewhat equivalent to the notion of visible invisibility is Lütticken's conception of "opaque transparency," which he describes as the conscious staging of the secret by a given regime: "What if those who kidnap and torture today depend on public exposure and visibility as part and parcel of what they do? In other words, what if these things can go on today because they are too clearly visible, broad-cast live, entirely predictable – in fact, they have been announced outright in advance?" See: Sven Lütticken, "Secrets of the See-Through Factory," *Open*, No. 22 (2011): pp. 100–24, at p. 104.

122 Thomas Keenan accurately observes that in Paglen's visual work we are not so much confronted with singular evidence, but rather with what he terms "evidence of evidence." Paglen makes "an effort simply to establish the possibility that some of these things might exist in the public realm." Thomas Keenan, "Disappearances: On the Photographs of Trevor Paglen," in Meg McLagan and Yates McKee, *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of Nongovernmental Activism* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), p. 47.

to re-instate exactly this mysticism, a sublimation of the language of secrecy in expanded state abstraction. There seems to be a pleasure at play here, of Paglen himself having become somehow part of the secret geography he claims to map, his own work fetishizing the language of expanded state abstraction that he simultaneously aims to decode. Few stakeholders in the secret geography of the expanded state would object to these abstract photographs, which actually further amplify the cult of secrecy and encryption to which Paglen even adds *elegance* by means of his language of high-conceptual aesthetics. Expanded state abstraction even manages to reproduce itself through the artist that claims to critically research its aesthetics. This makes Paglen paradoxically both a critical researcher of War on Terror Propaganda, and a War on Terror Propaganda artist at the same time.

What the expanded state wants us to know needs to remain unknown. In that sense, former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's notion of the "known unknowns" as the aesthetic paradigm of War on Terror Propaganda, holds for both expanded state abstraction and expanded state realism. In the case of expanded state realism, the known unknown takes the form of an endless variety of threat projections and imaginaries, in the case of the expanded state abstraction it takes the form of blank spots and cryptic badges.

To summarize, in the case of the second dominant style of War on Terror Propaganda Art, expanded state abstraction, we observe the creation of voids, classifications, and symbols that turn our histories, territories, and even bodies, into abstractions. We define the role of performance here as the process through which the expanded state enacts its own symbols of secrecy (the visible invisible) with the aim to construct reality after the interests of the expanded state.

#### WAR ON TERROR PROPAGANDA ART: SUMMARY

Before we continue to discuss the second category of contemporary propaganda art in the form of *Popular Propaganda Art*, let us formulate our observations on the manifold dimensions of War on Terror Propaganda Art in the following conclusions:

- War on Terror Propaganda Art is a contemporary propaganda art developed through the public-private infrastructures of the expanded state that produces images of imminent societal destruction and survival through the Us/Them dichotomy;
- War on Terror Propaganda Art manifests itself in the two interdependent styles of expanded state realism and expanded state abstraction. The latter is directed at erasing public history, te-

ritories, and bodies, so that the former can replace it with the image of imminent destruction and future survival;

- War on Terror Propaganda Art aims at transforming a staged reality into a material one. In its final phase, this takes the shape of extended performance, resulting in the discrediting of emancipatory political-cultural heritage and the torture or destruction of others;
- War on Terror Propaganda Art aims at transforming an imaginary reality into a material one, to strengthen the public-private infrastructures of the expanded state.

## 4.2 POPULAR PROPAGANDA ART

Through Butler's *Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* we already touched upon aspects of popular mass movements that relate directly to the sphere of the artistic, through her use of the concept of "performance." In her work, we come across a range of terms that relate directly to the domain of the artistic, such as "assemblage," the "theatrical" dimension of the assembly, and the "morphology" of its social forms.<sup>123</sup> So, while popular mass movements are not art in and of themselves, there seems to be a role that art plays within these movements.

There are voices that argue the contrary, such as Yates McKee, an activist and historian who wrote a history of art as it emerged during and after the Occupy movement. Yates claims 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."<sup>124</sup> We will examine this claim in some more detail below. For now, we will start from the idea that popular mass movements themselves are not works of art, but that art nevertheless plays a continuous role in the overall manifestation of these movements. On the one hand, because there are aspects of popular mass movements that we can analyze through artistic terminology, as Butler has done, and on the other, because there are artists involved and actively working within these popular mass movements.

Evidently, this observation is not exclusive to the 21st century. Throughout this section, we will refer to historical examples of artists joining precarious constituents in popular mass movements, ranging from the civil rights and black power movements in the United States, antiwar movements, feminist and LGBTQI+ activists, as well as environmental organizations. But we do so with the aim of employing these historical examples to conceptualize Popular Propaganda Art as a *contemporary* practice, and to understand how it operates as a category in relation or in opposition to what we have previously discussed as War on Terror Propaganda Art.

123 Judith Butler, *Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, pp. 68, 85, 87. Whereas the term "morphology" today has significance in different domains such as linguistics, biology, and mathematics, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is considered to have defined the term in relation to the study of plants, rejecting examinations of plant organisms in the tradition of Linnaean taxonomy: "The close proximity of Goethe's perception of art and his study of nature suggests that the choice of the same methods for both fields is based on similar intentions. In several essays, Goethe wrote about his aims as a scientist [...]. His intensive visual examination of natural phenomena, his efforts to objectify empirical observations, to use comparisons, and to establish series of observations, formed the basis for his project of morphology. Goethe defined morphology as 'the science of form (*Gestalt*), formation (*Bildung*) and transformation (*Umbildung*) of organic bodies.' Morphology was based on careful examination of forms and their modifications under different external circumstances, as well as on intuition in order to find archetypes (*Typen, Urphänomene*) and fundamental rules of their (trans)formation." Johannes Grave, "Ideal and History: Johann Wolfgang Goethe's Collection of Prints and Drawings," *Artibus et Historiae* Vol. 27, No. 53 (2006): pp. 175-186, at p. 183.

124 Yates McKee, *Strike Art* (London/New York: Verso, 2016), p. 27.



The notion of the “popular” in Popular Propaganda emerges through the collective demands of widely diverse precarious groups. We have begun to explore these demands through the inverted Chomsky and Herman propaganda model and its five filters of *democratization*, *grass roots mobilization*, *public knowledge*, *transparency*, and *collectivity*. It is through the performance of these collective demands – performance being, as Butler argues, the main “power” of the precariat – that a composition or assemblage emerges, to which we can refer as a “people.” This composition of a people emerges through the performance of the popular and through the precarious infrastructures that propose alternative institutions and models of (self)governance operating as the life-support for what we will discuss as a “people-in-the-making.” Important in Butler’s definition is that the concept of a “people” can only and always be in the making; just like the popular mass movement – through its various demands – is continuously in the making. As such, the process of composing a people through the popular mass movement confronts the conditions of the Us/Them dichotomy central to War on Terror Propaganda Art. What we come to define as “Us” is redefined through a new alliance, a new composition, of precarious people. A people not as a fixed or universalized category but as a transitory one.

Popular Propaganda Art plays a role in both the *performance of the popular* and the *composition of a people*. Our aim will be to understand how the work of artists has been shaped through their engagement with popular mass movements, how they have contributed to their precarious infrastructures, mobilization, and the composition of a people resulting from them. By means of the work of different historians we will begin by articulating a *Popular Art History*, narrating the intersection between popular mass movements and art. We will observe that a reoccurring aim of Popular Propaganda Art is to construct a form of *Popular Realism*, which is not so much a “style” but should rather be understood as an *objective*. We can understand this objective as the construction of reality structured by the demands of popular mass movements.

Subsequently, we will break down the practice of Popular Propaganda Art into three organizational components. The first one is *Assemblism*. This is essentially the practice of performative assembly discussed by Butler, which is characterized by and can partly be analyzed through an artistic vocabulary, but is not meant to be art as such. The second and third organizational models of Popular Propaganda Art are the direct result of artistic practices, namely *Embedded Art* and *Organizational Art*. With Embedded Art, we refer to artists who work directly within existing popular mass movements, political organiza-

tions, parties, and unions. With Organizational Art we refer to artists who establish their own alternative models of “artist organizations” in direct relation to popular mass movements, with the dual aim of exploring the artist organization as an artwork in and of itself, while simultaneously aiming to use this organization-as-artwork to bring about social change.

To understand what Popular Propaganda Art is or could be, we must first engage with the work of those who have tried to narrate alternative histories of art that emphasize the intersection between emerging forms of power and art, so that we can arrive at a more precise understanding of the political conditions that allow us to articulate Popular Propaganda Art as a contemporary practice. It is important here to emphasize that we will sometimes retrospectively apply this term to specific artistic practices within popular mass movements of the past, which themselves might not have used it. We will thus *assemble* the term Popular Propaganda Art through these different case studies to define its contemporary manifestation and practice.

## POPULAR ART HISTORY

Popular Propaganda Art, despite what its name might suggest, is not exactly popular; it is far from common practice within the institution of art at large. As artist and key proponent of the movement of Institutional Critique Andrea Fraser argued in her essay “L’1%, C’est Moi” (2011), the art market thrived throughout the period of the 2007–8 economic crisis rather than collapsed like many other sectors did.<sup>125</sup> The so-called 1%, a term coined during the 2011 international Occupy movement designating the contemporary global class that owns the means of production, forms the dominant segment of shareholders in the infrastructure of contemporary art.<sup>126</sup> This brings Fraser to

125 Institutional Critique manifested itself in the 1960s and ‘70s parallel to the growing revolts against normative historiographies and their institutional embedding, with the aim of interrogating the conditions of production of art itself. Central questions of Institutional Critique were directed at the political, economic, and ideological investments made in the context of the institution that we call “art” – the museum, the contemporary art institution, the gallery, the public or private funder, the collector – and how these conditions impact the artist and the work of art. Artists involved in the “first wave” of Institutional Critique in the 1960s and ‘70s, such as Hans Haacke, developed artworks that were essentially embodiments of Émile Zola’s infamous declaration “*J’accuse...*,” directed at the museum. “Second-wave” Institutional Critique from the ‘80s and ‘90s, such as the work of Fraser, instead began pointing out that the artist is equally an embodiment of the institution of art: “Every time we speak of the ‘institution’ as other than ‘us,’ we disavow our role in the creation and perpetuation of its conditions. We avoid responsibility for, or action against, the everyday complicities, compromises, and censorship – above all, self-censorship – which are driven by our own interests in the field and the benefits we derive from it.” See: Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” *Artforum* Vol. 44, No. 1, (September 2005): pp. 100–106, at p. 105.

126 The term “1%” is the inverse of the original Occupy Wall Street slogan “We Are the 99%,” which referred to the majority of population that is structurally excluded from the power and wealth of the “1%.” Anarchist and anthropologist David Graeber is usually referenced as either inspiration if not inventor of the slogan. See: Stuart Jeffries, “David Graeber Interview:

the conclusion that, while she herself is a relatively precarious cultural worker, the outcomes of her work, if anything, only benefit the “1%,” and thus concludes: “the 1% is me”:

Any claim that we represent a progressive social force while our activities are directly subsidized by the engines of inequality can only contribute to the justification of that inequality – the (not so) new legitimization function of art museums. The only “alternative” today is to recognize our participation in that economy and confront it in a direct and immediate way in all of our institutions, including museums, and galleries, and publications. Despite the radical political rhetoric that abounds in the art world, censorship and self-censorship reign when it comes to confronting its economic conditions, except in marginalized (often self-marginalized) arenas where there is nothing to lose – and little to gain – in speaking truth to power.<sup>127</sup>

While art is often presented as the ultimate civilizational proof of enlightened and supposedly civilized liberal democratic regimes, the access, validation, and circulation of art is to a large extent concentrated in the hands of a well-off elite. Protests of contemporary artists whose work has been collected by the daughter of President Donald Trump, Ivanka Trump, may seem progressive signals of the art world unwilling to legitimize the deeply racist and dangerous Trump regime, but it is important to pose the question how Ivanka Trump acquired these artworks in the first place.<sup>128</sup> Donald Trump’s racism and sexism were well known before his election, and so were his daughter’s ties to his business empire. To discuss the role of art in the context of Popular Propaganda Art also means to acknowledge that even though the vast majority of the infrastructures of contemporary art provides lip service to emancipatory politics, it is at its core organized along the neoliberal doctrine. As Fraser argued, it may even be considered an avant-garde of neoliberalism. The minority of artists that do engage with popular mass movements often do so in a compromised condition, which does not by definition mean that their work cannot be effective or that their

motivations are never genuine, but they are certainly not by definition an “opposite” force to neoliberalism. They work with, within, and through the increasingly global neoliberal condition. This is important to understand that Popular Propaganda Art, certainly in our contemporary condition, operates on a vastly smaller and more precarious scale than most of the art infrastructure. It also means that artists engaged in popular mass movements are continuously forced to work “in between worlds.” They have side jobs or they try to benefit as much as possible from the art market, even though they might oppose the conditions of both, in order to invest these means in their practice of making an alternative social order possible.

Let us begin to explore examples of what we could term “popular art history” through the work of Upton Sinclair in relation to the international socialist uprisings in the 1920s, followed by the work of Lucy Lippard, who discussed art as propaganda from the perspective of the feminist movement in the 1970s and ‘80s, and the work of Alice Guillermo, who understands propaganda art as a form of “revolutionary realism” in the more than a century-long struggle of the Filipino underground resistance movement. We will then continue with additional, contemporary examples of art-historical writings that analyze artistic production parallel to popular mass movements in the work of Claudia Mesh and Claire Bishop. Finally, we will turn to an artistic engagement with a politicized art history through the work of Andrea Fraser, an artist–historian who opens up the possibility of a Popular Art History for the present day.

In the second chapter we already encountered the work of Sinclair and his book *Mammonart*, an attempt to write an alternative art history from the perspective of class struggle. We remember Sinclair’s radical claim that “all art is propaganda,” arguing that “from the dawn of human history, the path to honor and success in the arts has been through the service and glorification of the ruling classes; entertaining them, making them pleasant to themselves, and teaching their subjects and slaves to stand in awe of them.”<sup>129</sup> In essence, Sinclair does not focus on what the artist makes, but what makes the artist: which structures of power define the conditions of their practice. This Marxist approach, a predecessor to Fraser’s argument, first of all attempts to analyze the economic basis of society, to understand how art is constituted as part of the superstructure. Rather than serving the ruling classes, Sinclair claims that the “true purpose of art is to alter reality” – a concept, which, as we have seen in the previous section, is equally true for War

“So Many People Spend Their Working Lives Doing Jobs They Think Are Unnecessary,” *The Guardian*, Mar. 21, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/21/books-interview-david-graeber-the-utopia-of-rules?paging=off>

127 Andrea Fraser, “L’1%, C’est Moi,” *Texte Zur Kunst*, No. 83 (Sep. 2011): pp. 114–27, at p. 124.

128 See: Randy Kennedy, “Artists Lay Their Fears at Ivanka Trump’s Door,” *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/28/arts/design/artists-lay-their-fears-at-ivanka-trumps-door.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/28/arts/design/artists-lay-their-fears-at-ivanka-trumps-door.html?_r=0);

Ben Kentish, “‘Get My Work Off Your Walls’: ‘Embarrassed’ Artists Tell Ivanka Trump to Take Their Work Down,” *Independent*, Dec. 23, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/artists-ivanka-trump-new-york-halt-action-group-donald-trump-paintings-a7491391.html>.

129 Sinclair, *MammonArt*, p. 7.

on Terror Propaganda Art.<sup>130</sup> Sinclair argues that the artist needs to reject the conditions set by the basis of society – the means of production owned by the ruling classes – in order to alter that basis, thus altering reality and changing the production, meaning, and ownership of art as such.

Introducing himself as a writer “that has for twenty-one years been carrying on a propaganda for Socialism,”<sup>131</sup> he discusses the work of French writer Honoré de Balzac and his literary exposés of the mores of high society of the early 19th century, which he describes as the “most perfect type of the predatory artist that has existed in human history; the art for art’s sake ideal incarnate; genius devoid of conscience.”<sup>132</sup> Sinclair counter-poses Balzac’s work against the work of French writer Victor Hugo, who “sought remedies” to social inequality rather than just describing them, and “became a convert to revolutionary ideals,”<sup>133</sup> manifested most famously in his political novel *Les misérables* (1862). Sinclair reserves more nuanced descriptions for the Russian poet Nikolai Gogol, who on the one hand was valued by the czar, but simultaneously attempted to use his position of relative privilege to tell of the “misery of the serfs, and the incompetence and futility of the landlords.”<sup>134</sup> In other words, it is not so easy to make an absolute division between reactionary and revolutionary art and culture, because works of art realized in compromised political conditions may still hold a political potential that manifests itself in less obvious ways, or in a time different from when they were initially created.

As Lütticken argues, “for Sinclair, the entire history of art was pre-historical,”<sup>135</sup> and throughout *MammonArt* he attempts to lay the foundation for a possible socialist history of art to come. In 1924, Sinclair sees a series of revolutions sweeping across Europe and Russia. He witnesses, in other words, the performance of the popular in the emergence of the growing self-consciousness of the proletariat – or in our time, the people-in-the-making we have discussed as the precariat in the previous chapter. And thus, Sinclair ends his exposé not with a historical conclusion, but by calling upon the artists of his world to collaborate on a new future history:

The artists of our time are like men hypnotized, repeating over and

130 Ibid., p. 9.

131 Ibid., p. 11.

132 Ibid., p. 191.

133 Ibid., p. 194.

134 Ibid., p. 262.

135 Sven Lütticken, *Cultural Revolution: Aesthetic Practice After Autonomy* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), p. 128.

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.<sup>136</sup>

Sinclair’s attempt to challenge the ownership of art history and articulate a partisan Popular Art History through the rise of popular mass movements is taken up in the work of the American art critic, activist, and curator Lucy Lippard under the title *To the Third Power: Feminism, Art and Class Consciousness* (1984), and in particular her essay “Some Propaganda for Propaganda.” Greenbergian art theory, Lippard argues, has created a taboo of what she calls “literary art,” which “calls up content more specific and pointed than that promulgated by modernist doctrines.”<sup>137</sup> But the concept of propaganda, she continues, should essentially be understood as nothing but education, which makes it possible that “art itself might escape from the ivory tower, from the clutches of the ruling/corporate class that releases and interprets it to the rest of the world.”<sup>138</sup> Feminists, in Lippard’s reading, should be capable of challenging the taboo of re-inventing art as education, as “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.”<sup>139</sup>

Criticizing the work of Jacques Ellul for the reduction of propaganda to a form of totalitarianism that can only result in enforced homogeneity through collective beliefs, Lippard is convinced that feminists can reinvent propaganda as an artistic practice able to challenge patriarchal, ruling-class historiography. This is what she describes as a “good propaganda” in the form of a “socially and esthetically aware provocation,”<sup>140</sup> whereas a “bad propaganda” is characterized by an “exploitative and oppressive economic control mechanism.”<sup>141</sup> Although the links between Sinclair and Lippard are evident, she breaks with the male bias that is so prominent in his historiography. As part of a feminist propaganda of education Lippard specifically considers “fe-

136 Sinclair, *MammonArt*, p. 386.

137 Lucy Lippard, *To the Third Power: Feminism, Art, and Class Consciousness* (New York: Dutton, 1984), p. 114.

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid., p. 115.

140 Ibid., p. 116.

141 Ibid., pp. 116–17.

minist influence on the art of the seventies” as manifested in what she describes as “the prevalence of art open to dialogue – performance, video, film, music, poetry readings, panels and even *meetings*.”<sup>142</sup> 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 introduced personal and intersocial relationships as part of our larger understanding and construction of reality:

The spoken word is connected with the things most people focus on almost exclusively: the stuff of daily life and the kind of personal relationships everyone longs for in an alienated society. It takes place *between* people, with eye contact, human confusion and pictures (memory). It takes place in dialogues with friends, family, acquaintances, day after day. So one’s intake of spoken propaganda is, in fact, the sum of daily communication.<sup>143</sup>

We can observe a relevant link between Butler’s theory of performative assembly and Lippard’s call for an “intimate propaganda,” which should not, however, be interpreted as a marginal activity. Lippard agrees with Ellul that an ineffective propaganda – a propaganda that does not address the masses – is simply not propaganda. Performativity, and its manifestation in what Lippard calls “meetings,” becomes a key term to relate the domains of the artistic and the political. Lippard nonetheless such practices as part of a feminist propaganda art still in the making, claiming that “[n]o one on the Left would deny the importance of propaganda. Yet it is a rare left-wing feminist who is interested in or even aware of the resources visual artists could bring to the struggle.”<sup>144</sup> This, Lippard argues, is the result of the “current lack of sparks between art and propaganda [...] due to a fundamental polarity that is in the best interests of those who decide things for us.”<sup>145</sup> That fundamental polarity is of course the Greenbergian doctrine: art, in order to be defined as such, stands either beyond power, or is reduced to a second-degree literal art of politicized or even *feminized* propaganda, not considered to be worthy of the grand patriarchal canon. Instead, Lippard counters this doctrine with a feminist, intimate propaganda art, which she posits as the possibility of a “useful art” – a term that will re-occur in some contemporary writings that we will explore below.<sup>146</sup>

An example that connects Sinclair and Lippard is Filipino art his-

142 Ibid., p. 117.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid., p. 123.

145 Ibid.

146 Ibid., p. 121.

torian Alice Guillermo’s *Social Realism in the Philippines* (1987) and her major work *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines* (2001).<sup>147</sup> In Guillermo’s discussion of protest and revolutionary art, two political and cultural movements are crucial when it comes to articulating the relation between aesthetic theory and popular mass movements. The first is that of (social-)realist art, as it developed in parallel to revolutionary movements in Europe; and the second is the role of Maoist cultural theory, as it impacted a variety of liberational and revolutionary movements throughout Asia, such as the one in the Philippines.<sup>148</sup> Through their intersection we can come to an understanding of protest and revolutionary art in the Philippines and the connection between Sinclair and Lippard.

The type of realism at stake is exemplified by Courbet in 19th-century France, who was involved in the uprisings of the Paris Commune and who called himself a “partisan of revolution” and “a realist.”<sup>149</sup> Guillermo thus understands realism and, subsequently, social realism as art that aims to construct an emancipatory consciousness. It does not just depict what is real in the present, but what could become real once we confront the material reality of the present differently.<sup>150</sup> Guillermo intersects realism and social realism with the cultural theory laid out by Mao Zedong in the guerilla zone of Yenan, two years before seizing power, known today as the *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art* (1948). Mao promotes the idea of expanding the artist’s

147 The revolutionary dimension of art discussed by Guillermo specifically relates to what is known as the “National Democratic Movement of the Philippines,” which consists of a variety of underground movements and (semi-)legal political parties and organizations with a strong leftist, Maoist signature that have been active in the country ever since its armed resistance against the Marcos dictatorship. See: Jose Maria Sison and Jonas Staal (eds.), *Towards a People’s Culture* (Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, 2013).

148 The revolutionary strategy of Maoism is to base its constituency on a broad assembly of peasants, workers, but also petty bourgeoisie. It rejects the proletarian factory worker as its main constituency, starting instead from the material reality of so-called Third World Countries where peasants form a majority of the worker population, and industrialization has hardly been realized. Different from the Chinese People’s Republic, the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines also included the mass involvement of activist factions in the Catholic Church. From the 1990s it recognized gay marriage and began to actively ally with the LGBTIQ+ community. See: Coni Ledesma, “The New Revolutionary Proletariat of the Philippines: Building a Just and Democratic Society,” lecture at the *4th New World Summit*, Royal Flemish Theater, Brussels, Sep. 20, 2014,

<https://vimeo.com/120105215>.

149 Alice G. Guillermo, *Social Realism in the Philippines* (Manila: Asphodel, 1987), p. 21. Courbet prominently displayed workers and peasants of the lower classes in his paintings – on formats similar to the ones used for kings and queens – thus introducing parts of society to the public imaginary that had essentially been existentially censored by the ruling aesthetic doctrines. At the same time, Courbet’s own political orientation shows that his realism aimed to make the concrete struggles of lower classes visible. The workers or peasants turn into from a backdrop into the principal subject of art and manifest themselves in a new history, in which they become the historical agents.

150 Guillermo traces these ideals set forth by the French realists through the work of geographically dispersed movements, varying from German expressionists such as George Grosz and Otto Dix to American social realists such as Ben Shahn and the work of the Mexican muralists, such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros – each of whom were highly politicized through the labor struggles, anti-dictatorship resistance, and revolutions of their times, situating their work in direct relation to or even within concrete political struggles. Ibid., pp. 21–43.

competences by having them learn from the struggle of peasants and workers. This results in what he terms a “struggle on two fronts,” form and content:

We should esteem the specialists, for they are very valuable to our cause. But we should tell them that no revolutionary writer or artist can do any meaningful work unless he is closely linked with the masses, gives expression to their thoughts and feelings, and serves them as a loyal spokesman. Only by speaking for the masses can he educate them and only by being their pupil can he be their teacher. If he regards himself as their master, as an aristocrat who lords it over the “lower orders,” then, no matter how talented he may be, he will not be needed by the masses and his work will have no future.<sup>151</sup>

The category that emerges from the overlap of social realism and Maoist cultural theory is what Guillermo terms “revolutionary realism,” an art that aims at popularizing revolutionary ideals through the broad dissemination of art and culture, and whose knowledge in the form of aesthetic praxis derives from the concrete exchange and involvement within the day-to-day struggle of peasants and workers in the Philippines.<sup>152</sup> One could say that the notion of a people *becomes an aesthetic category in and of itself*. It is composed, assembled, and created through a montage of artistic means. This relates to Popular Propaganda Art’s objective to compose a people, and we can term this the process in which art contributes to a people-in-the-making. In Guillermo’s 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.<sup>153</sup>

As a consequence, revolutionary realism developed its own particular traditions of “excellence” in the form of murals, theatrical interventions, and protest puppetry.<sup>154</sup> One example we find in the work of

151 Mao Tse Tung, “Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art,” in Sison and Staal, *Towards a People’s Culture*, p. 57.

152 Luis Jalandoni, “Cultural Imperialism vs People’s Culture,” lecture at the New World Academy, Nov. 15, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/90777555>.

153 Alice G. Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines 1970–1990* (Quezon City: University of Philippines Press, 2001) p. 28.

154 The popularization of revolutionary realism throughout the Philippines has taken the form of “posters, illustrations and comic books,” which, Guillermo emphasizes, should not be considered as “low” art. Each carries “their own standards of excellence and significant art can be created of them.” *Ibid.*, p. 38.

contemporary groups such as the UGATLahi Artist Collective, which develop “effigies” (protest puppetry) used in mass demonstrations against the ruling governments. Figures of ruling Philippine presidents or foreign US aggressors are sculpted in the form of enormous puppets, and are carried by thousands of members belonging to labor unions, progressive political parties, and sometimes clandestine underground movements through the streets of Manila as a counter-act to the yearly State of the Nation Address (SONA) of the president in power. The puppets are used as targets for scorn, while the protesters give speeches addressing injustices in the country: essentially accusing the puppet in the form of a public people’s trial.<sup>155</sup> At the end, the puppets are set on fire, as a theatrical act of justice staged against the aggressor. The enemy is identified through a sculptural and satirical visual language, the public is informed of its crimes through hours of theatrical speeches, and justice is enacted by burning.

The work of the UGATLahi Artist Collective allows us to articulate the practice of Guillermo’s definition of revolutionary realism very clearly. First, the UGATLahi collective produces within *precarious infrastructures* a protest puppet through collaborative practice, representing, through their conditions of labor, an ideal of collectivity they themselves wish to bring about. Second, the protest puppet becomes part of the process of *performing the popular*. It is dragged along and scorned by thousands of people, which, through the symbolism of the puppet, come to identify their *common* oppressor and *demand* an alternative governmentality. Third, the puppet is burned collectively, destroying the artwork but strengthening the collective that conquered its oppressor symbolically, as such contributing to assembling the present-day Philippine precariat into a new *composition of a people*. This revolutionary realism is therefore a form of Popular Realism: the articulation of a new reality through the enactment of the demands of a popular mass movement.

Lippard’s and Guillermo’s works are crucial and rare voices that attempt to initiate alternative historiographies and practices of art willing to engage propaganda on different terms. But while the term propaganda art is largely out of use – more common are references to “public relations,” “advertisement,” and Adorno’s concept of the “culture industry” – this does not mean that contemporary historians have not attempted to articulate alternative historiographies that show the rela-

155 The history of effigies in the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines has been extensively documented and analyzed by Filipino art historian Lisa Ito. See: Lisa Ito, “Protest Puppetry: An Update on the Aesthetics and Production of Effigy-Making, 2005–2012,” in Sison and Staal, *Towards a People’s Culture*, pp. 127–50.

tion between popular mass movements and art. One such historiography that we can discuss in the context of Sinclair's and Lippard's work is offered by the American art historian Claudia Mesh in her *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change Since 1945* (2013). The work follows what has been termed "New Art History" in the 1970s, which Mesh describes as "art historical studies that demanded that the discipline acknowledge the assumptions at work in how it bestowed aesthetic value on some artists and not on others," leading to "a new interest in marginalized cultures and artists within modernism."<sup>156</sup> For example, Mesh discusses second-wave feminism in relation to artist Judy Chicago and her attempt to introduce a "revisionist herstory,"<sup>157</sup> challenging the gendered term "his-" in "history." We see something similar in the case of artist Carolee Schneemann's concept of "art is-tory" which removes the gendered terms "his" and "her" altogether.<sup>158</sup>

Mesh traces alternative art-historical narrations through a variety of mass movements of the 20th century. For example, she discusses the reoccurring concept of "negritude" as originally theorized in Paris during the early 1930s "by the exiled Caribbean writers Aime Cesaire and Leon Damas and the Senegalese poet and statesman Leopold Sedar Senghor beginning in 1934,"<sup>159</sup> which introduced the idea, in the words of Vijay Prashad, "that a new self had to be crafted out of the harshly dismissed cultural resources of Africa and a new self-confidence in being black in the world needed to drive one's visions."<sup>160</sup> Other case studies include the impact of the anti-war movements in the period of the Vietnam War that brought about the Guerilla Art Action Group (GAAG), staging its protest actions not only in public spaces, but also in museums.<sup>161</sup> Mesh also names the emergence of Queer Art, in the form of the Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) campaign, which attempted to combat the AIDS virus, while simultaneously confronting the censorship of the Reagan administration of the devastating impact of AIDS on the lives of the gay community.

156 Claudia Mesh, *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change Since 1945* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 146.

157 Ibid., p. 105.

158 Ibid., p. 113.

159 Ibid., p. 48.

160 Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York/London: The New Press, 2007), p. 81.

161 Mesh particularly refers to GAAG's piece *Blood Bath (A Call for the Immediate Resignation of All the Rockefeller from the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art)* (1969), which was staged in the lobby of MoMA in New York. She describes how "[g]roup members Jon Hendricks, Jean Toche, Poppy Johnson, and Silvianna (Silvia Goldsmith) entered each museum and threw a text of their demands, dated November 10, 1969, into the air. They began ripping at each other's own clothing, which released containers of animal blood they had concealed there, in a simulation of the horrors brought about by the violence of war. As this occurred, they screamed gibberish phrases, that included the word "rape." They then fell to the floor, lying still. After a time, they silently rose and left the museum, without speaking to museum officials." Ibid., p. 79. GAAG, *GAAG: The Guerilla Art Action Group 1969-1976 A Selection* (New York: Printed Matter, 1978), section "Number 3".

The ACT UP campaign included artists who effectively politicized high-modernist visual language, most famously through the use of the pink triangle: once the symbol the Nazis used to designate gay and lesbian people, now a symbol of pride, while simultaneously a reminder of the ongoing criminalization and existential censorship of the victims of AIDS. One such iconic image is the famous 1986 black poster with a pink triangle, with the sentence "SILENCE = DEATH," typeset in white sans-serif capitals. While created two years before the ACT UP campaign began, it was adopted in the process as a key part of its visualized identity; a socialized form of minimalist art able to transcend the world of art into a popular mass movement of AIDS awareness.<sup>162</sup> These are but a few of Mesh's examples, as she reads the history of art through the lens of an enormous variety of popular mass movements, further including Climate Justice activism and the alter-globalization movement. Although Mesh's writing is focused on individual art works by artists who in some cases seem "inspired" rather than directly implicated in popular mass movements, her *Art and Politics* is something of a handbook to think specific works of art through a highly politicized history, and as such does a service to what we are trying to articulate as a Popular Art History, which takes the intersections of popular mass movements and art as their point of departure.

This, as we will see in our next case, is a constant and important tension in what we are defining as Popular Art History. For what exactly is it that we discuss as art or the work of art, when taking popular mass movements as a point of departure? Is the revolution, in which art might be merged, the total work of art? Or do we retain the idea that, although art can certainly be part of popular mass movements, it still articulates a reality that might not be fully conflated with its political demands? Exactly this tension is central to the thoroughly researched alternative history of art and social upheaval discussed in art historian Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2016). In her work, the focus is on the concept of "participation art" and its relation to specific structures of power in the 20th and 21st century. Bishop specifically connects French psychotherapist Félix Guattari's notion of transversality, which he describes

162 Jason Baumann, who is credited as the designer of the poster – although he rejects such claims of singular authorship – notes on the design: "We realized any single photographic image would be exclusionary in terms of race, gender and class and opted instead to activate the LGBTQ audience through queer iconography. So we reviewed the symbols already in use. We felt the rainbow flag lacked gravitas. The Labrys [a double-sided axe, often reoccurring in lesbian communities] might not be discernible to gay men. The Lambda had class connotations. And while we initially rejected the pink triangle because of its links to the Nazi concentration camps, we eventually returned to it for the same reason, inverting the triangle as a gesture of a disavowal of victimhood." See: Jason Baumann, "The Silence=Death Poster," *New York Public Library*, Nov. 22, 2013, <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2013/11/22/silence-equals-death-poster>.

as a “militant, social, undisciplined activity”<sup>163</sup> to French philosopher Jacques Rancière’s theory of the emancipated spectator, in which he claims that it is not the work of art that is autonomous, but the *aesthetic experience* of a spectator as such.<sup>164</sup> These two thinkers offer Bishop “alternative frameworks for thinking the artistic and the social simultaneously,” as she argues that “for both, art and the social are not to be reconciled, but sustained in continual tension.”<sup>165</sup> Bishop historicizes this continuous tension between art and the social and the impact this tension has had on various understandings of what “participation” in the realm of art signifies through three particular moments. The first two are characterized by “revolutionary upheaval,” namely 1917 “in which artistic production was brought into line with Bolshevik collectivism,” and 1968 “in which artistic production lent its weight to a critique of authority, oppression and alienation.”<sup>166</sup> The third moment is the year 1989 which “marks the fall of real existing socialism.”<sup>167</sup>

With great precision, Bishop reconstructs the emergence of participation as part of the changing definitions of art by the historical avant-garde, which, as we discussed in the second chapter in relation to the Russian Revolution, aimed in various ways to overcome the distinction between art and life. This task of the historical avant-garde echoes throughout the history of the 20th century up to the present, in what Bishop considers a near doctrinal “binary of active/passive.”<sup>168</sup> With the binary of active/passive, Bishop refers on the one hand to art practices that involve their spectators as agents in creating the work of art as a means of social or revolutionary change (active), while a more traditional reflection upon the artwork as object stands for a regressive bourgeois contemplative and docile counterpart (passive). The risk of maintaining this dichotomy, Bishop argues, is that political outcome stands above all other validations, disregarding specific artistic competence, among which those in the realm of the aesthetic.<sup>169</sup>

163 Guattari, quoted in Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London/New York: Verso, 2012), p. 273.

164 In Rancière’s words: “Like researchers, artists construct the stages where the manifestation and effect of their skills are exhibited, rendered uncertain in the terms of the new idiom that conveys a new intellectual adventure. The effect of the idiom cannot be anticipated. It requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the ‘story’ and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators.” Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London/New York: Verso, 2011), p. 22.

165 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 278.

166 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

167 *Ibid.*

168 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

169 We encounter this problem concretely in *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (2005) by the Austrian philosopher and art theoretician Gerald Raunig. Raunig seeks historical moments of “daily insurrection, of continual resistance, of constituent power” that give way to “micropolitical practices that practice resistance in heterogeneous ways against specific partial aspects of an increasingly global command and control” – a line of thinking similar in continuation of Guattari’s definition of the transversal. But Raunig’s alternative history of art in relation to revolutionary practice seems to be plagued throughout

Instead, Bishop is invested in a variety of art practices, which, while not denying their relation to popular mass movements, nonetheless continue to interrogate and challenge this relation in the process. While some historical examples, such as the Proletkult movement in the Soviet Union, appear a variety of alternative art histories – a kind of parallel canon in and of itself<sup>170</sup> – Bishop is committed to introducing undertheorized case studies. In the context of the Russian revolution she discusses the work of the radical Proletkult composer Arsenii Avraamov and his *Hooter Symphonies*, which replaced traditional musical instruments with the sounds of industrial and military machinery.<sup>171</sup> In the context of General Juan Carlos Onganía’s 1966 coup in Argentina, Bishop puts attention to the introduction of the use of “people as material” in the work of Argentinian avant-garde art movements, for example in Oscar Bony’s 1968 exhibition of an actual worker’s family on a gallery pedestal.<sup>172</sup> Whereas Avraamov is at the vanguard of the Russian revolution, Bony operates within a more institutional framework in the margins of the dictatorship. But, as Bishop argues, to theorize the artistic in relation to the political does not always demand a radical revolutionary condition, but rather conditions in which artists maintain a capacity to critically interrogate the relation and differences between the two – both in content and form. Although it would be hard to argue Bishop is a Maoist, she most certainly problematizes and actualizes Mao’s struggle on two fronts.

A substantial part of *Artificial Hells* deals with the notion of participation in so-called “community art” and its co-optation by neoliberal regimes in the 1990s as “the commodification of human bodies in a service economy.”<sup>173</sup> More relevant to our present study are the contemporary artists that Bishop discusses who engage in models of participation that seem able to distance themselves from such co-optation, such as the work *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (2002–2009) by Cuban

by the fact that he would rather consider a history of revolution without any art at all – with the exception of the short-lived performances and political song evenings of the Austrian anti-fascist anarcho-Brechtian Volkstheater. Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), p. 46.

170 Apart from Bishop and Raunig for whom Proletkult forms a key case study, another contemporary example is the work of Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene*, cited in the second chapter.

171 Avraamov’s work found its spectacular culmination in 1922 when on the occasion of a celebration of the revolution in the Baku harbor in St. Petersburg he composed a work with “sirens and whistles from navy ships and steamers, as well as dockside shunting engines, a ‘choir’ of bus and car horns, and a machine gun battery.” See: Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 65.

172 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

173 *Ibid.*, p. 277. The architectural collective BAVO (Gideon Boie and Matthias Pauwels) turned their critique of community art practices at the service of neoliberal state interests into a core part of their own cultural practice. A good example is their *Bureau for Artist Participation* (2010), which they proposed as a municipal agency that would operate like an employment agency, delivering artists that would provide participatory solutions for social and political issues. See: BAVO, *Too Active To Act: Cultureel activisme na het einde van de geschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2010).

artist Tania Bruguera. The project essentially comprises an alternative art school in the form of a two-year course embedded in the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) in Havana, which could *also* be considered as “an art school conceived as a work of art,”<sup>174</sup> not just because the students participating in the Cátedra Arte de Conducta produced radical works of art or because the school organized their exhibition, but because Bruguera’s approach to the model of the school as a compository model in and of itself challenges both the existing structure of the art school and the relation between art and the social realm at large. By introducing categories of studies such as “Jurisdiction” or “Trafficking Information” and including teachers from the field of art as well as lawyers and journalists, the school enacts a societal composition that structurally reads art through the social and vice versa, a form of practice Bruguera terms as “useful art.” Bishop, following Lippard’s work, explains this as “art that is both symbolic *and* useful, refuting the Western assumption that art is useless or without function.”<sup>175</sup>

The overall difficulty in Bishop’s attempt to write an alternative art history lies in her choice of “participation” as the main criterion for connecting different historiographies. It is a term that works only insofar as avant-garde movements, anti-dictatorship art collectives, or alternative schools-as-art-projects are connected directly to popular mass movements. But because Bishop also includes practices of community art, or artists involved in what is known as “relational aesthetics” – a form of participation for the sake of participation, without much of a political signature<sup>176</sup> – her writing runs the risk of conflating artistic practices that are basically incommensurable. An artist attempting to mobilize spectators as fellow revolutionaries evidently aims for a different mode of participation than an artist funded by a government agency to provide cultural solace to disenfranchised communities. The risk is that what could be a politicized history of art becomes de-politicized by an undifferentiated gaze on participation as a category in and of itself.

Even though Bishop is unwilling to discuss her case studies in the context of a Popular Propaganda Art because she considers propaganda as the equivalent of “conversion”<sup>177</sup> – a rather reductive and uninformed reading of the term from which many art historians suffer – her important contribution lies in exactly those moments in which she analyzes the proximity of popular mass movements and art, and attempts to excavate from them new “paradoxical criteria” that go be-

174 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 246.

175 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

176 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les presses du reel, 2002).

177 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 282.

yond propaganda art as a mere political instrument.<sup>178</sup> Her final, rather explicitly political, statement reads as follows: “[T]he task today is to produce a viable international alignment of leftist political movements and a reassertion of art’s inventive forms of negation as valuable in their own right.”<sup>179</sup> Essentially, this links to previous examples of Lippard and Guillermo as well. While evidently Popular Propaganda Art is informed, driven, and shaped through its direct implication in popular mass movements, this does not imply that it cannot contribute its own critical capacity and competence to it. We can understand this precisely through the Maoist–Bishopian struggle on two fronts.

Through the work of Sinclair, Lippard, Guillermo, Mesh, and Bishop, we have engaged a series of alternative historiographies that take the relation between popular mass movements and artists as a starting point of what we have termed Popular Art History. We have discussed Popular Propaganda as a performance of the popular and composition of a people with the aim of constructing Popular Realism: the transformation of reality based on the demands of popular mass movements. Based on our analysis of their work, we can make the following observations:

- Popular Art History narrates the influence of popular mass movements on the conditions of production, dissemination, and validation of popular propaganda art practices, materially and ideologically;
- Popular Art History simultaneously narrates the role and influence of art on popular mass movements in the process of performing the popular, composing a people and constructing Popular Realism;
- Popular Art History contributes to the politicization of art and thus to the creation of Popular Propaganda Art. From Sinclair to Guillermo, we observe not simply an attempt to record art history, but an articulation of the possibility of new forms of artistic practice through this narration.

Our next endeavor will be to understand more concretely the different practical and organizational models through which Popular Propaganda Art manifested itself, the first of which we will discuss as *Assemblism*.

## ASSEMBLISM

The first organizational model of Popular Propaganda Art is Assem-

178 *Ibid.*, p. 279.

179 *Ibid.*, p. 284.



blism, a term we use here following our study of Butler above, to describe the *practice* of performative assembly. Of particular interest to us is the fact that Butler analyzes performative assembly through terms that derive from an artistic vocabulary, ranging from the “theatrical” to the “assemblage” and the “morphological.” Butler uses these terms to describe the impressive physical gatherings of bodies on squares and the visual collages of tents, signs, and banners that result from them. Visual signs indeed evoke links to visual art, and although these are indeed sometimes created *by artists*, in many cases they can also be visual expressions that do not directly have an artistic intention. Rather, they are part of the collective creativity that manifests itself through the particular popular mass movement, its performance of the popular, and attempts to ally a widely diverse precariat as a composition of a people. Following Guillermo, we can thus witness within the practice of Assemblism the articulation of an *aesthetic* vocabulary through political struggle, even though an aesthetic expression is not necessarily an “artwork.” But the dividing lines, as we will see, can be very thin.

Our task here will be to explore the aesthetic dimension of Assemblism in the work of artists and non-artists alike. We will do so by connecting Butler’s ideas to those of art historian and activist Yates McKee, theorist Athena Athanasiou, and organizer and activist Alicia Garza. We will begin by challenging McKee’s claim that we referenced earlier, namely that popular mass movements such as Occupy Wall Street can themselves be considered an art project. Subsequently, we will focus on the role of choreography, theatricality, and spatial aesthetics that emerge as part of Assemblism in relation to The Outraged in Greece (Athanasiou) and Black Lives Matter (Garza). We will thus move from rebutting the claim to *Assemblism as a form of art* to an understanding of *aesthetic expressions as part of Assemblism*.

Yates McKee’s work *Strike Art* (2016) is a detailed narration of a history of art and cultural work that emerged within and parallel to the Occupy Movement, its aftermath, and the newly emerging popular mass movements that he claims stand in a certain dialogical relationship with Occupy, such as the Black Lives Matters and Climate Justice movements. In the process, McKee, who regularly refers to Butler’s writings on performative assembly, walks a fine line between proposing Occupy as a new definition of an “art project” as such, and discussing the role of art and a broader notion of aesthetics within this movement.

McKee’s claim to a reading of Occupy as an “art project” starts from the mass movement’s first manifestation in New York in 2011. McKee recalls how Occupy Wall Street had been planned and strategized through meetings at the alternative artistic platform known as the 16 Beaver Group, an artist-run space located near the Wall Street

district, where since 1999 – the year the alter-globalization movement emerged<sup>180</sup> – weekly meetings between artists, activists, educators, and thinkers had been organized to rethink alternative pathways for the practice of art and culture in the broader public realm. The imagery of Occupy as a movement-to-come had been designed by the art collective Adbusters, who created a now famous poster featuring an image of *Charging Bull* (1989), a three-ton bronze sculpture of an agitated bull created by Italian artist Arturo Di Modica. In an early manifestation of what would become known as “guerrilla art,” Di Modica had placed the object without permission in front of the New York stock exchange as a symbol of the resilience of the American people throughout the 1987 stock market crash.<sup>181</sup> In the Adbusters poster a ballerina is positioned on top of *Charging Bull*, with protesters emerging in clouds of smoke in the background, headed by the phrase “What is our one demand?,” followed by the hashtag “#occupywallstreet” and the call to “bring [a] tent.”<sup>182</sup>

The preliminary meetings of the 16 Beaver Group and the Adbusters poster would lead to the first founding assembly of the Occupy movement, which began as a rather conventional series of talks on the economic crisis in Bowling Green Park, but would later adopt the circular form of a gathering practiced in popular mass movements in Spain and Greece known as the general assembly. In the period following the founding assembly, the movement would grow to thousands of people in the nearby Zuccotti Park, formerly known as “Liberty Plaza,” a semi-public space better equipped to house the emerging movement. Occupy Wall Street, according to McKee, was thus initiated through a precarious, self-organized art infrastructure (16 Beaver Group) and first visualized through a poster by an art collective (Adbusters) referencing an early form of interventionist “political art” (the *Charging Bull* sculpture). McKee thus claims:

180 The alter-globalization movement emerged in the late 1990s in opposition to economic globalization and in support of cooperative democracy, indigenous rights, environmental protection, as famously narrated by Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* (1999). Many of the sources referenced in this chapter, such as the work of Raunig, McKee, and Thompson, either originate from or put additional emphasis on the importance of the alter-globalization movement as the birthplace of new forms of artistic and cultural activism in the 21st century.

181 Having become a major success among Wall Street workers, citizens and tourists, the sculpture, after initially having been removed, was kept and placed on the nearby location of Bowling Green Park. McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 86.

182 The iconographic status of this poster has been amplified by several other recent historiographies of art in relation to popular mass movements that referenced it. Nato Thompson, for example, refers to the Adbusters poster as part of the foundational moment of Occupy Wall Street. See: Thompson, *Seeing Power*, p. 151. While Thompson speaks of it in progressive terms, the poster is equally prominently displayed by filmmaker and Trump chief strategist Steve Bannon in his documentary–pamphlet *Occupy Unmasked* (2012), which argues that the Occupy movement was strategized and sinisterly run by professional activists and campaigners with the aim to overthrow the US government.

Like the camp itself that would be set up in the following month, the founding assembly might be understood as a kind of embodied collage, transposing an alien political form into both the ossified landscape of the New York Left and the symbolic heart of global capital itself.<sup>183</sup>

The notion of the assembly as an “embodied collage” reflects Butler’s description of performative assembly as “assemblage,” describing the process of a people-in-the-making. The question here is if the resonance of these terms – collage, assemblage – with artistic discourse is enough reason to discuss them *as art*. In this respect, it is important to take note of an article written by the collective of artists, theorists, and activists called Not An Alternative, who themselves were highly active in the Occupy movement and argue that people’s response to the Adbusters poster was not at all accidental, but the result of the previous manifestations of the Arab Spring and especially the M15/Los Indignados Movement in Spain, Catalunya, and the Basque Country. Because the possibility of such a manifestation was already engrained in the collective consciousness, the poster could have such a mobilizing effect. “[T]he idea already made sense to them” because “[t]he form of Occupy wasn’t created – it was given.”<sup>184</sup>

Not An Alternative emphasized that Occupy Wall Street gained momentum because of this pre-existing mobilization, and not necessarily because of the involvement of artists within it. Similarly, the 16 Beaver Group had been shaped strongly by the alterglobalization movement. This does not mean that the artistic efforts mentioned by McKee are unimportant, but that following Not An Alternative we should consider them as only one artistic component within a larger aesthetic manifestation that made Occupy Wall Street a reality. It is not just artists who shape the popular mass movement, it is the popular mass movement and its own particular aesthetics that *forms the artist* just as much. This is a core feature of Assemblism: the artistic imaginary is part of the larger aesthetic and social “collage” or “assemblage” through which the popular is performed and the composition of a people takes shape.

More important than McKee’s provocative claim of Occupy as a new definition of an “artistic project” are his considerations of the process through which the popular mass movement forms artists, resulting in what he describes as the “*unmaking* of art as it exists within the discourses, economies, and institutions of the contemporary art

system,” while on the other aiming for the “*reinvention* of art as direct action, collective affect, and political subjectivization embedded in radical movements working to reconstruct the commons in the face of both localized injustices and systemic crises that characterize the contemporary capitalist order.”<sup>185</sup> What we can take from his arguments is that the precarious infrastructures arising from the emerging powers of the assembling precariat challenged the role and definition of art and aesthetics to the point that we could indeed think of the popular mass movement in terms of Assemblism: not as an art work or “art project” itself, but as an emerging power within which art plays a continuous role as part of a larger aesthetic vocabulary of the popular mass movement.

In Butler’s work, two concrete examples stand out that are relevant for understanding the aesthetic component of Assemblism in terms of its scripting, choreography, performativity, and theatrical staging, namely the hunger strike and the aforementioned “general assembly.” In the first case, we are dealing with a form of Assemblism enacted by bodies that cannot occupy the same space due to the prison regiment. When prisoners engage in common hunger strikes, albeit each in their own cells, their simultaneous choreography re-affirms that no matter how much the prison divides them physically, they continue to collectively enact a script, a series of planned gestures. They continue to compose themselves as a people.

This is a different morphology from the one enacted by bodies that have the relative privilege of gathering in public in the general assemblies of movements like Los Indignados, Occupy, or Gezi Park – although all three have also been confronted with different levels of police violence. What connects these examples of Assemblism is the imaginary that they invoke: the surplus of presence they bring into being. Encountering one prisoner in a hunger strike while knowing that others are performing similar gestures creates the re-enforced experience of an unlimited number of people standing with a single individual. The synchronicity of the gestures in this form of Assemblism allows for a larger sense of collectivity to be invoked. Something similar happens in the circular assembly on the square. The people who call themselves the “99%” are factually a minority, but they act *as if they were a majority*. Assemblism, in this case, lays the foundation of a people yet to recognize itself: they are a people-in-the-making. The collective imaginary of this people-in-the-making is the result of Assemblism. And as we saw with both of Butler’s examples, while an artistic vocabulary can help to clarify the aesthetic dimensions of its

183 McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 93.

184 Not an Alternative, “Counter-Power as Common Power: Beyond Horizontalism,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, Issue 9 (Summer 2014), <https://www.joaap.org/issue9/notanalternative.htm>.

185 McKee, *Strike Art*, pp. 5–6.

manifestation, this does not mean that they are artworks as such.

The aesthetic dimensions of Assemblism is what Butler and the Greek theorist Athena Athanasiou discuss in their book *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013) as “self-poietics.” “Poietics” borrows the ancient Greek term for “creation,” which, Athanasiou explains, “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.”<sup>186</sup> In other words, the precariat, assembled in a popular mass movement because of a collective threat to its systems of life support, articulate in Assemblism an understanding of the self that can only be an “interrelated self” that is articulated, supported, and sustained through the presence and the acts of the bodies of others. Athanasiou discusses embodied performance – the “intimate propaganda” that Lippard spoke of – as being sustained through “corporeal standing,” a recurrent choreographical dimension of Assemblism that manifests itself through the “ordinary and rather undramatic practice of standing, rather than a miraculously extraordinary disruption, that actualizes here the living register of the event” and subsequently creates “both a space of reflection and a space for revolt, but also an affective comportment of standing and standpoint.”<sup>187</sup> So the choreography of collective standing in Assemblism – that which Occupy calls “occupation” – also implies a spatial dimension, or better, it articulates a new space overruling an existing one. This becomes very concrete in one of Athanasiou’s examples where she discusses the movement of The Outraged in Athens, which planned to surround the Greek parliament to stop a five-year austerity plan, resulting in the police fortifying the entire parliament building:

The image of the blockaded parliament, defended against the people’s demand for accountability, manifested nothing less than the sovereign gesture of closing the space of dissent by delegating the dissenters to a provisional outside.<sup>188</sup>

We witness how an existing order of power responds to the practice of Assemblism in the form of the surrounding – the bringing into presence of precarious bodies seeking for a composition not through a counter-assembly, but through a *fortification*: an enactment of a sta-

186 Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, p. 68.

187 *Ibid.*, p. 150–51.

188 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

te’s sovereign monopoly on the police. Athanasiou’s “self-poietics,” the choreography and spatial motives enacted through Assemblism, does not only perform the popular, the emerging power of the precariat. It also forces an existing power to articulate itself as its *opposing force*. A very theatrical example of this is the “book block,” which Athanasiou describes in the context of a variety of different popular mass movements. The book block consists of shields carried by protestors in the form of enlarged hand-painted book covers, which feature works of writers and philosophers such as Theodor Adorno, Samuel Beckett, and even Butler. When Athanasiou describes a photo of “a policeman [who] raises his baton against a protestor who carries a book shield of Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*,”<sup>189</sup> we again encounter two radically conflicting performativities made visible through the practice of Assemblism: books as symbols of knowledge and social transformation carried by the assembled precariat to *protect* themselves versus the baton as a symbol of monopolized violence carried by the police to *attack* others. Here, spatiality does not only relate to the placement of the bodies of the assembled precariat, but also to the space that they are creating through Assemblism: their bodies and book blocks articulate a different domain of knowledge and being, beyond the one represented by the regime of the baton. They embody an emerging power, performed through a people-in-the-making.

Such Assemblist articulations are strongly present in the popular mass movement known as Black Lives Matter. The movement was founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in the form of a social media hashtag “#BlackLivesMatter,” in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman for murdering the unarmed black seventeen-year-old Trevor Martin. Black Lives Matter quickly developed into a movement on its own right, following the historical aims of the civil rights and black power movements, currently counting “more than 45 chapters around the world.”<sup>190</sup> Garza speaks of the movement specifically in terms of a “herstory,” connecting the struggle of black women’s liberation movements to a wide spectrum of precarious constituents in the black community. She argues that “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.”<sup>191</sup> The structural racism, mass incarceration, and police violence disproportionately affecting black

189 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

190 Alicia Garza, “Under Siege,” transcript from a keynote lecture at *Creative Time Summit: Occupy the Future*, Washington DC, Oct. 14, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUNzJ-DKmrE>.

191 Alicia Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement,” *The Feminist Wire*, Oct. 7, 2014, <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>

communities, both in the US and internationally, thus forms the basis for a broad intersectional alliance. While Garza emphasizes the role of art within the movement when she speaks of the “cultural workers, artists, designers and techies [who] offered their labor and love to expand #BlackLivesMatter beyond a social media hashtag,”<sup>192</sup> an important assemblist dimension of Black Lives Matter resides in the public manifestation of the movement; the specificity of its name and slogans through which the performance of the popular is articulated:

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.”<sup>193</sup>

These slogans emerged directly from murders of black people in the wake of the killing of Trevor Martin. “Hands up, don’t shoot” resulted from the 2014 killing of Michael Brown, who had robbed a convenience store and was reportedly shot by a police officer – despite the fact that he had already stood still with his hands in the air. Mass protests and riots followed in Ferguson, with banners reading these supposedly last words of Brown, and masses of people chanting them – their hands up in the air – while approaching police battalions. “I can’t breathe” relates to the murder in the same year of Eric Gardner, who was supposedly illegally selling cigarettes, and held in a chokehold by police officers who arrested him. Gardner’s last words – “I can’t breathe” – were similarly appropriated by Black Lives Matter protestors on signs and in collective chants.

Although it seems more appropriate to discuss the movement in the tradition of the civil rights and black power movements, McKee discusses the Black Lives Matter movement as part of the “post-occupy condition,” emphasizing the importance of what Garza calls the “visibilization of black life,” which he perceives as a way of highlighting “the aesthetic dimension of the struggle.”<sup>194</sup> 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 radical precarization of black communities. Nevertheless, these Assemblist practices of a popular mass movement indeed embody McKee’s “poetic figures” or Athanasiou’s “self-poietics,” emerging through the Assemblist actions and gatherings of the movement.<sup>195</sup> The collective chanting of “I can’t breathe” results into such a poetic figure of “breathing in common”: a collective acknowledgement of precarious life by translating the loss of life of one to the possible loss of life of all inside a

192 Ibid.

193 Garza, “Under Siege”

194 McKee, *Strike Art*, p. 185.

195 Ibid., p. 188.

“white supremacist capitalist system.”<sup>196</sup> In the face of the increasingly militarized police in the US, the casually dressed protestors, their hands in the air, chanting “Hands up, don’t shoot” and “I can’t breathe” articulate strength through a display of collective vulnerability while the militarized police across from them becomes the embodiment of those who murdered and suffocated those commemorated in the slogans.<sup>197</sup> Again, we encounter a practice of Assemblism whose choreography, performativity, and spatial designation articulate a domain in opposition to the militarized and segregated domain embodied by the military police. As in the case of Occupy and the hunger strike, the Outraged in Greece and Black Lives Matter, Assemblist practice invokes a new political space through the enactment of popular demands: Popular Realism that constructs a reality beyond dispossession, austerity, indebtedness, police violence, structural racism, and murder.

Through a reading of Butler, McKee, Athanasiou, and Garza we have come to understand Assemblism as an aesthetic manifestation – sometimes including artistic components – that results from the performance of the popular and the process of composing a people.

To summarize, Assemblism is defined by the process through which a diverse precariat assembles and begins to form a social montage, collage, or assemblage that articulates what we have defined as a people-in-the-making. Art plays a role in this process of composition, but only as one component of the social and aesthetic texture of the popular mass movement as a whole. In the case of Assemblism, performance, the term through which we both define the power of the precariat as well as its enactments in the form of scripted, choreographed, and theatrical stagings consisting of corporeal standing, chanting, and the strategic use of objects such as the book block or the banner to designate an alternative spatial and ideological configuration. The self-poietics and poetic figures of emerging power that are created in the process provoke established powers to engage in often violent counter-performances, further articulating the spatial and ideological configuration of the mass movement. If successful, the outcome of this antagonistic process is the construction of a Popular Realism: a designation of a spatial and ideological configuration of a reality organized on the collective demands of the popular mass movement.

By discussing the practice of performative assembly in the form of Assemblism we have already touched slightly on visual elements that play a role in the composing of a people. The book block seems a per-

196 Ibid., p. 188.

197 The performativity of vulnerability as an assemblist strength is elaborated by several authors, including Butler and Athanasiou. See: Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2016).

fect example of an aesthetic component with artistic resonance – the visualization of knowledge as that what is threatened by austerity, while also forming a literal and mental shield for those trying to protect this knowledge – which cannot be embodied, but needs an additional sign of sorts. The book block, as discussed, also operates as a spatial designation, as a highly visible cultural frontline of Assemblism articulating the opposition between emerging and established power even more clearly. The capacity of such visual components touch upon what we will now discuss as the artistic component that *overlaps* with Assemblism in the form of *Embedded Art*.

### EMBEDDED ART

With the term Embedded Art, we mean to focus on the role of artists as well as art groups and collectives that operate within popular mass movements. In the process, we will see how their work often overlaps with that of Assemblism, contributing to the artistic component of the larger aesthetics that result from Assemblism's practice. In the case of Embedded Art, we are dealing with artists who, as McKee writes, attempt to disentangle art from its present embedding in regimes of oppressive power, and to re-invent it through the emerging power and precarious infrastructures of popular mass movements.

In the context of popular mass movements, creating an artwork in and of itself is not the aim. Rather, we are dealing here, following Athanasiou's use of the notion of self-poietics, with a reinvention of art as a practice that emerges through the interrelation of precarious bodies and the enactment of their demands. Guillermo described this as aesthetic practice emerging from the immediacy and urgency of struggle. Embedded art similarly emerges through artists situating themselves directly within the precarious infrastructures of popular mass movements and its aesthetic vocabulary. This means that traditional notions of autonomy have to be challenged. Rather than trying to achieve artistic autonomy, artists situate themselves within a popular mass movement that aims to gain political autonomy, not just for art but for a variety of segments of the precariat – from workers to the undocumented. And although art is not the exclusive property of artists within popular mass movements, we will see how artists contribute, through specific knowledges and competences, to their manifestations and Assemblist practices. With the demand of democratization in a popular mass movement, also comes the democratization of art as such.

Popular Propaganda Art's practice of Embedded Art brings with it many challenges. Due to their own precarious conditions, popular mass movements generally do not pay artists – the demand for the

redistribution of capital is still in the making – and 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 bring on criticism from both sides; namely the abuse of art for political means, or the abuse of popular mass movements for artistic means.<sup>198</sup> The artist thus risks becoming an agent who, rather than politicizing a popular mass movement, commodifies it through the realm of art by selling banners and photos of protests in the white cube of art to gain the financial means to keep up their work within the popular mass movement. This defines the particular precarity of artists, which is both a *material* and an *ideological* precarity. Artists have the capacity to imagine and visualize power differently, but – apart from a small elite of global artist-brands such as Jeff Koons or Damien Hirst – they do not necessarily have power themselves. 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 established power and emerging power. The notion of “embeddedness” in Embedded Art should thus be understood as taking place within different institutionalities at the same time, *established* ones that they aim to change and *emerging* ones that they wish to help construct and gain power.

In the previous chapters we have already touched upon such historical practices of Embedded Art, from the writers implicated in popular mass movements discussed by Sinclair to the work of feminist artists through which Lippard proposed an intimate propaganda art; from the artists involved in the ACT UP campaign analyzed by Mesh to the work of art collectives in the Filipino underground; from the radical Proletkult musical practices discussed by Bishop to the artists and designers that contributed to the Assemblist practices of the Occupy movement. Our aim now will be to expand these case studies with contemporary practices of Embedded Art, which highlight the concrete competences that artists contribute to popular mass movements and Assemblist practices, and the ways they deal with operating between worlds.

In this context, we will discuss four examples of Embedded Art, each of which operates within or in direct relation to popular mass movements. We will focus on artist Hito Steyerl in relation to the al-

198 A dilemma addressed by Thompson when discussing the concept of socially engaged art: “So it isn't art, and it isn't activism. It's something else. What is that something else? Socially engaged art projects that do not receive outright hostile reactions tend to receive this classic dismissal: that they are neither art nor activism. By being outside of both categories, works that toe the line between didacticism and ambiguity are discarded into critical purgatory.” Thompson, *Seeing Power*, p. 34.

ter-globalization, Gezi Park, and Kurdish resistance movements; the collective Not An Alternative in relation to the Occupy movement and climate change activism in the United States; the work of artist Matthijs de Bruijne in relation to labor unions and the mobilization of domestic workers; and the work of Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR) in relation to popular mass movements in Palestine in the past, present, and *future*. Nonetheless, we will observe also many differences between these practices resulting from their specific relations to the specific coalitions of precarious peoples in different geographic, political, and cultural contexts. We thus aim to explore four different artistic *proximités* in relation to popular mass movements, resulting in four different understandings and outcomes of artists' embeddedness.

Following the movement of Institutional Critique earlier exemplified by Fraser, German artist Hito Steyerl further radicalizes its premise when she states provocatively: "If contemporary art is the answer, the question is, how can capitalism be made more beautiful?" She elaborates by explaining: "Contemporary art feeds on the crumbs of a massive and widespread redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich, conducted by means of an ongoing class struggle from above."<sup>199</sup> Like Fraser, she emphasizes how the "intrinsic conditions of the art field, as well as the blatant corruption within it [...] is a taboo even on the agenda of most artists who consider themselves political."<sup>200</sup> As a result, Steyerl's practice radically expanded the analysis of, and engagement with, the art institution so as to encompass technology, the military-industrial complex, and practice of warfare, but also its relation to popular mass movements and revolutionary organizations. This is explicitly the case in her work *Is the Museum a Battlefield?* (2013), a video recorded as a lecture-performance, presented for the first time in the midst of the tumultuous 13th Istanbul Biennial. This art manifestation took place parallel to the emergence of a popular mass movement in the city, known as the Gezi Park protests.<sup>201</sup> In her lecture-performance, Steyerl begins with the story of her friend Andrea Wolf who joined the women's section of the formerly Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan

199 Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), p. 93.

200 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

201 The public space of Gezi Park was threatened by massive government-sanctioned real estate development, and civil protests quickly grew into a broad popular movement against the increasingly authoritarian and corrupt Erdoğan regime. The protestors were subsequently faced with brutal government crackdowns, with many deaths as a result. See: Amnesty International, *Gezi Park Protests: Brutal Denial of the Right to Peaceful Assembly in Turkey* (London: Amnesty International Ltd, 2013), <https://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/eur440222013en.pdf>. For further reading see: Bülent Gökay and İlia Xypolia, *Reflections on Taksim: Gezi Park Protests in Turkey* (Keele: A Journal of Global Faultlines, 2013). A unique narration of the Gezi Park protests is written by Raşel Meseri in the form of a children's story illustrated by Sanne Karssenbergh. The story revolves around Pen the Penguin, who became a symbol of the Gezi Park protests after the Turkish television aired a documentary on penguins instead of covering the protests. See: Raşel Meseri and Sanne Karssenbergh, *Pen in the Park: A Resistance Fairytale* (Tirana/The Hague: Uitgeverij), 2014).

Worker's Party (PKK) under her *nom de guerre* "Ronahî."<sup>202</sup> Wolf was reportedly captured in 1998 in the Van region by Turkish special forces together with thirty others, beaten and extra-judicially executed after which her breasts were cut from her body. There was never an official investigation and the bodies of Wolf and her fellow fighters were never found.<sup>203</sup>

Thirteen years later, Steyerl returned to the site. There, the artist retrieves ammunition and rockets shelves from the battlefield, of which she begins to trace the origins, which lead her to weapon manufacturers such as the American General Dynamics company, the German Heckler & Koch, and the British Lockheed Martin, all with headquarters in Western metropolises. These headquarters, Steyerl realized, were all designed by some of the most highbrow "starchitects" in the world. Lockheed Martin's headquarters in Berlin was developed by Frank Gehry, the creator of several of the most iconic art museums of the world, such as the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.<sup>204</sup> And not only does Gehry's starchitecture provide Lockheed Martin with its cultural front, the building itself, Steyerl observes, seems to be modeled after the shape of the gun shells she collected on the battlefield:

So 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 [...]. So how is this possible? 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 [that fired the missiles in Van] were developed.<sup>205</sup>

The design of contemporary architecture and contemporary weapons seems to arise from the same "creative" software, suggesting an intricate resonance between military and cultural infrastructures not evident to most, as we discussed earlier on this chapter in the context of War

202 Since its founding in 1978, the PKK has waged an ongoing guerrilla war in the south-eastern part of Turkey, known as North Kurdistan or Bakûr, against the Turkish regime. We will further discuss this history in the final part of this chapter, "Stateless Propaganda Art."

203 Felix Kurz and Georg Mascolo, "Besonders mutige Kämpfer," *Der Spiegel*, Sep. 11, 1998, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-8030503.html>. Wolf would appear in several of Steyerl's works, such as *November* (2004) and *Lovely Andrea* (2007). Pablo Lafuente puts additional emphasis on the construction of the "popular" in these particular works. See: Pablo Lafuente, "For a Populist Cinema: On Hito Steyerl's *November* and *Lovely Andrea*," *Afterall*, No. 19 (Autumn/Winter 2008), <https://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.19/populist.cinema.hito.steyerls.november.and.lovely>.

204 Davide Ponzini, Michele Nastasi, *Starchitecture: Scenes, Actors and Spectacles in Contemporary Cities* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2016)

205 Hito Steyerl, "Is the Museum a Battlefield?," transcript of lecture performance during the public program of the 13th Istanbul Biennial, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/76011774>.

on Terror Propaganda Art. The turning point in Steyerl's lecture-performance takes place when, while trying to trace the origin of the bullets from the battlefield, she visits The Art Institute of Chicago, an institution strongly supported by a member of the General Dynamics founding family.<sup>206</sup> There, Steyerl encounters her own work: a video she shot while doing her fieldwork in Van, with the caption "This is a shot." The encounter links the shooting of the weapon that killed Wolf to the video shooting of Steyerl trying to reconstruct who killed her, bringing her to the question "did I shoot the bullet that I found on the battlefield myself?"<sup>207</sup> By tracing the overlapping of military and cultural industries, the artist's claim that the museum is a battlefield takes shape. For, Steyerl argues, museums have been "torture chambers, sites of war crimes, civil war, and also revolution."<sup>208</sup> The storming of the Winter Palace was simultaneously the storming of the Hermitage Museum, located on its premises; and the Louvre, as we saw in the second chapter, was declared a public museum through the French Revolution, and, as Steyerl narrates, stormed and occupied another five times in order for it to remain a public museum.<sup>209</sup> The history of the museum has been that of its revolutions, or, today, of its military-industrial sponsors. Through Steyerl's attempts to trace a bullet, the military-industrial complex turns into a cultural complex and vice versa, like a strange, continuous feedback loop. This brings her to a militant conclusion: "It seems if we are stuck in that loop, we may have to go back in this point in time and storm the museum again."<sup>210</sup> This statement was not without risk, as Steyerl was claiming the art institution as the extension of the site of the Gezi Park protests happening right outside its doors.<sup>211</sup>

While Steyerl's work takes the form of pamphlets, books, essays, lecture-performances, and videos interconnecting the institution of art and popular mass movements, the work of collective Not An Alternative, founded by artists and activists in the aftermath of the alter-globalization movement, puts an even greater emphasis on the scope and scale of embedded art practice.<sup>212</sup> Their prominent theoretical work is strongly influenced by the work of philosopher Jodi Dean, a member

206 Ibid.

207 Ibid.

208 Ibid.

209 Hito Steyerl, "Is the Museum a Battlefield?," transcript of lecture at the *Creative Time Summit: Confronting Inequity*, New York, Oct. 12, 2012, <http://creativetime.org/summit/2012/10/12/hito-steyerl/>.

210 Ibid.

211 Following Butler's "assemblage" and McKee's "collage" in relation to the composition of popular mass movements, Steyerl discusses the relation of art to the popular movement in terms of the "montage": "What kind of movements of political montage would result in oppositional articulations, instead of a mere addition of elements for the sake of reproducing the status quo?" Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, p. 90.

212 Current members Beka Economopoulos and Jason Jones, and former members Ian Hart and Winnie Fung created *Not An Alternative* in the 2000s, in the aftermath of the alter-globalization movement.

of Not An Alternative and author of *The Communist Horizon* (2012) and *Crowds and Party* (2016). For Dean, the popular mass movement in and of itself does not provide an answer to conditions of precarity and exploitation, unless it is connected to an organizational infrastructure – such as the Communist Party – in order to translate its demands into a durable infrastructure.<sup>213</sup> This militant left position informs the name of the collective, which rejects the very notion of the need of an "alternative" to current crises, but rather emphasizes a need for a more radical if not revolutionary change in the political and economic order.

When it comes to the domain of art, Not An Alternative refers to its work as "projects" each of which consist of a series of "tools," emphasizing the importance of their approach to the artistic domain through concrete instruments to be used in the context of political mobilization and action. Occupy New York is again a primary example, specifically their tool *Occupy Tape* (2011) part of project "Occupy." It consists of a yellow and black striped tape, normally used to seal off foreclosed homes, which in this case reads "Occupy." Freely distributed among protesters, the tape became used by the Occupy Wall Street movement, as well as other Occupy offshoots around the country, in encampments and in city interventions. Together with posters reading: "Foreclose on banks, not on people," the tape was used to seal off financial institutions that had played a role in the financial crisis. A similar strategy is used in *Occupy Police Blocks* (2012), an intervention created a few days before the anniversary of the Occupy Movement. Anticipating a resurgence of protests, police blocked the entry to Zuccotti Park by placing large cement blocks reading "NYPD." Not An Alternative crafted a series of foam blocks entitled *Occupy Police Blocks*, looking exactly like the cement blocks used by the authorities, but which read "OWS" (Occupy Wall Street) instead, followed by the sentence "Protecting the People from the Powerful." Again, we witness an act of appropriation of visual signifiers normally used exclusively by ruling powers, but now turned against them. Not An Alternative shows that power has a "compository" dimension, and is manifested through visual markers that provide institutional legitimacy; signs that order and engineer our daily life, but that can also be turned against themselves.

In some sense, Not An Alternative operates as the "branding" agency of the popular mass movement, without being officially commissioned, providing additional and highly professional looking signs for a

213 Jodi Dean's work on the concept of the "crowd" overlaps in some respects with the assemblies of the precariat discussed by Butler. However, Dean takes a more militant approach. In her perspective it is only through an organizational structure like the Community Party that the crowd can emerge as a people. See Dean's lecture "If You're Not Against Us, You're With Us," *Former West Public Editorial Meeting*, Hungary, May 13, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/136578092>.

demarcation of an emerging power. Different from the quickly painted covers of the book blocks, the projects and tools of Not An Alternative play out a professional and sometimes corporate language for other means. But this investment is not limited to appearance alone, but also related to strengthening the precarious infrastructure of the Occupy movement. This is the case with their *Occupy Shelter* (2011), a building block consisting of panels through which different structures could be built, such as tables, backdrops, benches and shelters with the aim of “fortifying the physical infrastructure” of the rather fragile set-up of tents.<sup>214</sup> Like the tape and blocks, *Occupy Shelter* could be used well beyond the confines of a protest camp to reclaim a diversity of public spaces, abandoned or foreclosed houses, and buildings. The visual literacy and organizational capacity that Not An Alternative contributes to the popular mass movement therefore aims to reach beyond the rather spontaneous patchwork of tents and signs that are characteristic of the protest encampment. Instead, Not An Alternative looks at these emerging social forms as pre-figurative institutions: the possibility to re-imagine and establish new models of civil forms of governance and representation. We can consider their work as both an act of commitment and as a critique of the organizational and infrastructural limitations of the popular mass movement. In that light, Occupy’s ideal of spontaneous self-governance, similar to that of the spontaneous camp, is challenged by the collective when Jodi Dean and Jason Jones claim that Occupy cannot transcend models of political representation:

It reinvents representation as the active, self-authorizing assertion of division in relation to the appearance of antagonism. Occupy unleashes practices and incites actions, linking them together via the hole in Wall Street. In its new politics of representation, division isn’t effaced or overcome. It’s asserted and linked to capitalism’s fundamental antagonism, class struggle.<sup>215</sup>

In these writings a more militant politicized approach to the camp is articulated; not as a space of spontaneous political consensus, but a site of struggle where the 99% – those who claim the right to speak for a popular majority through assemblist practice – assert a fundamental division between ruling power and the precariat. Or, as Jones and Dean phrase it, “[a]sserting division, it represents possibility.”<sup>216</sup>

214 Retrieved from the “Project” section of Not An Alternative’s website, <http://notanalternative.org/projects/>.

215 Jason Jones and Jodi Dean, “Occupy Wall Street and the Politics of Representation,” *Chto Delat*, No. 34: In Defense of Representation (Mar. 2012).

216 Ibid.

The real work of Occupy and related popular mass movements, so the authors claim, happens outside the domain of consensus, in the form of direct organization and action with the aim of constructing a long-term and durable alternative form of institutionality and emancipatory governance:

There is nothing about democracy that necessarily goes against capitalism. Democratic processes have been coextensive with the capitalist mode of production and accumulation. The position that represents the threat to global capitalism is the one that refuses capitalism outright and insists on universal egalitarian emancipation.<sup>217</sup>

The importance of a clearly formulated political position, the organization and maintenance of infrastructure, counter-branding, and seizing power from existing institutions is expressed in Not An Alternative’s project *The Natural History Museum* (2014–ongoing), a newly declared institution that “offers exhibitions, expeditions, educational workshops, and public programming” through “existing institutions, [...] its 15-passenger mobile museum bus, and online.”<sup>218</sup> Different from the existing Natural History Museum, Not An Alternative’s version focuses on the impact of humans on climate change, the role of fossil fuel industries and their influence on museums, as well as the political system at large. Like a 21st-century propaganda train, Not An Alternative’s mobile museum is capable of setting up instant pop-up displays adorned with the colorful child-friendly imagery that we associate with the Natural History Museum, but deeply politicized through slogans such as “Cut Ties to the Fossil Fuel Industry: Stand Up for Science.” *The Natural History Museum* is thus presented as a new politicized form of institution. Different from previously self-funded interventions it was financially supported by “art and social justice foundation grants.”<sup>219</sup> Its aim is to partly operate through existing institutions and partly through its own channels of communication, and to force directors as well as visitors not merely to be informed on climate change, but to recognize their own implication within it and take a position in relationship to it.

In a 2015 op-ed in *The Guardian*, Not An Alternative members Steve Lyons and Beka Economopoulos pushed the Natural History Museum’s agenda by issuing a series of public demands: “[W]e are asking museums of science and natural history to drop climate science deniers from their boards, cancel sponsorships from the fossil fuel

217 Not An Alternative, “Counter-Power as Common Power: Beyond Horizontalism”.

218 Retrieved from the “Project” section of Not An Alternative’s website, <http://notanalternative.org/projects/>.

219 E-mail exchange with Not An Alternative member Jason Jones, Mar. 1, 2017.



industry, and divest financial portfolios from fossil fuels.”<sup>220</sup> This is an important aspect of the process in which Not An Alternative operates “between worlds” – between the popular mass movement and the artistic-cultural institution – reclaiming common resources through a variety of sites of struggle, and effectively overcoming the divide of being “inside” or “outside” a given system. They effectively enact Steyerl’s call to occupy and seize the institution as part of the battlefield:

[I]nstitutional liberation isn’t about making institutions better, more inclusive, more participatory. It’s about establishing politicized base camps from which ever more coordinated, elaborate, and effective campaigns against the capitalist state in all its racist, exploitative, extractivist, and colonizing dimensions can be carried out. This takeover will not happen overnight. But it is happening now at an international scale, accumulating force and momentum with every repetition of a common name and image, every iteration of associated acts: red lines, red squares, arrayed tents, money drops, blockades, occupations.<sup>221</sup>

Similar to Not An Alternative, the work of Dutch artist Matthijs de Bruijne takes the form of projects and tools developed in direct relation to popular mass movements, in this case with the Federation of Dutch Labor Unions (FNV) at its core. De Bruijne, different from Not An Alternative, is directly funded by the FNV itself, and although he continues to involve the art institution, this is a nearly marginal dimension of his overall practice. It was particularly his work with the Argentinian *cartoneros* – people who make their living from collecting, organizing, and re-selling waste in the form of cardboard, metal, and glass – that brought the FNV to contact the artist for a series of ongoing collaborations in the context of their campaign *Schoon genoeg!*<sup>222</sup> which means roughly “enough already,” but can also be read differently: the word *schoon* also means “clean.” The history of the FNV has a particular tradition of art and culture of its own,<sup>223</sup> but De Bruijne

observed that this deep connection “between the arts and the union has disappeared since WW2,”<sup>224</sup> and that the FNV instead has “evolved from a political movement to an insurance company” with an equally “corporate identity.”<sup>225</sup> 2010, however, saw a resurgence of organizing capacity of the cleaner’s union resulting in a successful three-month strike to demand less work pressure, a 2% promised increase of their salary, and paid sick leave. It was the largest and longest strike in the Netherlands since 1933.

The commemoration of their successful strike was to become the moment for the cleaner’s union to solidify their newly gained successes. Developing his insights from Argentina, De Bruijne created a project called the *Trash Museum* (2011), a mobile museum that would display a diversity of objects found by cleaners in their workplaces – from train to airport – which publicly demonstrated their often difficult working conditions. Following the decision-making structure of the cleaner’s union, De Bruijne presented his proposal to the “Parliament of Cleaners,” which agreed to its realization and financing.<sup>226</sup> The *Trash Museum* 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.<sup>227</sup> In collaboration with design group Detour, consisting of Marnix de Klerk and Nina Mathijssen, De Bruijne erected yellow walls mimicking the colors of the yellow gloves and yellow cloth used by the cleaners in the central hall of the station. Plastic zip-lock bags were attached to the wall, each containing objects found by cleaners: from toys and drug needles to sex toys. A sign was placed next to every object, providing the background story of the cleaner who found it, testimonies collected by De Bruijne. The yellow flags of the union, and its by now famous symbol of a clenched fist in a yellow rubber glove, surrounded the walls, marking the spatial claim of the museum in the middle of the train station. Thousands of visitors came by to see the objects, discuss the demands of the cleaners with the union’s members, and take promotional materials presented on a nearby table. Instead of

220 Steve Lyons and Beka Economopoulos, “Museums Must Take a Stand and Cut Ties to Fossil Fuels,” *The Guardian*, May 7, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/07/museums-must-take-a-stand-and-cut-ties-to-fossil-fuels>.

221 Not An Alternative, “Institutional Liberation,” *e-flux journal*, No. 77 (Nov. 2016).

222 De Bruijne recorded and wrote down the stories of the *cartoneros*, and published these together with images of the collected waste on the website *Liquidacion.org* (2002) where online visitors could also purchase the objects. A crucial model from which he developed his own artistic methodology was the *Tucumán Arde* (*Tucumán Burns*), a 1968 exhibition in Buenos Aires and Rosario organized by the Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia (Group of Avant-Garde Artists) in collaboration with other cultural workers, sociologists, and journalists with the aim of highlighting the disastrous working conditions in Tucumán city, located in the north-western part of the country. See also: Sven Lütticken, “Matthijs de Bruijne,” *Witte Raaf*, No. 107 (Jan.–Feb. 2004), <https://www.dewitteraaf.be/artikel/detail/nl/2758>.

223 De Bruijne often references the “Burcht” – “the fortress” – built in 1899–1900 as a monument to the labor movement and headquarters of the union that was designed by architect Hendrik

Petrus Berlage and decorated with murals depicting the rise of the worker movement by artist Richard Roland Holst.

224 Matthijs de Bruijne, “Museum of the People,” lecture at the *New World Academy*, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, Nov. 15, 2013, <https://vimeo.com/90675280>.

225 Lara Staal and Wouter Hillaert, “Centraal staat het werk,” *rekto:verso* No. 69: Dossier Zwart-Wit (Dec. 2015–Jan. 2016), <https://www.rektoverso.be/artikel/centraal-staat-het-werk>. Original quote in Dutch: “De Nederlandse bond is van een politieke beweging geëvolueerd naar een verzekeringsmaatschappij. De bijhorende *corporate identity*-mentaliteit is mee overgenomen.”

226 According to De Bruijne, the Parliament of Cleaners is not an executive branch of the union but created by the cleaners themselves. Due to prominent members of the Parliament of Cleaners – such as *Khadija* Thahiri, president of the Cleaner’s Union – many of its decisions are honored nonetheless. One could say the Parliament of Cleaners operates in a form of dual power within the union as a whole. Noted from telephone conversation with De Bruijne on Feb. 11, 2017.

227 The *Trash Museum* afterwards toured to the Burcht, Amsterdam (Oct. 24–25, 2011), the town hall of The Hague (Jan. 4–26, 2012), the library of Groningen (Jan. 30–Feb. 5, 2012), and the town hall of Heerlen (Feb. 14–21, 2012).

injecting the message of a popular mass movement into the museum, De Bruijne proposed to institute the museum as part of and created in collaboration with the popular mass movement itself.

This initial collaborative project of De Bruijne and the cleaner's union brought him into contact with the domestic worker's union, which represents a severely under-recognized segment of the Dutch labor force: "Most of the Domestic Workers in the Netherlands, especially in the big cities, are undocumented. We talk about thousands and most of them come from the Philippines, Indonesia, Latin America and Ghana, and officially they don't exist."<sup>228</sup> One of the artworks that De Bruijne developed with the Domestic Worker's Union was an enactment of their slogan "Never Ever Invisible." It consisted of a shadow play in the form of video titled *No Work, No Pay!* (2012), which was realized for a screening in The Hague at the Dutch parliament. The work was part of the union's campaign to bring the Netherlands to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) convention 189 in recognition of the rights of domestic workers.<sup>229</sup> De Bruijne explains the shadow play as "a form of theatre, originally from Asia that is also common here in the Netherlands because of our colonial history." He thus connected an aesthetics that relates both to the history of the Netherlands and many migrant domestic workers, allowing us to consider a neo-colonial dimension of the use of cheap labour in the form of migrant domestic work.<sup>230</sup> The shadow plays are realized by domestic workers and actors standing behind a screen, with a strong backlight. Therefore, the medium allows the domestic workers to be *present* in silhouette without being *recognized*. This is a crucial protection, due to the risk of the identification of undocumented workers by the authorities. The medium of the shadow play through which the migrant workers share their stories is thus simultaneously an expression of the specific *condition* of the protagonists themselves. We could consider this a radical variation of what we have discussed in War on Terror Propaganda Art as "visible invisibility," in this case repurposed and enacted by the dispossessed.

Whereas De Bruijne works with diaspora communities in the labor

228 Matthijs de Bruijne, "Solidarity and Unionising," lecture at the *Artist Organizations International*, HAU Theater, Berlin, Jan. 11, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/119233427>. The struggle of undocumented domestic workers gave rise to the campaign *100,000 Families Trust Us*, which called for a recognition of domestic work on par with any other sector, and for the recognition of around 70,000 undocumented domestic workers in the Netherlands. The campaign generated its very own lexicon relevant both for union members and outsiders to gain understanding of their specific conditions of struggle. As such, the publication is both a handbook and a documentation of the work and successes of the union so far. See: Matthijs de Bruijne and Cecilia Vallejos, *Werkwoorden – Words of Labor* (FNV Schoonmaak, 2017).

229 International Labour Organization, C189 – Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::p12100\\_instrument\\_id:2551460](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::p12100_instrument_id:2551460).

230 De Bruijne, "Museum of the People."

union, many of which have fled neocolonial oppression in their countries of origin, a final example of Embedded Art that we will discuss relates to the direct context of such oppression itself. This concerns the work of Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR), an institution founded in 2008 by Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman – from Italy, Palestine, and Israel respectively, and each with a background in architecture – located in Beit Sahour, a Palestinian town east of Bethlehem under the administration of the Palestinian National Authority. DAAR combines an architectural studio and a residency program, and has involved a multidisciplinary group of local and international participants in their program – from artists, designers, architects to philosophers, writers, and activists – with the aim to "use spatial practice as a form of political intervention."<sup>231</sup> Spatial practice here relates directly to the conflictual and contested region of Palestine, its colonization and monitoring by the Israeli occupation, and the prominent role that architecture plays in the process of reclaiming one's native land.<sup>232</sup>

DAAR's focus lies on understanding the changing conceptions of space and property through the occupation of Palestine, and operates in close proximity with some of the popular movements that continue to struggle for their right to return to their lands of origin. But, as mentioned earlier, while DAAR affirms its solidarity with "the full implementation of the right of return," it simultaneously acts as a critical agent within the conflict by stating that "we do not believe that return can offer a solution to the condition of refugeeness by simply reversing the trajectory of time."<sup>233</sup> Instead, they explore the political potential of the spaces that arise between a site of origin and a site of exile with the potential of bringing forward the project of decolonization, explained by the group as follows:

"Decolonization" [...] is not bound as a concept, nor is it bound in space or in time: it is an ongoing practice of deactivation and reorientation understood both in its presence and its endlessness. In the context of Palestine, it is not bound within the 1967 occupied

231 Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture After Revolution* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), p. 28.

232 Weizman, who is also co-conceiver of the Centre of Research Architecture (CRA) with Thomas Keenan and Susan Schuppli at Goldsmiths University in London, speaks in this regard of Israel's settlement architecture as a form of destruction by design: "[T]echniques of destruction become a kind of de facto urban planning." In this context the CRA investigates what it calls "forensic architecture" as an alternative take on the reconstruction of evidence. See: Yates McKee and Meg McLagan in conversation with Eyal Weizman, "Forensic Architecture: An Interview with Eyal Weizman," in Meg McLagan and Yates McKee (eds.), *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of Nongovernmental Activism* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), p. 445. See also: Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London/New York: Verso, 2007).

233 Alessandro Petti et al., *Architecture After Revolution*, p. 39.

territories. Decolonization, in our understanding, seeks to unleash a process of open-ended transformation toward visions of equality and justice. The return of refugees, which we interpret as entailing the right to move and settle within the complete borders of Israel–Palestine [...] is a fundamental stage in decolonization.<sup>234</sup>

DAAR makes this question of decolonization concrete by focusing its work on the infrastructures of colonization – refugee camps, the remainders of Israeli settlements, or “public” spaces – that were never desired by the Palestinian people in the first place. Should one hold onto the right of return as a “return in time” as the only possible trajectory in relation to the condition of exile, or is there a third option imaginable in the form of what DAAR explains as “a subversion of the originally intended use [of such infrastructures], repurposing it for other ends”?<sup>235</sup> This is at the core of what DAAR describes as an “Architecture After Revolution,” the title of their 2013 publication: not maintaining the exile/return dichotomy, but investing in a transformative third option that re-contextualizes the right to return in new future scenarios and re-composes people and state anew through a process that seeks “to decolonize a system rather than establish a State.”<sup>236</sup> The possibility to establish what DAAR calls a “future extraterritorial polity” will be of crucial importance to understand their practice.<sup>237</sup>

DAAR’s project *Returns* (2009) is an architectural proposal for the village of Miska, colonized by Israel in 1948, and the Palestinian refugee camp Dheisheh, established south of Bethlehem in the West Bank in the same year, and housing more than three thousand refugees. The infrastructure of the camp evidently was not desired and should not be considered as any kind of solution, but its historical role in facilitating popular mass movements such as the resistance groups Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), demonstrates that it also cannot be reduced to a symbol of mere victimhood, because “the camp continuously develops and rearticulates the self-conception of refugeehood in a way that maintains its vanguard political status. Rather than enacting normalization these constructions became potential agents of decolonization.”<sup>238</sup> *Returns* takes the form of two circles of the same width, one to be realized in Miska, one in Dheisheh: an intervention on the site of origin that mirrors the one in exile. But whereas DAAR proposes the circle

234 Ibid., p. 18.

235 Ibid., p. 21.

236 Ibid., p. 32.

237 Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, “The Morning After: Profaning Colonial Architecture,” in McLagan and McKee, *Sensible Politics*, p. 467.

238 Alessandro Petti et al., *Architecture After Revolution*, p. 50.

in Dheisheh to become emptied from any construction, turning it into a public space in the crowded refugee camp, the circle in Miska would house a solid building.<sup>239</sup> As such, the intervention articulates the reality of a third option: acknowledging Miska as the “site of origin” parallel to the Dheisheh as the “site of exile” as the beginning of the refugee community.<sup>240</sup> While *Returns* is yet to be realized, another project entitled *Concrete Tent* (2015), commissioned by the related organization Campus in Camps, realizes part of the proposal.<sup>241</sup> The project is situated in Dheisheh and consists of a model of a refugee tent that is cast in concrete, operating as a space of meeting and assembly. The structure represents a condition of permanent exile. Dheisheh thus becomes something between the site of exile and a space, which due to its long history, inevitably has become something of a “home.” *Concrete Tent* thus acknowledges the history of Dheisheh while never giving in to the idea that this could ever be the site of arrival: “the re-creation of a tent made of concrete today is an attempt to preserve the cultural and symbolic importance of this archetype for the narration of the Nakba, but at the same time to engage the present political condition of exile.”<sup>242</sup>

As we saw in the case of both *Returns* and *Concrete Tent*, DAAR’s projects are speculative and literally concrete at the same time, constructing infrastructures in the present while speculating on their future iterations as part of a third path; the dialectical outcome of origin and exile. Another relevant example in this regard is DAAR’s complex research project on the lines that formed the divided territories of Israel and Palestine in the decades following the Nakba.<sup>243</sup> The lines that formed DAAR’s point of departure were the ones drawn upon a map dividing the West Bank in the early 1990s, as part of the so-called Oslo Accords in Norway. DAAR notes that “[b]ecause the documents signed were printed hard copies in which the lines were just over a millimeter wide, in real space the line acquired a width of about five meters,”<sup>244</sup> and it was this space – the space articulated through the thickness of the line – which after the collapse of the Oslo Accords would remain

239 In the case of Miska, the structure was modeled after the al-Feniq program, a cultural center established in Dheisheh, projecting the common cultural project emerging from the camp into a foundation of a future return. As such, the first building block of the return to Miska would be the common infrastructure that emerged from decades in exile in the camp, as DAAR argues that “the veritable revolution of return is fundamentally a revolution in relation to property.” Ibid., p. 59.

240 Ibid., p. 54.

241 Whereas DAAR is the architectural outcome of Petti, Hilal and Weizman’s collaboration, Campus in Camps is considered to be the “pedagogical wing,” led by Petti and Hilal. Cited from e-mail exchange with Alessandro Petti, Feb. 8, 2017.

242 Retrieved from the “Dheisheh” project section of the website of Campus in Camps, <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/concrete-tent/>.

243 The point of departure was formed by historian and former deputy mayor of Jerusalem Meron Benvenisti, who, in relation to the 1949 cease-fire lines drawn by military commanders Moshe Dayan and Abdullah al-Tal, asked the question “who owns the ‘width of the line’?” Petti, Hilal, and Weizman, *Architecture After Revolution*, p. 151.

244 Ibid., p. 153.

“[w]ithout legal definition.”<sup>245</sup>

This example leads to the most important and challenging example of this research, the *Common Assembly* (2011) project, which deals with the Palestinian Legislative Council building. Constructed in 1996 at the height of enthusiasm about the Oslo accords, the now abandoned parliament was challenged by three spatial realities at the same time. One part belongs to the Israeli occupation, one part belongs to the Palestinian authorities, and a third part, defined by the thickness of the line, belongs to no one. The work of DAAR consisted in tracing the exact location of the line through the parliament, which they swept and polished clean. A photograph of the space shows how the line is now visible in the middle of the parliament, adding a new spatial level to the architecture and implicating the construction as part of a new extraterritorial reality – the material and spatial reality of the line itself. It was this line in which DAAR claimed to “identify a space that could host and embody decolonization.”<sup>246</sup> For it is in this space, in this third option, that a radically new model of assembly emerges – an assembly of an architecture after the revolution:

It is in the heart of these unlegislated spaces that a sense of communality beyond state institutions can be re-imagined. It is by re-using these present political ruins – parliaments and borders – that a common extraterritorial assembly may emerge.<sup>247</sup>

Let us try to summarize the practices of Steyerl, Not An Alternative, De Bruijne, and DAAR in the context of Embedded Art, as well as their overall relation to Popular Propaganda Art and the performance of the popular, composition of a people, and construction of Popular Realism.

The embeddedness in the popular mass movement is articulated differently in all four practices. In the case of Steyerl, the museum is identified as a battlefield which includes popular mass movements such as the Kurds and the Gezi Park protests. As a result, her embeddedness in the museum expands into her embeddedness in the popular mass movement. In the case of Not An Alternative, members of the group are already embedded either in the field of activism or that of art. The result is a parallel embeddedness, repurposing means from the institution of art for the popular mass movement, sometimes leading to completely new institutional models. In the case of De Bruijne, his

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

embeddedness is primarily within the labor union and its decision-making structures, and although his link to the institute of art is not severed completely, he institutes the role of art within the movement itself. In the case of DAAR, its members are embedded within civil and refugee movements in the present, but aim to articulate a third option of a “people-in-the-making” that defines its aim for a future embeddedness which the present does not yet allow for. In many of these cases, we observed that we are dealing with a engaged *and* critical embeddedness, whether it concerns Not An Alternative’s critique of the model of general assembly in Occupy, or DAAR’s refusal to commit to the existing dichotomy of exile/return. Embeddedness as such is not the equivalent of a passive acceptance of political doctrine, but relates to the effort of actively shaping the popular mass movement while being fully part of it at the same time.

The performance of emerging power, central to the practice of Popular Propaganda Art, manifests itself differently depending on the form of embeddedness. Steyerl’s work impacts the performance of the popular and composition of a people directly by enlarging the institution of art as battlefield and employing art to re-compose – or in her case, “edit” – a people by assembling the viewer with the protestor. In Steyerl’s work, we can define Popular Realism as a construction of reality that emerges through a complete erasure of the boundaries between the institution of art, the military-industrial complex, and the popular mass movement. Not An Alternative’s projects clearly contribute to mobilization and civic action in the context of the performance of the popular, but try to widen them at the same time by moving beyond the spontaneous dimension of protest toward a more structured claim to new forms of institutional power. Not An Alternative contributes to the formation of new identities through its conceptual appropriation of branding to contribute to the composition of a people. The form of Popular Realism they try to invoke throughout these works is one in which institutions – whether in the form of public space or a museum – are radically reclaimed, repurposed, and redistributed – or even re-instituted – among popular majorities. De Bruijne’s work effectively mobilizes broad constituents, both within the union and outside of it, from commuters moving in train stations, to political parties that see his screenings. His work further contributes to the composition of a people by proposing a new visual identity of the Dutch working class. The form of Popular Realism that de Bruijne attempts to initiate is articulated through the demands of a broad coalition of documented and undocumented workers, with a strengthening and expansion of the union as a result. DAAR’s work acknowledges and supports the right to return of Palestinian refugees, but simultaneously aims to open

a third option around which a people-in-the-making has yet to emerge. Its projects contribute to a broad involvement of its own members, residents to their program, as well as the governing structures of Palestinian municipalities and refugee camps, and as such contribute to the performance of the popular, albeit on the very specific terms of what they describe as a third option. In the process, DAAR effectively contributes to the formation of new compositions of identity through strategies of decolonization and political claims to extraterritoriality as a potential space of “common assembly.” The form of Popular Realism they try to invoke is described through their concept of a third path, a conception of the popular that emerges beyond a dialectic of the origin/exile dichotomy into a new extraterritorial reality.

In our analysis of Embedded Art, we have already touched slightly on the final organizational model of Popular Propaganda Art that we will discuss, *Organizational Art*. In the case of Not An Alternative as well as DAAR, we are dealing with collectives and organizations founded by artists, encompassing certain artistic dimensions of their own. Not An Alternative is something of a militant slogan in its own right, whereas DAAR contains a futuristic dimension by being an art residency of an extraterritorial domain of political and artistic practice yet in the making. But in neither case could we say that the organizations are themselves works of art. This is different with Organizational Art, which maintains a direct relation to the popular mass movement, but is itself also an artistic composition of sorts.

## ORGANIZATIONAL ART

With the term Organizational Art we mean to focus on artists who work indirectly with popular mass movements, through artist organizations they have founded. The artist organization is not the same as an artist collective, because the former considers the very notion of an organization as the material an artwork is made of: the organization is created in compository, artistic, and aesthetic terms.<sup>248</sup>

In the case of artist collectives, artist initiatives, or artist platforms such as Not An Alternative and DAAR we already saw how important the organizational dimension of artistic practice is in relation to the

248 In 2015, dramaturg Florian Malzacher, curator Joanna Warsza, and I initiated the three-day conference *Artist Organizations International* from January 9–11, in a first attempt to theorize Organizational Art through the observation that “[a]rtist organizations are founded by artists; artist organizations choose the form of the organization; artist organizations seek for structural engagement; artist organizations propose social/political agendas.” These observations were debated by over twenty representatives of artist organizations worldwide. Congress statement and video registrations are archived at <http://www.artistorganizations.org/>, see also Andrea Liu, “Artists Organisations International” *Afterimage Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (2015): pp. 2–3.; 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): pp. 20–27.

performance of the popular and the composition of a people. We could say that the alliances of artists, activists, and theorists (Not An Alternative) or their diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds (DAAR) prefigure the aim of composing a people beyond the existing Us/Them divide imposed through War on Terror Propaganda. In the case of Organizational Art, this aspect is pushed even further. The composition of an artist organization is not only aimed at prefiguring a different composition of a people, it should also be understood and analyzed as an artwork in itself. We touched on the idea of the organization-as-artwork already in Claire Bishop’s discussion of Tania Bruguera’s *Cátedra Arte de Conducta*, and in this section, we will try to deepen our understanding of such practices by defining a practice of Organizational Art as part of Popular Propaganda Art. In the process, we will address three aspects of Organizational Art. The first relates to understanding an artist organization as an artwork. The second concerns the artist organization’s relation to and impact on popular mass movements. The third is the infrastructure that the model of the artist organization provides to its founders and members, addressing not only the needs of popular mass movements, but also the precariat of artists and cultural workers themselves.

Whereas the practice of Embedded Art can be elucidated through a large variety of examples of artists involved in popular mass movements throughout history, the case of Organizational Art is more particular. An early example would be the work of Dutch anarchist-turned-fascist artist Erich Wichmann, who co-founded a political party in Amsterdam known as the Rapaille Partij (Rabble Party) in 1921. Wichmann was a staunch critic of parliamentary democracy and compulsory voting, and convinced that the presumption that uninformed citizens would be able to make proper decisions on issues regarding their own governance posed a grave danger.<sup>249</sup> To prove his point, the artist did not only produce an ongoing wave of curious pamphlets mocking citizenry as spineless “milk drinkers,” but also ran with the Rapaille Partij for the Amsterdam municipal elections.<sup>250</sup> Leader of the party was famous homeless man and street musician Cornelis de Gelder a.k.a Hadjeme-maar (If-you-could-have-me), a ludic alcoholic that ran the political platform with an agenda co-authored by the artist, promising the citizens of Amsterdam jenever (gin) and beer for the prize of only 5 cents

249 Koen Vossen, *Vrij vissen in het Vondelpark: Kleine politieke partijen in Nederland 1918–1940* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2003), pp. 143–44.

250 The pamphlet in question was titled “The White Danger: On Milk, Milk Use, Milk Abuse and Milk Gluttony,” posing milk as the ultimate consumption of petty-bourgeois citizenry. See: Erich Wichmann, “Het witte gevaar: Over melk, melkgebruik, melkmisbruik en melkzucht,” in Wim Zaal (ed.), *Erich Wichmann: Lenin stinkt en andere satirische geschriften gekozen door Wim Zaal* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Arbeiderspers, 1971).

and the possibility to fish and hunt in de Vondelpark, one of the main public parks of the city.<sup>251</sup> The party won 14,000 votes, amounting to two seats, strengthening Wichmann's conviction that parliamentary democracy operated on the basis of the control and manipulation of public information, driving him later in his life to Mussolini's Fascist Party and its sympathizing Futurist movement.<sup>252</sup> As a consequence, Wichmann and his Rapaille Partij became marginalized in the art-historical canon, although Wichmann undeniably had created one of the first models of the artist organization. The Rapaille Partij was not simply a collective of artists or a political party with artist members, but an organization conceived and operating as an artwork in its own right while achieving actual political results at the very same time.

A more contemporary example of the artist organization, including a similar flirt with authoritarianism, would be the Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), an artist organization founded in Yugoslavia in 1984. NSK consists of several "departments" formed by artist groups, among which the most prominent are the music group Laibach and the artist group IRWIN.<sup>253</sup> Created in the Eastern European block during the emergence of ethno-nationalist tensions running throughout Yugoslavia and the ongoing influence of the Soviet Union in the region, one could say the core work of NSK was focused on the performativity and morphology of totalitarianism.<sup>254</sup> NSK members presented themselves as a homogeneous collective. The Laibach music group dressed in what looked suspiciously like Nazi uniforms and accompanying hairstyles, and their manifestos were based on continuous claims on the necessity of unity, centralization, order, collectivism, and loyalty.<sup>255</sup>

251 Quoted from "De Raad," the official election newspaper of the Rapaille Party, original quotes in Dutch "De Jajem 5 cent, Bier ook 5 cent" and "Vrij visschen in het Vondelpark," see: F.J. Haffmans (ed.), *Geest, Koolzuur en Zijk: Briefwisseling van Erich Wichman* (Westervoort: Van Gruting, 1999), p. 69.

252 The work and writings of Italian futurist frontman Marinetti were an important influence on Wichmann. Just like Marinetti's proximity to Mussolini's Fascist Party, Wichmann sought to ally himself to Dutch Fascist movements. Nonetheless, Wichmann biographers Frans van Burkom and Hans Mulder have argued that, if it were not for his early death, the artist's anarchist sympathies would have proven irreconcilable with later Nazi-fascism. They argue that Wichmann was principally a "chaot," a bringer of chaos. See: Frans van Burkom and Hans Mulder, *Erich Wichmann 1890–1929: Tussen idealisme en rancune* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 1983), p. 108–9, 159.

253 Other founding members were Theatre of the Sisters of Scipio Nasica, now the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung, as well as the New Collectivism design department.

254 NSK member artist Miran Mohar mentions the disappointment of actual fascist groups attending NSK projects: "Interestingly, despite our iconography, we were not of much interest to ultranationalists in the long run. In fact, they were mostly quite disappointed and perplexed when they looked more closely at us. They attended the events of NSK and its groups because our iconography was apparently appealing to them, but its content did not meet their expectations and they did not know what to make of it." Miran Mohar, "Why Neue Slowenische Kunst in German?" *e-flux journal*, No. 57 (Sep. 2014).

255 The NSK's "Eternal Book of Laws" lays out the "Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK Members." It states, among others, that "[a] member of the NSK should be hardworking; he should respect the concepts of NSK and its history, be compliant and cooperative in carrying out joint decisions, and irrefragable in administering the general and secret statutory and moral norms of NSK." Such principles are organized around the belief of "the hierarchical principle and existence of the supreme substance (ICS – the immanent, consistent spirit),"

IRWIN produced posters and paintings with a strong *Blut und Boden* aesthetics, combining pagan symbols such as the deer with heroic workers and Germanic symbols. What remained absent, however, was an exact ideological declaration. NSK manifestos and interviews were full of rhetoric on anti-individualism and the need of absolute order, but never explain *why* this order was needed in the first place and *whom* this order would be benefiting. One could say that the NSK attempted to enact totalitarianism as something of a "pure form": mobilizing deep human desires for unity through theatrical staging, but bypassing violent action. This strategy, known as "over-identification," is essentially a critique of a political regime by adopting its form and rhetoric, but in such an excessive way that it ridicules and undermines it.<sup>256</sup> Nonetheless, as an artist organization, the NSK brought about semi-functioning political infrastructures, most famously when the NSK transformed into the "NSK State in Time," a new state founded in 1992 that issues actual passports, but does not exist as a physical territory, rather only as a geography of ideas.<sup>257</sup> The lack of territory however has not stopped 16,000 citizens from joining the State in Time.<sup>258</sup> In this context, one could see the 2015 concert of Laibach in North-Korea – the first international band to play in the highly secluded country – as real-time *international diplomacy* between the State in Time and the neo-Stalinist state.<sup>259</sup>

Taking these two examples into consideration, the artist organization can already be valued on two levels. First, as an *artistic composition* that challenges the deficit of existing political models. And second, in terms of *political effect* as they operate in an actual political reality of upheaval and social change, and potentially bring about new changes themselves. Whether these changes are desirable, such as in the case of Wichmann, or even in control of the artists themselves, such as in the case of Laibach, is of course yet another discussion.

While we could discuss several historical examples of artist organizations, we can observe a substantial rise of such organizational practi-

which demands members to accept that "the association denies each member his own freedom of choice regarding his religious persuasion, and political and aesthetic affiliation." Neue Slowenische Kunst, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (Los Angeles: AMOK Books, 1991), p. 4.

256 A term defined by Slavoj Žižek. See: Slavoj Žižek, "Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?" *M'ARS Casopis Moderne Galerije*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1993): pp. 3–4. BAVO further expands the concept of over-identification in relation to the contemporary practices of Christoph Schlingensiefel and Atelier van Lieshout. See: BAVO, *Culture Activism Today: The Art of Over-Identification* (Rotterdam: Episode Publishers, 2007).

257 Documented in IRWIN, *State in Time* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2014).

258 Information on the amount of NSK passport holders is retrieved from a post on <http://www.nsk-state.com>, the official digital channel from the NSK State in Time, posted on Jan. 11, 2016. The first NSK Citizen's Congress was organized Oct. 21–23, 2010 in Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. See: Alexei Monroe (ed.), *State of Emergence: A Documentary of the First NSK Citizen's Congress* (Leipzig/London: Poison Cabinet Press, 2011).

259 The event was scheduled as part of the "Laibach Liberation Tour." See: Oliver Hotham, "Laibach to Play Sound of Music covers at Pyongyang's First Rock Concert," *The Guardian*, Jul. 22, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/22/north-korea-laibach-pyongyang-concert>.

ces in the 21st century. The reason for this rise should be added as the third aspect of Organizational Art: the artist organization is not only an artistic composition or instrument to achieve a certain political effect, but also as *system of life support for artists* themselves. We should understand the rise of Organizational Art as a result of the growing precariat, of which artist and cultural workers form a substantial part. Whereas collectives such as the English Carrotworkers Collective or the German Haben und Brauchen are contemporary examples of artists and cultural workers who attempt to unionize in their struggle against unpaid labor and a general absence of social security in the art field,<sup>260</sup> the artist organization could be considered to be a similar response to a lack of infrastructure for the cultural precariat. It is far more effective to negotiate salaries and long-term funding when one presents one's practice as an organization rather than as an individual artist-entrepreneur. Nevertheless, the primary objective of artist organizations is not to secure better funding for the artistic precariat, but the exploration of the organization as artwork and the mobilization of the artist organization to achieve political effect, to which the structural funding and social protection of its initiators and members is inherent.

In the case of contemporary Organizational Art, we can think of artist organizations such as the International Institute of Political Murder (IIPM), The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (labofii), or Zentrum für Politische Schönheit (ZPS), each of which operates as an actual organization and provides income to its respective founders or members, while simultaneously exploring the organization as artistic composition and as a tool to achieve political change. IIPM was founded by the Swiss theater maker Milo Rau, and its main aim was to challenge the international judicial order through re-enacting historical trials and manifestos, exploring the theatrical and visual dimensions of evidence.<sup>261</sup> Labofii, founded by John Jordan and Isabelle Frémeaux, operates mainly from the French Zone A Défendre (ZAD) nearby Nantes in France: an autonomous communal camp of climate

260 The Carrotworkers Collective consists for a large part of interns and former interns in the cultural field, and organizes monthly assemblies, symposiums, workshops, and publications to weaponize cultural workers against exploitation. Being something between pamphlet, questionnaire and – surprisingly – photo-romances that narrate the struggles of female cultural workers, their guide *Surviving Internships* (2009) documents their analysis of precarious labor in the cultural realm. Carrot Workers Collective, *Surviving Internships: A Counter Guide to Free Labour in the Arts* (London: Hato Press, 2009). Haben und Brauchen focuses particularly on the city of Berlin, calling attention to working conditions of artists through pamphlets, petitions, debates, and lectures, while simultaneously calling for recognition of the unique alternative artistic and cultural sphere of the city in the face of gentrification and neoliberal politics.

261 One of the most controversial examples in this regard is IIPM's production *Five Easy Pieces* (2016), in which child actors aged eight to thirteen narrate the story of the Belgian child molester and serial killer Marc Dutroux, as a form of public "evidence" of the changed Belgium national identity after the fact, while simultaneously forming "evidence" of the tricky ethics of Rau's own use of minors for his piece, described by Rau as "connecting the idea of, as an adult, working with children, and this crime against children." *Kunstenfestivaldesarts*, "Milo Rau / Five Easy Pieces / Interview," May 16, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/166817332>.

activists through which labofii develops its public carnivalesque agitational actions against corporations they consider implicated in global climate crimes.<sup>262</sup> Lastly, the ZPS emerged from a large collective of German artists and political campaigners with the aim of developing high-profile media actions they call "aggressive humanism" related to the refugee crisis, such as their highly controversial proposal to bury the corpses of refugees that died at sea in cemeteries in the German capital.<sup>263</sup>

While the very names of these artist organizations hint at the utopian dimension of the endeavor of re-imagining what an organization is, could, or should be, they are simultaneously shaped and formed by popular mass movements and civil upheaval. In the case of IIPM in relation to social justice movements, in the case of labofii in relation to climate activism, and in the case of the ZPS in relation to the struggle for refugee rights. Using the form of the organization here 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 – to not just finance an artistic "project" with a social or political dimension, but to co-conceive fully functioning organizational infrastructures that provide income and the capacity of long-term engagement of its members.

The first of two detailed case studies that we will discuss in the context of contemporary Organizational Art as part of Popular Propaganda Art, will be related to the work of Tania Bruguera. We will begin by discussing her theoretical output on the notions of political art and her concept of "useful art" to understand how her practice of Organizational Art came into being.

In her 2010 article "Political Art Transforms the Audience into Citizens" Bruguera argues for a "difference in art between representing what is political and acting politically."<sup>264</sup> Political art, she continues, is not merely art that acts as an instrument of politics, which she considers – reductively – as a form of "art-propaganda."<sup>265</sup> Instead, Bruguera claims:

262 For example, labofii organized in 2016 a training day on the "Art of the Blockade," engaging participants to imagine alternative forms of protecting the ZAD, which would simultaneously operate as visual canvases and sculptural interventions of sorts. Labofii also does practical propaganda work, for example by producing the English translation of the Mauvaise Troupe Collective's *Defending the ZAD* (Paris: Editions de l'éclat, 2016).

263 *The Dead Are Coming* (2015) consisted of a campaign to bury migrants who had died in the Mediterranean Sea in Berlin, the capital of what ZPS regards as the "bureaucratic murderers" responsible for these deaths. Sanctioned by the relatives of the deceased, the first burial of a Syrian migrant took place on Jun. 16, 2015. Chairs placed with the names of thirty-eight invited German politicians remained empty. Henri Neuendorf, "Controversial German Art Collective Buries Deceased Migrants in Berlin," *Artnet*, Jun. 18, 2015, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/art-collective-bury-dead-migrants-berlin-308975>.

264 Tania Bruguera, "Politische Kunst macht das Publikum zu Bürgern," *Texte Zur Kunst*, No. 80 (Dec. 2010): pp. 134–36, translation retrieved from [taniabruquera.com](http://www.taniabruquera.com), section "Texts", <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/458-0-Political+art+transforms+the+audience+into+citizens.htm>.

265 Ibid.

Political art has doubts, not certainties; it has intentions, not programs; it shares with those who find it, not imposes on them; it is defined while it is done; it is an experience, not an image; it is something entering the field of emotions and that is more complex than a unit of thought.<sup>266</sup>

Over time, Bruguera has begun to rethink the notion of propaganda as a potentially progressive form of practice. Relevant in this particular text is the clarity with which Bruguera discusses the aims of what we have discussed so far as Popular Propaganda Art. For example when she writes that “[p]olitical art (which is not more artistic than it is political) is not comfortable because it speaks from a position of demand.”<sup>267</sup> This relates directly to what we have discussed as the importance of “demands” in the formation of a Popular Mass Movement through the inverted propaganda model. This intersection between popular and artistic demand is the result of what Bruguera defines as a “new people’s political language,” similar to what we have discussed as the role of art in the process of composing a people, the aesthetic and morphological construction of a new collectivity in the making.<sup>268</sup>

In order for art to act politically, Bruguera confronts the question how exactly to define the “use” of art. Her answer comes in the form of her “Introduction to Useful Art” (2011) and “Reflexions on Arte Útil” (2012), in which she essentially focuses on art as a tool of politicized civil society, rather than an established political class. The difference lies between what she calls “art-propaganda” as a tool of the state, versus a useful art – what we term Popular Propaganda Art – as a tool of politicized civil society.<sup>269</sup> Different from Steyerl, Bruguera argues that “[w]e 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,” indeed emphasizing the civic and not the statist as the political dimension of political art.<sup>270</sup> Starting from historical examples such as the “Manifiesto de Arte Útil” (1969) written by Argentinean artist Eduardo Costa, Bruguera argues that the “utilitarian component” that she is seeking in the civic usages of art “does not aim to make something that is already

266 Ibid.

267 Tania Bruguera, “Political Art Statement,” 2010, <http://www.taniabruquera.com/cms/388-0-Political+Art+Statement.htm>.

268 Ibid.

269 Stephen Wright, with whom Bruguera collaborated intensively to develop the implications of transforming the notion of spectatorship into usership, writes: “usership [...] names not just a form of opportunity-dependent relationality, but a self-regulating mode of engagement and operation. Which makes usership itself a potentially powerful tool. In the same way that usership is all about repurposing available ways and means without seeking to possess them, it can itself be repurposed as a mode of leverage, a fulcrum, a shifter, and as such, a game-changer.” Stephen Wright, *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2013), p. 68.

270 Tania Bruguera, “Introduction on Useful Art,” transcript from a conversation on Useful Art at the Immigrant Movement International headquarters on Apr. 23, 2011, New York, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKPPmmNVuAs>.

useful more beautiful, but on the contrary aims to focus on the beauty of being useful.”<sup>271</sup> Useful art, she argues, remains art insofar as “it is the elaboration of a proposal that does not yet exist in the real world and because it is made with the hope and belief that something may be done better, even when the conditions for it to happen may not be there yet,” but it can only be termed as fully useful when it is capable of transforming “affection into effectiveness.”<sup>272</sup>

To understand the concrete outcome of Bruguera’s definition of political art and practice of useful art, we turn to her artist organization Immigrant Movement International (IMI), which resulted from Bruguera’s collaboration with the New York-based public arts organization Creative Time and the Queens Museum.<sup>273</sup> Demanding nothing but minimum wage, Bruguera lived together with an immigrant family in the city, and opened a storefront in a former beauty salon in Corona, a neighborhood in Queens, from where numerous activities were organized: ‘English lessons, classes on immigrants’ rights and how to acquire legal documents, music lessons for children, [...] workshops that sought to create a manifesto on behalf of migrants, and a workshop on what could be meant by useful art.’<sup>274</sup>

This modest community center that ran for five years, had an agenda as pragmatic as it was radically imaginative. On the one hand, it operated as a practical space of empowerment and community building for immigrants, politicizing them by giving concrete insight in their juridical status and by unifying those often hidden in informal economies because 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 claim the immigrant as a new “global citizen.”<sup>275</sup>

This endeavor to challenge artistic authorship by turning into an “artist-initiator” or “artist-convener” who invites a broader coalition around an artist organization becomes most concrete in the 2011 IMI-issued *International Migrant Manifesto*, collectively written by “immigration academics, activists, politicians, and community members”

271 Ibid.

272 Tania Bruguera, “Reflexions on Arte Útil (Useful Art),” in Nick Aikens et al. (eds.), *What’s the Use? Constellations of Art, History and Knowledge* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2016), p. 316.

273 Bruguera first conceptualized IMI while in residence in Paris during the 2005 riots in the *banlieus*, articulating the notion of useful art and being-immigrant as part of the same paradigm: “It was at this time that I first identified as an immigrant. I felt impotent and realized I had no other resource but art to address this situation; therefore, art had to be useful.” See: “Tania Bruguera,” *Artforum*, Dec. 6, 2011, <https://www.artforum.com/words/id=29724>.

274 Thompson, *Seeing Power*, pp. 98–99.

275 “Tania Bruguera,” *Artforum*.



at the IMI headquarters in Corona.<sup>276</sup> The manifesto claims migrants as global citizens and an “engine of change.”<sup>277</sup> Rather than victimizing the figure of the migrant, the manifesto attempts to politicize them, claiming for immigrants “the same privileges as corporations and the international elite, as they have the freedom to travel and to establish themselves wherever they choose,” while demanding that “the functionality of international borders should be re-imagined in the service of humanity.”<sup>278</sup> The transnational dimension of IMI took the form of the short-lived *Migrant People Party (MPP)*, founded by Bruguera to participate in the 2012 elections in Mexico, not as an electable party, but as a party that organized public events and interventions in public space to put migrants rights’ on the agenda of existing political parties. Bruguera’s migrant as global citizen is the foundation of her particular strand of Popular Realism that emerges from her practice of Organizational Art.

The tension of IMI is located in the ambiguous nature of Organizational Art. On the one hand, IMI is a radical imaginative structure that attempts to redefine immigrants around the world as a vanguard of a new transnational world order to come. On the other, IMI is a real-time community center capable of providing modest support to its often highly precarious community, which – operating in the grey and black economy – face the daily threat of abuse, incarceration, and deportation. The outcome of IMI should be evaluated through this very duality, between the possible and the real. And while the artistic dimension is crucial here for opening up a radical imaginative capacity of what an organization could be, it is simultaneously the cause of IMI’s fragility. Bruguera’s capacity for gaining funding for her work is strongly connected to her name as an artist, and her projects operate for as long as she is able to allocate funds from the institution of art to her own artist organization. When financing comes to an end, projects such as IMI or the MPP are added to her project archive, with a reference of them being “courtesy” of the artist.

From that perspective, we can question to what extent existing immigrant rights organizations that are not conceived as artworks are not far more effective in their long-term work, and far less dependent on the investment of a single person. In the NGO world directors come and go, but the organization, in principle, lives on. While for art-world standards Bruguera’s Organizational Art is long-term, from the pers-

276 Tania Bruguera et al., “Migrant Manifesto,” *Immigrant Movement International*, Nov. 2011, <http://immigrant-movement.us/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/IM-International-Migrant-Manifesto2.pdf>

277 Ibid.

278 Ibid.

pective of NGOs and humanitarian work they are rather short-lived. In the meantime, Bruguera has continued to set up a variety of new institutions, such as the *The Hannah Arendt International Institute of Artivism* (2016–ongoing) and a campaign to participate as a presidential candidate in the next Cuban elections while calling upon fellow Cubans to do the same, all of which limit her capacity to continue the endeavor of IMI.<sup>279</sup> Artist James Bridle notes that we are dealing with what could be considered a progressive variation of the use of a “front organization,” such as deployed by both intelligence agencies as well as blacklisted organizations.<sup>280</sup>

The trail of organizations founded by Bruguera seems to suggest that at the moment the artist, after a long-term investment, decides to move on, the feasibility of the infrastructure is put at risk. This touches on a paradox of the “usefulness” of useful art. While it most certainly has a concrete effect on a given community at the moment of its conception, its radical imaginative capacity seems to be its most durable and lasting outcome. While this might be hard to quantify, it is most certainly “useful,” but possibly on slightly different and more paradoxical terms than the artist intends it to be.

The second case study that we discuss in the context of Organizational Art as part of Popular Propaganda Art, is related to the work of Turkish-Kurdish artist Ahmet Ögüt. We will briefly explore his ideas on the relation between the artistic and the political, and what he terms the “currency of collective consciousness,” the role of art in articulating alternative models of validation that go beyond those of financial currencies.

Ögüt’s explains the roots of his politicization in his essay «CCC: Currency of Collective Consciousness» (2015), in which he narrates his time growing up in the Turkish civil war, in a town patrolled by tanks where speaking one’s mother tongue was in itself considered a crime: “I am coming from a place where I learned the importance of consciousness – more importantly, collective consciousness – when

279 The Hannah Arendt Institute for Artivism (Instar) was conceived at the occasion of the re-opening of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States, with the aim to “create peaceful tools for policy change and civic literacy.” The school is organized in four departments, “Useful Art,” “Behavior Art,” “Applied Arts,” and “AEST-ethics.” It operates through a three-step methodology: “Think Tank,” focused on rethinking policy and constitutional transformation; “Do Tank,” in which policy/constitutional performances are translated into popular public performances; and “Wish Tank,” consisting of residencies of artists, activists, and others with a socially engaged practice that feeds back into the “Think” and “Do” Tanks. Retrieved from the “Mission” section of the Instar website, <http://artivismo.org/english/#mission>. Bruguera’s presidential bid was announced on Oct. 16, 2016 by the artist during the three-day Creative Time Summit in Washington entitled “Occupy the Future.” Victoria Burnett, “Artist Asks Cubans to Imagine They Are Running for President,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 14, 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/15/arts/design/tania-bruguera-cuba-creative-time-summit-video.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/15/arts/design/tania-bruguera-cuba-creative-time-summit-video.html?_r=0).

280 From personal conversation with Bridle on the concept of the artist organization, Athens, Apr. 23.

one is isolated both culturally and politically.”<sup>281</sup> Such collective consciousness, Ögüt argues, is a crucial currency to develop in the domain of politically engaged contemporary art, whose internal economy is plagued by corrupt finances and sponsors, as became evident in a variety of boycotts of large-scale art biennials in which Ögüt was involved.<sup>282</sup> What Ögüt claims is needed, are strategies of sabotage and para-sitic practice in order to break art’s bonds to ruling corporate and political interests, so as not to abandon but repurpose the infrastructure of art with the aim of social transformation. Concretely this means that the artist becomes an “intervenor,” an agent who challenges and rearticulates the relation between the institution of art and the larger social realm.

Although written as a proposal, Ögüt’s “CCC: Currency of Collective Consciousness” should rather be understood as an artist manifesto after the act; he himself is the intervenor that institutes, in between worlds, the para-institutions that introduce new forms of currency of collective consciousness that we are theorizing as Organizational Art. This is most particularly the case in his Organizational Art practice, taking the form of *The Silent University* (SU, 2012–ongoing). Ögüt conceptualized the SU as part of a collaboration with the Tate Museum and the Delfina Foundation in London, as well as the political organizations Southwark Refugee Communities Forum, Migrants Resource Centre, and the United Migrant Workers Education Project. SU’s aim was to create a para-institution that Ögüt called an “autonomous knowledge platform” in order to recruit “asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants with a professional background in their country of origin who, due to systemic social exclusion and discrimination, are unable to put their knowledge to professional use in the countries where they currently live.”<sup>283</sup> A core focus lies on asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants with an academic background that are not recognized in their country of arrival, something the SU considers as a destruction of capital that can be countered by activating “the all too often unrecognized knowledge of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants that have been condemned to silence in their new countries of residence.”<sup>284</sup>

281 Ahmet Ögüt, “CCC: Currency of Collective Consciousness,” *e-flux journal*, No. 62 (Feb. 2015).

282 Ögüt was one of five artists who began a widely mediated boycott of the 2014 19th Biennial of Sydney due to the role of Transfield Holdings, one of the event’s main sponsors, which holds a contract with the Australian government to provide security and welfare services to asylum seeker detention centers on nearby islands. See: Joanna Warsza and Salzburg International Summer Academy of Fine Arts (eds.), *I Can’t Work Like This: A Reader on Recent Boycotts and Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), pp. 258–326.

283 Ceren Erdem (ed.), *Ahmet Ögüt: Tips and Tricks* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2014), p. 114.

284 Ahmet Ögüt, “The Pitfalls of Institutional Pedagogy,” *World Policy*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Winter 2016/17), <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2013/06/12/pitfalls-institutional-pedagogy>. The notion of “silencing” is crucial in the name of the project, which refers to the work of writer and educator Anna Eliot Ticknor, who in 1873 initiated the Society to Encourage Studies at Home, a network in Boston that literary scholar Harriet F. Bergmann recently described as a “Silent

Today, the artist organization SU has been or continues to be active in London, Stockholm, Hamburg, Ruhr, Amman, and Athens, in each case originating from the same principle, to create a para-university through the domain of the arts providing recognition and work for asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants with a predominantly academic background, harboring their knowledge and skills in the society of arrival.

Although the point of departure remains the same, the implementation of the SU has been different depending on each context. In London, it was created through the financial support of two art institutions, and launched in Tate Modern with a series of presentations by the lecturers of the SU free for all to attend. These first presentations were delivered by “a pharmacist from Syria, an accountant from Congo, a marketing manager from Zimbabwe and a calligrapher from Iraq,”<sup>285</sup> some of which decided not to speak at all, such as the Eritrean Mulugeta Fikadu who delivered a lecture on transmittable sexual diseases in front of empty colored slides standing in total silence.<sup>286</sup> As such, the founding event of the Silent University was situated between artistic performance and an actual university. Knowledge was transferred, but in some cases an audience might be listening to information they had no necessary interest in, but remained in their seat to witness an *artwork* by Ögüt. And in some cases, silence itself became the knowledge transmitted as a way of forcing the audience to acknowledge the silencing of the SU lecturers as holders of knowledge. This theatrical use of silence in the SU also relates to the investment of this para-institution into new currencies of collective consciousness. Rather than asking attendees for payment, the SU instead aims for an exchange of knowledge and skills. Seeing that in the case of Fikadu this exchange had not yet taken place – only he was expected to deliver knowledge – staging silence was also a means of addressing this fundamental inequality between audience and speaker.

In other words, SU is not only a platform for the recognition of the skills and knowledge of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants, it is also a structure that challenges the very idea of what a university is, could, or should be. The SU is free of charge on a monetary level, but attempts to reintroduce alternative currencies as a means of building common consciousness. In some cases, the use of such alternative currencies also solves the problem of members of the SU’s faculty which are undocumented or in the process of asylum application, and as such

University.”

285 Ahmet Ögüt, “The Silent University,” *Frieze* No. 149: New Schools: The Silent University (Sep. 2012): p. 139, at p. 139.

286 Florian Malzacher, Ahmet Ögüt, and Pelin Tan (eds.), *The Silent University: Towards a Transversal Pedagogy* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), p. 76.

not allowed to do any paid labor. Embracing alternative currencies obviously does not mean that the SU is not itself vulnerable to financial pressures within the existing system. In the case of the SU in London, after initial investments of Tate, Delfina, and a money prize in the form of the Visible Award, financial means were exhausted by 2014 after a final collaboration with the Oxford Migration Studies Society, the Refugee Centre at the University of Oxford, and The Showroom. Existing institutions did not “adopt” the para-institution within their own infrastructure.

According to the surprisingly self-critical publication *The Silent University: Towards a Transversal Pedagogy* (2016) issued by the SU, this lack of funding resulted in a question what to do with the assembled faculty of lecturers, consultants, and advisors as well as “students,” comprising two hundred individuals registered through the SU website pledging more than a thousand hours in total in alternative currencies.<sup>287</sup> Increasingly infrequent gatherings of the SU faculty proposed the possibility of registering the SU as a charity to retrieve more structural funding – with the risk of the artist organization being forced into the organizational regiment of already existing NGOs. Another issue raised by the faculty dealt with their own sense of limited ownership over the SU. The latter point is rather crucial here, when it comes to the stated intention of Organizational Art to operate not only as an artwork that deals with the model of the organization as material, but equally invests in the concrete political outcomes and capacity of the organization to operate autonomously after its conception. In this case, the reoccurring question “Where is Ahmet?” among faculty indicates a difficulty of the SU’s aim to move from an artist project to a fully operating institution,<sup>288</sup> in spite of Ögüt’s own statement that “artistic pedagogical practices need to be emancipated from commonly used terminologies such as ‘projects’ and ‘workshops’ referencing them as ‘tests’ or ‘short-term engagements.’”<sup>289</sup> This is an issue we also encountered with Bruguera’s IMI. Funds can be repurposed only for as long as the artwork maintains a certain novelty, and the artist signature remains continuously present for the art institution to legitimize why it would invest in a body with such a clear political purpose. In other words, the institution of art is willing to finance Organizational Art for as long as it can clearly be described as *art* through the artists’ authorship, leaving the possibility of a long-term organizational work in the hands of NGOs and the like.

287 Ibid., pp. 79–80.

288 Ibid., p. 81.

289 Ögüt, “The Pitfalls of Institutional Pedagogy.”

In the case of subsequently established SU para-institutions, Ögüt attempted to counter this dilemma by negotiating long-term funding with partner institutions beforehand. This was most successfully the case in Ögüt’s collaboration with Tensta Konsthall and the Worker’s Educational Association (ABF) with whom the SU Stockholm was founded in 2013, and the artist’s collaboration with Impulse Festival, Theaterhaus Ringlokschuppen Ruhr, and Urbane Künste Ruhr with whom the SU Ruhr was founded in 2015. Whereas in the case of the SU Stockholm the para-institution operates within the building of Tensta Konsthall, the SU Ruhr runs in a former shop unit in the center of Mülheim with a coordinator hired for a three-quarter position to make sure its activities are maintained on a structural level. It is worthwhile to note that the successes of SU Stockholm and Ruhr also led to abandoning the SU London’s experiment with alternative currencies. The aim for a more solid university subsequently impacted the more experimental artistic-pedagogical nature of the SU. Nevertheless, the SU has continued to be discussed, analyzed, and theorized in all of its artistic potentialities, especially at the SU Stockholm due to its integration in an existing art institution.<sup>290</sup> And while the alternative currencies might have lost their immediate priority, the day-to-day practice of the Silent University brought about new dimensions and aims, such as a parallel language school in Stockholm, which was not part of the original setup. The SU, in other words, started on the basis of principles but developed into new forms and modules in practice. Sometimes practice also meant the end or suspension of the artist organization, such as the case of SU Hamburg (2013), where existing universities started to provide similar services,<sup>291</sup> or in the case of SU Jordan (2015), where the faculty encountered difficulties to guarantee the security of its lecturers.<sup>292</sup> The most recent SU iteration in Athens (2016), founded by independent activists and cultural workers with support of the non-profit art institution State of Concept, is partly operational but struggles with the overall “drainage of resources by austerity measures and memoranda since 2012,” which have turned Athens into the scenery of an ongoing “economic war.”<sup>293</sup>

When compared to other artist organizations Ögüt’s SU has an impressive track record with regard to the para-institution’s scale and scope, but its different iterations also show a series of reoccurring di-

290 Director Maria Lindt pledges to continue to Silent University at least for the period of her directorship at Tensta Konsthall, and writes that the language café is currently taking place twice a week, with additional monthly excursions throughout Stockholm. From personal e-mail exchange with Lindt, Mar. 5, 2017.

291 Malzacher, Ögüt, and Tan, *The Silent University*, p. 105.

292 Ibid., pp. 122–23.

293 Ibid., p. 137.

lemmas, which are mainly related to the long-term funding and institutional back-up necessary to turn it into a durable reality. The difficulty of the artist organization model is that while it suggests the appearance of an organization proper – including logo, website, business cards, and the like – it does not have access to even a fragment of the financial resources that are normally attributed to actual universities. We encounter here again the duality of Organizational Art in the form of the real and the possible. The SU encompasses modest, sometimes more and sometimes less successful attempts to recognize the knowledge and capacities of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants through conferences, lecture programs, and language cafes. At the same time, the SU claims the concept of a para-institution as a space where traditional currencies are abandoned, pedagogical hierarchies radically overthrown, all languages are spoken equally, silence is recognized as an alternative form of knowledge transfer, border politics are abolished, and extraterritoriality considered the given space of action. It is the SU's own thorough self-critique that makes it possible for us to identify Organizational Art's dilemma between what is real and what is possible more clearly, creating the possibility of overcoming its contradictions. In this regard Ögüt stands at the forefront of theorizing and establishing a practice of Organizational Art as a lasting para-institutional reality in the 21st century.

Let us try to summarize the practices of Bruguera and Ögüt in the context of Organizational Art as well as their overall relation to the performance of the popular, the composition of a people and the construction of Popular Realism.

The artist-organization's relationship to the popular mass movement is articulated similarly in the two different practices. In the case of Bruguera, IMI operates clearly in direct relation to popular mass movements, specifically in the realm of immigration rights and mobilization, connecting to local communities, civil organizations, and NGOs in the process of drafting its manifestos and programs. The relation to the institution of art is maintained, albeit by challenging it to invest in a parallel artist-run infrastructure in the form of the artist organization, proposing a long-term engagement beyond the usual temporary political art "project." In the case of Ögüt, the Silent University relates directly to popular mass movements in the form of struggles of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants, connecting to a variety of local communities, civil action and advocacy groups, but also to universities and other educational institutions. The relation to the institution of art is manifold and international, with a shifting focus on accepting temporary commissioned work (London) to a demand for long-term investment in the SU (Stockholm, Ruhr) to maintain and

expand its work.

The performance of emerging power, central to the practice of Popular Propaganda Art is similar in both practices as well. IMI's output is located between the real and the possible, between concrete labor in service of immigrant communities through the center that existed for five years, and an investment in a transnational campaign that posits the migrant as global citizen. IMI is therefore clearly invested in contributing to the performance of the popular through the work of its community center, while simultaneously investing its imaginative capacity in re-composing a transnational people through the politicization of the immigrant subject. IMI's Popular Realism is aimed at the construction of a possible reality based on this fundamental paradigm shift. Like Bruguera, the SU's output is located between the real and the possible: between concrete labor in service of the struggles of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants through the different incarnations of the para-institution, while investing in the possibility of developing alternative currencies and horizontal pedagogical models. The SU as such is clearly invested in contributing to the performance of the popular through the work of its various international iterations, while simultaneously using its imaginative capacity to recompose a people through the politicization of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants in the context of the radical pedagogy of the para-institution. The SU's Popular Realism is aimed at the construction of a possible reality through this process of politicization; creating a common knowledge in which citizens and non-citizens co-exist on a principle of fundamental equality.

Although we have seen that the political aims of Organizational Art in many ways overlap with those of Embedded Art, it differs in its investment in the concept of the organization as artwork. We can, however, observe a particular surge of artist organizations in the 21st century as a result of the precarious position of artists and the desire to invest in long-term engagement with popular mass movements.

#### POPULAR PROPAGANDA ART: SUMMARY

Before we continue to discuss the third and final category of contemporary propaganda art in the form of *Stateless Propaganda Art*, let us summarize our observations on the manifold dimensions of Popular Propaganda Propaganda Art through the following conclusions:

- Popular Propaganda Art is contemporary propaganda art that operates by means of the emerging precarious infrastructures of popular mass movements through which it aims to contribute

to the performance of the popular and the composition of a people;

- Popular Propaganda Art subverts the Us/Them dichotomy of War on Terror Propaganda by building alliances between a diverse precariat, identifying common oppressors and recomposing the notion of Us – a people-in-the-making;
- Popular Propaganda Art manifests itself through three different organizational models: Assemblism, Embedded Art, and Organizational Art. Assemblism as a practice of performative assembly includes artistic components and comprises an aesthetic vocabulary, but as a whole should not be considered art as such. Embedded and Organizational Art focus on the particular competence of artists within or in relation to popular mass movements: the former as individual artists or artist collectives and artist groups, the latter in the form of organizational models that operate politically, and simultaneously as artworks in their own right;
- Popular Propaganda Art aims at transforming the collective demands that emerge from popular mass movements through the performance of the popular and the composing of a people into the construction of Popular Realism: the transformation of reality after the interests of precarious popular mass movements.

### 4.3 STATELESS PROPAGANDA ART

The *stated* – those recognized, administered, and living in the sphere of relative protection provided by the state – cannot but observe the condition of statelessness. The *knowledge* inherent to statelessness can only be acquired by those who have been forced into the condition of living without or outside the state. In this final section, instead of merely analyzing the condition of statelessness, we will have to embark on a different endeavor, by trying to *learn* from the specific knowledge generated by the experience of statelessness.

This is what we have tried to do in the Stateless Propaganda section in the previous chapter vis-à-vis the work of Mohamedou Ould Slahi, who lived through a particular experience of statelessness in the lawless structures of the War on Terror. His book is an act of self-recognition of the stateless community while at the same time providing the stated the possibility of understanding how the very structures that define their relative privilege and protection simultaneously enforce the condition of statelessness upon others. In Ould Slahi's proposal to make the stated hear beyond what they are able to hear, an assembly between the stated and stateless, as embodied in his alliance with Hollander and Siems, becomes imaginable. We defined the dual outcomes of Ould Slahi's Stateless Propaganda as *self-recognition* and *recognition by others*.

In this final segment, rather than defining Stateless Propaganda Art, we will seek to draft a series of observations, based as much as possible from primary sources produced by the political and cultural practices of different stateless actors themselves.<sup>294</sup> At this point, *propaganda research* cannot be separated from my own implications in the domain of *propaganda work*. To draft a definition of Stateless Propaganda Art, I must return to the work of my own artist-organizations, the *New World Summit*, and its school, the *New World Academy*, which I mentioned in my introduction to this thesis. The particular examples in this chapter, namely refugee collective We Are Here in Amsterdam, the National Liberation Movement of Azawad in Northern-Mali and the Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava in Northern-Syria, were collaborators in both of these organizations. Interviews that I conducted with its representatives referenced throughout this segment, are the result of field

<sup>294</sup> Many of the cited sources are the result of my project *New World Academy* (2013–15), co-founded with BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht, which I also referred to in my introduction. An art project in the form of a school, the *New World Academy* invited stateless and blacklisted organizations to teach artists and students about the role of art and culture in their political struggles. This gave me the opportunity to conduct field research and interviews in, among others, Azawad (northern Mali) and Rojava (northern Syria), and work with the Amsterdam-based refugee collective We Are Here. Transcripts of these interviews form the basis of a five-part reader series, which are also primary sources for this section on Stateless Propaganda Art.

work in stateless regions but also of *collaborations* taking place at the very same time. Prominent voices in Stateless Propaganda referenced here, such as Yoonis Osman Nuur (We Are Here), Moussa Ag Assarid and Mazou Ibrahim Touré (MNLA/Artist Association of Azawad), Abdullah Abdul (Tev-Çand) and Şêro Hindê and Diyar Hesso (Artist Association of Azawad), are not merely “sources” or “case studies” but collaborators and most of all, artists that are directly implicated in the struggle of *instituting* the very concept of Stateless Propaganda Art. In this context, my own propaganda work is both source *and* objective, defined by the process of narrating and creating alternative histories – and possibly future practices – of propaganda art.

We will expand on the notion of statelessness developed through Ould Slahi’s work by adding brief historical examples of other forms of statelessness and Stateless Propaganda. These examples, all of which result from my own propaganda work, include the model of the refugee collective, the national liberation movement, and an alternative model of stateless democracy. Our particular focus will be the role of Stateless Propaganda Art within each of these examples.

There is no single condition of statelessness but rather a variety of different conditions, depending 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 grey 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 in the cases we will be discussing throughout this section, this statedness is symbolical at best, and barely functional in reality. Instead, we might have to think of the difference between the stated and the stateless in the way that philosopher Rastko Močnik *spoke of fascism, considering that there is hardly ever complete or no fascism at all, and that the question is rather: “How Much Fascism?”*<sup>295</sup> *In this light, we would have to ask ourselves: How much state? Or how much statelessness?*

Our aim here will thus be to explore how our earlier proposition of a definition of Stateless Propaganda – a performance of the radical precarity of a community of stateless peoples – relates to such different conditions of statelessness, and how these define different *stateless propagandas* and equally different forms of *Stateless Propaganda Art*.

295 Rastko Močnik, *Extravagantia II: koliko fašizma?* (Ljubljana: Institutum studiorum humanitatis, 1995).

We will note some differences between Stateless Propaganda Art and Popular Propaganda Art. One of the main differences we have discussed in the previous chapter relates to the extreme difference of precarity between a member of politicized civil society and a stateless person, and the way that these different scales of precarity impact the capacity for political organization. The other difference is that while we may understand Stateless Propaganda partly as an “emerging power” when it brings about new structures of organization and governance, it starts first of all from a process of self-recognition of the stateless as an already existing collectivity. In this segment, we will take the stateless as our point of departure, and the specificity of their condition and struggle vis-à-vis the stated.

We will place an emphasis, however, on the third condition of statelessness, which is the demand to recognize statelessness as an alternative to the state. This will allow us to understand statelessness not in mere opposition to the state, but as a condition – a *state of being* – that introduces a construction of stateless reality, or a “reality according to the stateless.” And the construction of reality, as we have observed throughout this thesis, is the aim of all propaganda.

#### STATELESS PROPAGANDAS AND STATELESS PROPAGANDA ART

As we have mentioned, the term statelessness can refer to a variety of different conditions. Let us begin with stateless people who *demand recognition and protection by an existing state*, such as undocumented migrants, refugees, or individuals persecuted as terrorists. Here we speak of people who once had passports, or should have them, but are denied such recognition. We can think for example of refugee collective We Are Here in Amsterdam, a group of more than two-hundred undocumented migrants and refugees – some of which 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 due to safety issues or because their countries no longer recognize them, while the Dutch state simultaneously refuses them citizenship.<sup>296</sup> This condition of limbo forces them into the domain of statelessness, or more precisely, “between states.” Neither the state of origin nor the hosting state is willing to provide them with crucial structures of life support. In the case of Ould Slahi, we saw the

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

consequence of being labelled as terrorist. His rights as a Mauritanian citizen were revoked and he was subsequently imprisoned as a stateless individual. It is important to mention here how the examples of undocumented migrants and refugees, as well as alleged terrorism suspects, have become increasingly interrelated, for example when Western states refuse to provide resident status or citizenship to refugees out of fear that terrorists or potential terrorists would be among them.<sup>297</sup> The stateless subject can thus become a screen of orientalist projection and the target of War on Terror Propaganda. No matter their background or reasons to migrate, a suspicion of terrorism can come to completely define their status. What connects all these examples is that each aim at recognition by an existing state, whether that is the state of origin or the state of arrival, whether it is as a refugee or as a terrorist suspect.

As we discussed previously under Stateless Propaganda, the claim to power of stateless peoples often does not reach beyond the – limited – use of their bodies. This is the primary “power” that is available to those who are forced to exist outside any form of state recognition. This is the reason why the hunger strike, mentioned by both Butler and Ould Slahi, forms one of the recurring models of Assemblist practice through which the stateless can organize the extremely limited powers at their disposal. It was in this light, that we observed that the performance of Stateless Propaganda is characterized by a nearly complete separation of the stateless from existing power and their claim to an oppositional construction of power. In the case of Ould Slahi, we saw how this translated into *Guantánamo Diary*, in which he performed a form of self-recognition of the stateless community on the one hand while initiating an assembly of the stated and the stateless on the other. The case of the We Are Here refugee collective allows us to add some other examples to the domain of Stateless Propaganda. Although members of We Are Here are not allowed to travel outside the Netherlands, their limited freedom of movement allows for additional strategies of Stateless Propaganda which were unavailable to Ould Slahi.

Yoonis Osman Nuur, one of the key representatives of the We Are Here collective, emphasized the importance of the group’s name during a speech on the occasion of the collective’s first anniversary: “We didn’t want to be invisible any longer. We wanted the world to know

297 Žižek observes about an attack in Paris perpetrated by the Islamic State in 2015: “With the Paris terror killings on Friday 13 November, however, even these ideas (which at least still involve large socio-economic issues) are now eclipsed by the simple opposition of all democratic forces caught in a merciless war with forces of terror – and it is easy to imagine what will follow: the paranoid search for ISIS agents among the refugees, and so on. The greatest victims of the Paris terror attacks will be refugees themselves, and the true winners, concealed behind the platitudes in the style of *je suis Paris*, will be simply the partisans of total war on both sides.” Slavoj Žižek, *Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and Other Trouble with our Neighbours* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), p. 110.

that we are here and that we are lost in between. And because this is unacceptable, we came together.”<sup>298</sup> Similar to Butler’s reading of Assemblist practice, Nuur emphasizes the unchosen composition of the We Are Here collective. The members of the group, coming from different parts of the African continent, are characterized by different political, educational, and religious backgrounds; they are “one” only in so far as each of them is confronted with the oppressive conditions of statelessness. Similar to Ould Slahi’s assembly with Hollander and Siems, Nuur addresses the importance of the alliance between documented and undocumented peoples – between the stated and the stateless: “[C]hanges 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.”<sup>299</sup>

On the one hand, Nuur recognizes that the performative power of We Are Here is both defined and limited by the stateless condition of its members, exemplified by the name of the group, which is simultaneously its slogan – *We are here* – a recognition of the unchosen dimension of this political collective. On the other, an alliance needs to be initiated that includes those who are holding relative positions of power within the existing state while opposing its policies to achieve greater impact upon reality. This led to the collaboration between We Are Here and Christian activists as well as anarchist communities came about, which helped to squat and organize a variety of temporal spaces for the collective to reside. It also facilitated donations in the form of food and material support from Dutch citizenry, which allowed the group to survive up until today. The recognition of their own performativity as stateless bodies and the capacity of these bodies to become visible to each other and to those who are stated, is exactly what forms the preconditions for the group’s existence and its enactment of Stateless Propaganda. The strength of the state lies in its capacity to make the stateless invisible; the strength of the stateless is to make themselves visible. First to civil society and subsequently, through civil society, to the state. As Nuur explained in an interview, “[b]y 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.”<sup>300</sup>

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 legal – or rather, “illegal” – status. Whereas statelessness preclu-

298 Yoonis Osman Nuur, “We Exist,” in *Collective Struggle of Refugees*, p. 43.

299 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

300 Yoonis Osman Nuur interviewed by Jonas Staal, “We Are a Political Group,” in *Collective Struggle of Refugees*, p. 57.

des its members from working, gaining access to social security or education under the threat of incarceration or instant deportation, it does not limit them from creatively expressing themselves. In other words, creative expression – art – is not considered to be labor, and thus does not threaten their status in their quest to obtain citizenship.<sup>301</sup> As a result, the artistic community of the Netherlands and We Are Here assembled to organize a variety of exhibitions, concerts, and even theater pieces as a means to gaining further visibility and thus leverage as “stateless citizens” of the Netherlands, to the point of which Nuur even joined forces with Ögüt to declare We Are Here an “undocumented political party.”<sup>302</sup> As the *We Are Here Manifesto* (2013) states: “We enhance our visibility through unification, protests, a media campaign, lobbying, and other means.”<sup>303</sup>

We Are Here’s main output as Stateless Propaganda Art, is the theater play *Labyrinth* (2015), created in collaboration with German theater maker Nicolas Stemmann and Frascati Theater in Amsterdam. Initiated through the We Are Here Cooperative – an assembly of artists in the Netherlands and members of We Are Here, founded in 2013 – *Labyrinth* is based on a radical reversal of roles. Visitors are handed a file of 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 belonging at entry, visitors are moved through a labyrinth of rooms created from a patchwork of fabric, similar to the improvised residences of the We Are Here members. In each room, they encounter a key “actor” from the asylum procedures that each of the We Are Here members have been subjected to countless of times, but now reenacted by the members themselves. The audience is subsequently interrogated on the limited information at their disposal about their new identity as Mohammed Hassan Abdi. Representatives of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Dutch Repatriation and Departure Service, as well as police officers and judges, each of which are played by We Are Here members, make the audience of *Labyrinth* keenly aware of the level of internalization of the immigration script each of them has been subjected to. Any contradiction in a statement, a wrong answer or joke can mean expulsion from the labyrinth. The script of the play is structured

301 Something elaborated from a juridical perspective through 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*, p. 91–101. For further reading on the political, economic, and juridical paradoxes of artistic practice of We Are Here, see Ellen C. Feiss, *A Critique of Rights in We Are Here* (Amsterdam: We Are Here Cooperative, 2015)

302 Yoonis Osman Nuur and Ahmet Ögüt presented their resolution “Political Representation Beyond Citizenship” during the *Beyond Allegories* conference, Amsterdam Town Hall, May 9, 2014.

303 We Are Here, “We Are Here Manifesto,” in *Collective Struggle of Refugees*, p. 23.

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 assembly of the documented and the undocumented, the stated and the stateless. To assemble those in whose name immigration policies are enacted together with those who are subjected to those policies. The stated cannot understand what it means to be stateless, but they can to some degree learn about its consequences, and about their own implication in them.

The methodology of *Labyrinth* shows a strong overlap with Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire’s definition of a *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), in which he argues: “[T]he 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.”<sup>304</sup> 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 into a state of subjection, although – very different 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 grant the members of We Are Here temporary power over them, is a performance of the power of the stated over the stateless. Nonetheless, the power of the oppressed, 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.”<sup>305</sup> We Are Here decides the dominant “theme” of *Labyrinth*, and involves the audience as co-investigators of the oppression they are co-responsible for, with the aim of changing this reality through praxis in the form of an assembly between the stateless and the stated. It is this praxis of mutual liberation – instigated on the conditions of the oppressed, not the oppressor – that Freire claims fundamental to the pedagogy of the oppressed.<sup>306</sup>

Although described as “agitation propaganda” by some,<sup>307</sup> *Labyrinth* had an enormous impact, both by involving audience participants to its cause – many of which were policy makers – as well as through its broad visibility in Dutch mainstream media. Together with many other cultural projects this effectively led to the creation of a history for We Are Here members in the Netherlands, creating grounds to argue that

304 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London/New York: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 26.

305 Ibid., p. 36.

306 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.” Ibid., p. 127.

307 Simon van den Berg, “Schrijnende rolverwisseling met vluchtelingen,” *Theaterkrant*, Jan. 21, 2015, <https://www.theaterkrant.nl/recensie/labyrinth/we-are-here-cooperative-frascati/>.



they have become so rooted in a society to which they have made substantial and visible – cultural – contributions, that for some citizenship has come in reach.<sup>308</sup> This was for example the case for Nuur, who was granted residency status in 2017. Different from the work of Ögüt and Bruguera, which we discussed in the context of Popular Propaganda Art, this case study of Stateless Propaganda Art originates from the initiative of stateless people themselves, seeking alliances with stated artists and cultural workers. Their performance is defined by severely limited access to power, their bodies being among the few tools available to articulate the claim that they are “here.” But by effectively deploying them they achieve to establish a political collective with one another (self-recognition) and engage in assembly with the stated (recognition by others), thus increasing their limited power through further visibilization. This assembly is the basis for the articulation of a new community – a new reality – performed through *Labyrinth*, in the form of a Stateless Propaganda Art.

Having briefly touched upon the condition of statelessness with regard to a demand to be recognized by the state, and the subsequent impact of this claim on a specific practice of Stateless Propaganda and Stateless Propaganda Art, let us move to the second condition of statelessness; namely of *those who demand the establishment of an independent state of their own*. Such examples are the Basque Country 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. Although the Basque people have gained regional autonomy in Spain with their own language and parliament, there remains a strong popular movement that considers its particularity as a nation unrecognized without full statehood. In the case of the Palestinians, we are dealing with an actually occupied people that was about to achieve their own independent state before they were massacred and forced to migrate during the Nakba – as we discussed earlier on in the context of *Popular Propaganda Art*. In the case of the Azawadians, we are dealing with a nomadic people, predominantly the Kel-Tamasheq, who did not desire a nation-state in the first place, but were forced to articulate their claims to independence through such terminology after being colonized by the French and forcefully inte-

308 Other notable projects are the *We Are Here Academy* (2014–ongoing), which provides free education by invited academics, artists and activists in the form of an artwork to members of *We Are Here*; *We Are Here Occupying the Border* (planned for 2017), which takes the form of a “refugee parliament” at the borders of Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, allowing each refugee to participate legally, as long as they remain exactly within the border of the country where they filed their asylum request. Retrieved from the website of Here to Support, <http://heretosupport.nl/>.

grated into the post-colonial state of Mali. To different degrees, the term statelessness here thus designates a lack or complete absence of rights within an existing state or occupation and simultaneously, the demand for their own independent state.

The case of Azawad is of particular interest here, as it relates to a relatively recent achievement to create a newly independent nation-state. Nevertheless the state of Azawad has existed only for four years and has never been recognized by any other existing state in the world.<sup>309</sup> Although the Kel-Tamasheq people revolted against the French occupation from the end of the 19th century onward, and opposed, in alliance with other people from the region like the Songhai and Fula, their integration into the new French-backed state of Mali, their demand for their own independent state through armed rebellion in 1960, 1963, 1990, and 2006, followed by the actual – albeit temporary – realization of an independent state of Azawad, is more recent.<sup>310</sup> In 2012 the National Liberation Movement of Azawad (MNLA) declared Azawad’s independence, backed by highly trained Kel-Tamasheq fighters that left the crumbling Ghadaffi regime, effectively expelling the Malian army from their lands in the Sahara and Sahel. This caused a crisis, as the power vacuum resulting from the revolution was quickly filled by radical Islamist groups such as Ansar Dine and Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb, which resulted in the return of the French and their allies to the region to support the Malian state in stabilizing the conflict.<sup>311</sup> Our main focus now though, lies on the Stateless Propaganda of a stateless people in its few years of independence.

During the first years of Azawadian independence Moussa Ag Assarid, the 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.”<sup>312</sup> This is of particular relevance, as it explains the changing understanding of statelessness for the Kel-Tamasheq people. As mentioned before, the Kel-Tamasheq were originally a nomadic people. In that context, the notion of “statelessness” did not mean

309 Representatives of the Malian government and the Azawadian rebel groups signed the Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali that emanated from the Algiers on May 15, 2015. This effectively ended the MNLA’s demand for an independent nation-state, with the MNLA agreeing upon relative autonomy and humanitarian development aid in the region. See: Gaudence Nyirabikali, “Mali Peace Accord: Actors, issues and their representation,” *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, Aug. 27, 2015, <https://www.sipri.org/node/385>.

310 See for a historical account of the colonial history and uprisings in the region: Berny Sèbe, “A Fragmented and Forgotten Decolonization: The End of European Empires in the Sahara and their Legacy,” in Moussa Ag Assarid and Jonas Staal (eds.), *The Art of Creating a State* (Utrecht: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, 2013), pp. 113–42.

311 For a detailed reconstruction of the Azawadian revolution and its crises, see May Ying Welsh’s three-part documentary *Orphans of the Sahara* (2014).

312 Moussa Ag Assarid interviewed by Jonas Staal, “We Inhabit the Horizon,” in *The Art of Creating a State*, pp. 41–42.

much, as there was nothing to call a “state” in the first place. It was rather in the process of French colonization and the creation of the state of Mali, that the terms “stateless” and “state” became relevant as a terminology that could articulate their demand to regain some of the freedom it 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 by Ag Assarid from his 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.<sup>313</sup> Here, Stateless Propaganda operates without a vast communication network or interconnected urban infrastructure, but through small cities and villages often at great distance from one another, and through limited radio signals and satellite phones. To construct the imaginary of a new state in this environment is a severe challenge.

In this context, the work of 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 radio maker has been in charge of all banners, slogans, and symbolic depictions of the new state since the start of the Azawadian revolution. Explaining his formation simply by stating that “I saw the situation of my people, and I realized that they needed an artist,”<sup>314</sup> 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 and peace signs, as well as public monuments constructed from the limited amount of available scrap metal, among which remnants of weaponry. In some cases, existing infrastructures are re-appropriated by the artist, for example in the form of road signs which used to refer to Malian cities, but are now repainted to direct only to the state of Azawad. Touré uses a similar strategy with old monuments and roundabouts installed by the Malian government, which are repainted in the colors of the Azawadian flag, and have been 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

313 Cf. Agamben’s previously discussed notion of “bare life.”

314 Mazou Ibrahim Touré interviewed by Jonas Staal, “I Was Needed, so I Became an Artist,” in *The Art of Creating a State*, p. 92.

French – should not to be underestimated. And different from what an outsider might presume, this Stateless Propaganda is not aimed primarily at outsiders to gain recognition for the Azawadian project. 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.<sup>315</sup>

Touré’s double role as radio maker 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 through Bluetooth from the phone of one MNLA militant to another. Having achieved world fame with its liberation songs, Tinariwen unifies not only the Azawadians on their land, but also its diaspora, and builds greater knowledge of Azawadian language, history, and struggle through its own strand of cultural diplomacy.<sup>316</sup>

The diverse practice of Touré and his Artist Association of Azawad, whose work, different than 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 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 second-degree 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 of a new community to be performed collectively, with the aim to establish a new reality, the state of Azawad. In this case, the self-recognition of the stateless is the foundation for a new condition of statedness.

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 Martinique-born anti-colonial resistance fighter, psychiatrist, and writer Frantz Fanon, in particular in his work *The Wretched of the Earth*

315 Ibid., pp. 94–95.

316 See Tinariwen member Abdallah Ag Alhousseini’s conversation with Banning Eyre on the Azawadian revolution, “Tinariwen’s Abdallah Ag Alhousseini Talks about Mali,” in *The Art of Creating a State*, pp. 51–68.

(1961). An important inspiration to Freire, Fanon argues: “[C]olonialism 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.”<sup>317</sup> 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 natives’ head the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality.”<sup>318</sup> It is in this light that we might gain a better understanding of Ag Assarid’s explanation of a hesitancy among his fellow people to demand a state of their own, and 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, the endeavor of independence cannot succeed. It is this transition from cultural history to colonized culture and to a new national culture that is at stake in the struggle of decolonization and independence. In Fanon’s words:

A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people’s true nature. It is not made up of the inert dreg of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.<sup>319</sup>

In Touré’s work we thus encounter an attempt to both re-construct pre-colonial history and to construct a new national culture. He takes up a role that Fanon describes as an “awakener of the people,” recovering the colonized past, constructing a liberated presence.<sup>320</sup> Touré’s self-described “poetry of the revolution” aims at both to imagine, self-recognize, and enact the cultural body that is the desired Azawadian nation-state.<sup>321</sup>

We have briefly discussed two conditions of statelessness so far, first the demand to be recognized by the state, and second the demand to construct a new state. In the first example, we saw how *We Are Here*, similar to Ould Slahi, performs self-recognition of the stateless collec-

317 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London/New York e.a.: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 169.

318 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

319 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

320 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

321 Mazou Ibrahim Touré interviewed by Jonas Staal, “I Was Needed, so I Became an Artist,” p. 91.

tive and seeks to become recognized by others to create an alliance between the stateless and the stated. In the second example, we saw how Touré and his Artist Association of Azawad enacts a process of self-recognition first, to become stated on their own terms. The third and final example, which will be of our particular interest in this final segment, concerns the *demand of the stateless to define statelessness as an alternative to the state altogether*.

We will discuss those who identify the very model of the state as inherently oppressive and opposed to forms of egalitarian governance. We find rare examples of this model throughout different histories of anarcho-libertarianism, or libertarian-socialism, the most known example being the 1936–37 Spanish Revolution, in which a communalist “stateless” project of self-governance emerged in Catalonia during the civil war.<sup>322</sup> A contemporary and sustained example is the Rojava Revolution, resulting in the autonomous Kurdish-led region in Northern-Syria that declared its model of “democratic confederalism” or “stateless democracy” in 2012, during the second year of the Syrian civil war. Highly critical of the colonial history of the nation-state in the Middle-East, the Rojava revolutionaries claim statelessness as the necessary precondition for their model of stateless democratic self-governance. Statelessness in this context is no longer a counterpoint to the state, but as a state of being, the precondition for a radically different stateless reality to emerge in the face of the existing geopolitical stated system.

Considering the profound role of art and culture in the Rojava Revolution that I was able to research on location through a direct collaboration with the autonomous government starting in 2014, we will dedicate the next part of this segment to understanding in more detail what brought this revolution and its political model about, and how its Stateless Propaganda produces a distinct model of Stateless Propaganda Art.

#### ROJAVA’S STATELESS PROPAGANDA AND STATELESS PROPAGANDA ART

In Kurdish Rojava means “West” and refers to the western part of Kurdistan, the northern part of present-day Syria. The partition of the region after the First World War led to the fragmentation of the Kur-

322 On the 1936 Spanish revolution, see Murray Bookchin, *To Remember Spain: The Anarchist and Syndicalist Revolution of 1936* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1994). For a more extensive historical examination of the concept of libertarian socialism, see Alex Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Saku Pinta, and David Berry (eds.), *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Black and Red* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

dish nation across four different states – Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran – in each of which the Kurds faced severe oppression, leading to the foundation of the Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in 1978 in Bakûr, North Kurdistan (south-eastern 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*.”<sup>323</sup> The mountains of south-eastern Turkey formed the perfect terrain for a guerrilla war, and from an elite cadre the PKK transformed into a mass movement.

Of particular importance for the Rojava revolution – often referred to as a “women’s revolution” – is the emergence of the Kurdish women’s movement within the highly disciplined and hierarchically structured PKK. Co-founder Sakine Cansız explained her party had been “giving an ideological struggle from the very beginning against denial, social chauvinistic impression, primitive and nationalist approaches.”<sup>324</sup> As a result, in the 1990s the women of the PKK, encouraged by Öcalan, started to actively organize themselves to put their liberation from patriarchy within the party on the agenda.<sup>325</sup> This development ran parallel to a series of crises within the PKK due to Turkey’s massive military operations leading to Öcalan’s arrest in 1999. He has remained in prison ever since.<sup>326</sup>

From prison, Öcalan continued to theorize about the future of the Kurdish liberation movement. Öcalan argued that “[t]he male monopoly that has been maintained over the life and world of woman throughout history, is not unlike the monopoly chain that capital monopolies maintain over society.” He concludes that “women [are] the oldest colonised people who have never become a nation.”<sup>327</sup> The critique of patriarchy thus brought Öcalan to redefine the relation between family, state, and capital. Combining the ideas of the Kurdish women’s movement with his own mythological strand of Mesopotamian his-

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

324 “The Foundation of the PKK in the Words of Sakine Cansız,” *Kurdish Question*, Nov. 27, 2014, <https://www.kurdishquestion.com/oldarticle.php?aid=the-foundation-of-the-pkk-in-the-words-of-sakine-cansiz>.

325 The fact that it was a male leader who called upon women to liberate themselves has often been observed as the great paradox of the movement.

326 “By 1995, Ankara was spending as much as \$11 billion a year to fight the war [...]. Turkey also deployed some 220,000 troops in the region – tying up a quarter of NATO’s second largest army in a domestic battle.” Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York/London: New York University Press), 2007, p. 249.

327 Abdullah Öcalan, *Liberating Life: Woman’s Revolution* (Cologne: International Initiative Edition/Neuss: Mesopotamian Publishers, 2013), p. 35.

tory<sup>328</sup> and the writings of eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin,<sup>329</sup> Öcalan declared in 2005 the struggle for an independent nation-state to be over. Instead he proposed a new political paradigm named “democratic confederalism,”<sup>330</sup> which he explained as “a democracy without the state.”<sup>331</sup> The core principles of Öcalan’s *stateless democracy* are based on local self-governance, gender equality, communal economy, and the right to self-defense: a new and crucial 21st-century paradigm of Stateless Propaganda. Instead of starting from the conditions dictated by the opponent – the existing Turkish state – Öcalan now began working from the concrete conditions of statelessness, the fact that they have no state at all. This particular *state of being* now was no longer a weakness, but could be claimed as the strength of the movement: statelessness was both its *condition* and its *objective*.

When in 2011 the Assad regime was forced to the south to fight the Islamic State, the Kurds in Bakûr and Rojava seized their chance. Together with Assyrian and Arab allies they declared their original part of West Kurdistan autonomous. Subsequently, three autonomous cantons of Rojava – Afrin, Kobanê, and Cizîre – were founded by what was now called the new Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava. The political project was officially announced on January 29, 2014, as part of “The Social Contract” – referring to Rousseau’s famous text from 1762 – co-written by all peoples living in the region: Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Turkmens, Armenians, and Chechens.<sup>332</sup> This Social Contract was the translation of stateless de-

328 Öcalan’s most elaborate attempt to articulate a social, historical, cultural, and political analysis of the roots of the Kurdish Question, narrating the birth of subsequent tribalism, statism, capitalism, and patriarchy to provide a viable scenario for an autonomous and democratic Kurdish movement can be found in his *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilisation* (London: Transmedia Publishing, 2007).

329 Particularly Bookchin’s elaboration of non-state confederalist structures of political organization were of Öcalan’s interest. Bookchin poses that “[a] free ecological society – as distinguished from one regulated by an authoritarian ecological elite or by the “free market” – can only be vast in terms of an ecologically confederal form of libertarian municipalism. When at length free communes replace the nation and confederal forms of organization replaces the state, humanity will have rid itself from nationalism.” Murray Bookchin, *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy* (New York: Verso Books, 2015), p. 138.

330 Within the concept of democratic confederalism Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden distinguish three interrelated projects: “A democratic republic, democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism. The democratic republic seeks to redefine the Republic of Turkey, by disassociating democracy from nationalism; democratic autonomy refers to the right of people to decide on their own priorities and policies, to determine their own future; and the project for democratic confederalism is to serve as a model for self-government, its concrete realization sought through the political organization of society at four different levels, namely, communes in villages and districts, the organization of social groups (such as women and youth), organization on the basis of cultural and religious identities, and civil society organizations.” Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden, “Understanding Today’s Kurdish movement: Leftist Heritage, Martyrdom, Democracy, and Gender,” *European Journal of Kurdish Studies*, No. 14 (2012), <http://ejts.revues.org/4656>.

331 Abdullah Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism* (Cologne: Transmedia Publishing, 2011), p. 21.

332 “In pursuit of freedom, justice, dignity and democracy and led by principles of equality and environmental sustainability, the Charter proclaims a new social contract, based upon mutual and peaceful coexistence and understanding between all strands of society. It protects fundamental human rights and liberties and reaffirms the peoples’ right to self-determination. Under the Charter, we, the people of the Autonomous Regions, unite in the spirit of reconciliation, pluralism and democratic participation so that all may express themselves freely in public life.”

mocracy into practice, investing powers predominantly in the local self-governing communes within the cantons instead of its overarching administration, implementing a quota of forty percent women's participation in political life, establishing male–female co-presidencies for all political organizations, and recognition of 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 People's and Women's Protection Units (YPG/J) which are independently organized by the Kurdish women's movement.

Most important for our endeavor of gaining an understanding of Öcalan's proposition of a new model of Stateless Propaganda are the alternative institutions founded throughout the revolution in the Rojava autonomous region. Educational institutions are at the core of disseminating the ideas of stateless democracy, to politicize and mobilize its communities to carry out the project of self-governance. Women civil servants and militia are to follow mandatory education in the women's academies before being allowed on the battlefield. An example is the Star Academy in Rimelan, organized by the Yekitiya Star, the umbrella group of the women's movement in Rojava. In an extension of the rejection of the nation-state and its patriarchal foundations, the main task of the academy is to break the ties between the state and science, not as a rejection of science as such, but of the specific power structure underlying it. The alternative takes the form of "jineology," meaning "women's science," *-logy* referring to the Greek "logos" (knowledge) and *jin* referring to the Kurdish word for woman.<sup>333</sup> Jineology is an attempt to re-write history from a perspective of colonized classes – women, stateless peoples, minorities – through the Rojava Revolution. Here we see Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* translated into a *Pedagogy of the Stateless*: the academy transformed into a space in which the very conditions of knowledge production and dissemination are re-investigated by the stateless, in favor of a history that is founded on their particular condition of being. Oppression here is no longer identified through the lack of the state, but identified as an inherent part of the

Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava, "The Social Contract," in *Stateless Democracy*, pp. 131–58. We note the radical reversal of what Masco described as the negative social contract in War on Terror Propaganda to the emancipatory claim expressed through Rojava's social contract in the context of Stateless Propaganda Art.

333 Journalist and representative of the women's movement Gönül Kaya writes that "in history, rulers and power holders have established their systems first in thought. As an extension of the patriarchal system, a field of social sciences has been created, which is male, class-specific, and sexist in character." Based on this analysis, Kaya calls for a "women's paradigm," described as a rejection of the relation between the woman-object (slave) and the male-subject (master), which she considers inherently intertwined with modern science and which has in turn had a severe impact on social life, with nurture or domestic work – framed as part of feminine "nature" – not considered "labor," but instead articulated in terms of "service" to the masculine master. Gönül Kaya, "Why Jineology? Re-Constructing the Sciences Towards a Communal and Free Life," in *Stateless Democracy*, p. 86.

state paradigm as such.

What is at stake is not merely a military and territorial struggle, but an ideological one, which the Rojavans refer to as the importance of "changing mentality."<sup>334</sup> The revolution is not aimed at just seizing power, but at re-articulating the very notion of power through stateless democracy. The power of the stateless – those who have rejected the state – demands not only a new administrative and political system of self-governance, but also a different educational and scientific paradigm. The endeavor of Stateless Propaganda is thus both to educate and perform the specific power paradigm that Öcalan recognized as being inherent to the condition of statelessness. That is the case for the political, economic, and educational system, but is possibly expressed most strongly – or at least, most visibly – in the context of Rojava's Stateless Propaganda Art.

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, we encounter in Rojava's stateless democracy the continuous presence of the yellow-red-green colors of its flag, often painted on discarded barrels to define the borders of its cantons, 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.<sup>335</sup> Essentially, we witness here 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. Just like in Azawad, popular slogans such as "Resistance is Life," "Women, Life, Freedom," and "Martyrs Never Die" – the latter 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 bring to mind Touré's trilingual banners as well.

What the Artist Association is for Azawad, is the network of Tev-Çand cultural centers for Rojava – although the latter has far more means at its disposal. 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. In another similarity to Azawad, mu-

334 As Janet Biehl, partner of Öcalan's inspiration Murray Bookchin, noted during her travel to Rojava: "Aldar Xelil, a member of the council of TEV-DEM [Movement for a Democratic Society], explained to us, Rojava's political project is "not just about changing the regime but creating a mentality to bring the revolution to the society. It's a revolution for society." Janet Biehl, "Revolutionary Education: Two Academies in Rojava," in *Stateless Democracy*, p. 213.

335 When I travelled to the canton of Kobané, I witnessed how in only recently liberated territories, the Islamic State had appropriated old monuments and roundabouts for its own purposes as well. Painted in black and white, they were used for public executions or for the public display of prisoners in cages.

sis is particularly present in the curriculum. Since Kurdish culture was long suppressed, clandestine songs had been the carrier of Kurdish history, struggle, and language. With several radio and satellite TV channels at Rojava's disposal, music is also 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.<sup>336</sup>

Botan's use of the notion of performance describes the direct relationship between her artistic work and the construction of a society based on the model of stateless democracy. Her performance as a musician is directly related to the larger collective performance of stateless democracy, and the defense of this model against the militias of the Islamic State, thus connecting the military with the cultural battlefield.

The case of the Rojavan artist Abdullah Abdul is particularly relevant for the analysis of the differences between 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 a *lost history*. Working from a small studio next to a Tev-Çand center in Amude, a substantial part of Abdul's source material relates to the nearby archeological site of Urkesh, the remnants of an ancient kingdom.<sup>337</sup> Formerly under the control of the Assad regime, Abdul explains that the Rojavans for a long time "did not know whether [Urkesh] was part of our history or of another civilization."<sup>338</sup> Under the Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava, the site is recognized as heritage of Hurrians, Kurds, and other peoples that 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. In

<sup>336</sup> Interview with Nesrin Botan conducted in the Mitra Hasake cultural center, Dec. 20, 2014.

<sup>337</sup> In 1995, researchers in Syria reported Urkesh "to be the capital of a fabled kingdom and the most sacred religious center of the Hurrians, an obscure people who were contemporaries of the Sumerians in the south and the Semites of Ebla in the west." John Noble Wilford, "Lost Capital of a Fabled Kingdom Found in Syria," *The New York Times*, Nov. 21, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/11/21/science/lost-capital-of-a-fabled-kingdom-found-in-syria.html>.

<sup>338</sup> Interview with Abdullah Abdul conducted in the artist's studio in Amude, Dec. 18, 2014.

his words: "We, Kurds, care a lot about our history, yet we do not have a museum here. All museums are in Damascus and Aleppo. We do not have access to our own history, but I would like to learn about it and see its images."<sup>339</sup> As a consequence, he uses the Tev-Çand as a space to exhibit his clay and stone sculptures, modeled on actual archeological findings, in part on Mesopotamian mythology. He argues:

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.<sup>340</sup>

Using materials often recuperated from the surroundings of Urkesh, Abdul's work is hard to distinguish from archeological findings. His red clay relief *King of Urkesh* (2013), for example, takes the form of a broken fragment from a pot or vase, with the image of the former king sculpted upon the surface. Abdul's scratching and sanding of the clay, suggests a long passing of time in between the creation of the original object and its present-day exhibition. This is even more so in the case of Abdul and Hamo's collaboration entitled *A Woman from Rojava* (2014), which from a distance looks like a stone, placed soberly on the floor, leaning against a wall of the Tev-Çand. On closer inspection, the contours of a woman's face appear upon the surface, which, similar to *King of Urkesh*, has been scratched and sanded to give it an ancient appearance. Abdul's marble sculpture *A Woman from Mesopotamia* (2015) goes even further, by showing a female figure without legs or arms; suggesting it has been damaged by the passing of time.

The resemblance of Abdul's work with archeological findings is so striking, that his pieces cannot leave the Rojava region. Iraqi border patrol and customs would confiscate the materials, suspecting them to be actual historical objects.<sup>341</sup> This exemplifies the complex layering of his work. One could argue that his works are archeological falsifications, but it is actually the staging of history that forms the core of his artistic endeavor. The aesthetic representation of history in the form of archeological heritage defines his conceptual approach, material, and style. Simultaneously, being a Kurd from the region, it is hard to argue that his work would not be an actual continuation of a Mesopotamian

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> In 2015, contemporary art center BAK, basis voor actuele kunst requested me to aid in the loan and transport of Abdul's work, but quickly the Rojava administration confirmed that this would be impossible, due to the likeness of his work with archeological findings.

heritage. Operating between material historical findings and mythology, Abdul's work overlaps with Öcalan's own mythological reading of Mesopotamian history.<sup>342</sup> In opposition to what Jineology defines as the doctrines of the statist scientific paradigm, we encounter here a complex entanglement of history and myth, or better, of *history as myth*.<sup>343</sup>

Using the Tev-Çand as museum, Abdul introduces a distinct model of Stateless Propaganda Art, which constructs and stages a cultural history of the stateless. The stateless not as those bereft of the state, but 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 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.

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 Derbisiye. 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 films sets.<sup>344</sup>

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

342 As David Graeber observes, there is a strong cultural dimension to Öcalan's writings, which introduces ancient Mesopotamia as a mythological space in which goddess-women ruled, and peaceful and ethnically diverse pre-democratic confederalist structures existed. Graeber in this regard notes that Öcalan "wishes to speak [...] about a history and social science that does not currently exist, but itself, perhaps, can only be imagined." David Graeber, "Preface," in Abdullah Öcalan, *Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization, Volume I: Civilization, The Age of Masked Gods and Disguised Kings* (Porsgrunn: New Compass Press, 2015), p. 13.

343 The staging of archeology is a reoccurring strategy of regimes to legitimate their native or indigenous origins. Whether in the case of large scale Hollywood productions in which white English-speaking actors retrospectively claim ancient Greece as the origin of all-American values in movies such as Zack Snyder's *300* (2006), portraying Spartans fighting Persians as the pre-entertainment of the War on Terror; or in the case of North-Korea's hybrid "excavations" of historical sites, often enlarged or mixed with more contemporary styles and symbols to affirm continuity between past and present. In the case of Abdul, the staging of history is of course part of his artistic endeavor. See: Terence McSweeney, *The 'War on Terror' and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second*, pp. 186–88; Jane Portal, *Art Under Control in North Korea*, pp. 105–23.

344 Rojava Film Commune, "To the Press and Public Opinion," 2015, <https://www.kominafilmarojava.org/english/profile/>.

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 are reorganized."<sup>345</sup> The redistribution and production of culture in the broad public realm – the factories, restaurants, and streets of Rojava – are its point of departure. Concretely, this happens through the four "wings" of the Rojava Film Commune. The first is focused on the education of the Rojavan population on the history of cinema, the second on the training of young Rojavan filmmakers, the third on the actual production of a Rojavan cinema, and the fourth on supporting filmmakers from abroad who, as the communique claims, "are tired to be captured by the capitalist modernity in their countries."<sup>346</sup> 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."<sup>347</sup>

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."<sup>348</sup> 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 in this framework be unrealistic as it denies such revolutionary imagination, instead turning into what the communique 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 reminds of Bru-guera's work, which we have to define "use" by 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."<sup>349</sup>

The Rojava Film Commune's approach to revolutionary realism

345 Interview conducted with Diyar Hesso at the Rojava Film Commune, Derbisiye, Oct. 30, 2015.

346 Rojava Film Commune, "To the Press and Public Opinion."

347 Interview conducted with Diyar Hesso.

348 Ibid.

349 Ibid.

and its attempt to reorganize art alongside the reorganization of Rojava society clarifies the role of the four branches. Let us shortly review their *modus operandi*, to map out the particular translation from stateless democracy as a political proposition to an artistic one.

As we noted, the first branch is aimed at popular education. Members of the Rojava Film Commune travel to cities and remote villages to mobilize children and workers to attend film screenings. This work, according to writer and Film Commune member Şero Hindê, is organized “with the help of the communes and the city councils.”<sup>350</sup> The aim is to educate the Rojavans on the history of popular cinema so that the films of the Commune are able to resonate with its population, with an emphasis on the younger generation. The first screening that was organized was Charlie Chaplin’s *The Kid* (1921), considered among Chaplin’s most successful works. The film was screened throughout dozens of villages and cities, assembling squares full of children, parents, and workers. Journalist Chris Keulemans observed a strange mutation of Chaplin’s principal vagabond character, “the Tramp,” in the Rojava context:

[S]uddenly, Chaplin is a Kurd. Look at him standing, with his large eyes full of wonder. His worn-out clothes, holes in his shoes: he fits his suit as perfect as the YPG in their uniform. But he is smart too. Homeless, no money in his pocket, the police on his heels – but he remains elusive. At the last moment, he always finds his way out. By accident or on purpose. Chaplin the Kurd always lands on his feet.<sup>351</sup>

What Keulemans’s observation shows is that the screening of *The Kid* in Rojava should be understood as both a form of popular education and as something of an artistic intervention itself. The Film Commune shows a key document from the history of cinema, which is at the same time part of the construction of a new revolutionary cinema. No longer is Chaplin a symbol of capitalist modernity, he is now a Kurd: one of the many actors in the construction of reality through stateless democracy. Just like the old monuments of Assad are repurposed, so is an icon of American cinema. Chaplin is “liberated” in the way the Rojavans are attempting to liberate democracy from the state.

350 Interview conducted with Şero Hindê at the Rojava Film Commune, Derbisiye, Oct. 30, 2015.

351 Original quote in Dutch: “En plotseling is Chaplin een Koerd. Kijk hem nu eens staan, met die grote, verwonderde ogen. Kleren versleten, gaten in de schoenen: hij zit net zo strak in het pak als de YPG in hun uniform. Maar slim is hij ook. Dakloos, geen cent op zak, de politie op zijn hielen – maar hij blijft ongrijpbaar. Telkens verzint hij een nieuwe list. Per ongeluk of expres. Chaplin de Koerd komt altijd op zijn pootjes terecht.” Chris Keulemans, “Charlie Chaplin is een Koerd,” *Groene Amsterdammer*, Nov. 11, 2015.

The second and third branch of the Rojava Film Commune are directly related, in the form of educating Rojava filmmakers and producing Rojava films. In this context, Film Commune members like Hesso and Hindê educate their students on the importance of art production within revolutionary situations, with examples from the French to the Soviet revolutions.<sup>352</sup> But just like Avant-Garde Propaganda Art attempted to liberate art and culture from their subservience to the ruling classes, the Rojava Film Commune emphasizes its aim of regaining control over its own means of cultural production and representation. In the past, the Assad regime controlled all means and channels of artistic production and distribution, but ever since the beginning of the Rojava revolution, hundreds of journalists, television teams, and filmmakers from abroad visited the region to report on the uprising, while no productions were actually in the hands of the Rojavans themselves. In a logic similar to the foreign looting of cultural heritage, there has been a looting of contemporary culture as well by those foreign actors who uphold the means of cultural production and representation from the Rojavans who do not. The Rojava Film Commune aims to reverse this process by developing a practice of film through the distinct condition and worldview of stateless democracy.

The Film Commune’s first major production is entitled *Roza: Country of Two Rivers* (2016), created by several of its members and students, with the aim of becoming the first documentary film on the Rojava Revolution realized by Rojavans themselves.<sup>353</sup> Striking is the film’s gritty and heart-torn reality of the revolution’s losses, displaying images of martyr funerals and public mourning, which form a hard contrast with CNN reports of composed English-speaking Rojavans explaining the democratic aims of the revolutions. *Roza* embodies a proximity and intimacy to its subject, which demands of its makers to fully identify with their surroundings. Who is the one that stands behind the camera, who is the one that asks questions, in what language are these questions asked. These issues define half of what a “documentary” can be as a testimony to, or even active participant in the construction of a new reality.<sup>354</sup> Retaking control over the means

352 Interview conducted with Diyar Hesso and Şero Hindê at the Rojava Film Commune, Derbisiye, Oct. 30, 2015.

353 Examples of foreign documentaries have been Vice’s *Syria’s Unknown War* (2013) and BBC’s *Rojava: Syria’s Secret Revolution* (2014). Note how in both titles signal the Western “discovery” of Rojava’s “unknown” and “secret” revolution. A notable exception would be *The Sniper of Kobani* (2015) of Reber Dosky, a Kurdish-Dutch filmmaker from Başûr, Southern Kurdistan (Northern Iraq).

354 I experienced something similar. Having conducted many interviews in the region, it quickly became clear that as a male subject, I was often not able to address issues of the women’s movement in a relevant or accurate way, or was partly mistrusted as the person asking the questions due to my own implications in the patriarchal paradigm. As a result, my colleague, Renée In der Maur, took over this part of the research. In the Rojava context, knowledge also relates strongly to awareness of gender embodiment.



of cultural production and representation thus also means being able to construct and mediate reality differently. The reality of a society in construction, as Hesso termed it, includes the losses that made this construction possible in the first place. In *Roza: Country of Two Rivers* source and mediator are implicated in the same process of constructing reality anew.

The fourth branch relates to the Film Commune's criticism of outsiders controlling the means of cultural production and representation of the Rojavan reality. Foreign filmmakers are asked to propose their scripts to the organization for feedback first, and are asked to allow free screenings of their work throughout Rojava upon realization. This is a gesture toward filmmakers who are inspired by stateless democracy and wish to "make a movie freely,"<sup>355</sup> but also a way to confront the gaze of the foreign subject observing and "appropriating" the Rojava revolution, by demanding that "[a]t least one person from the Rojava Film Commune will be present during the foreigners' films shooting."<sup>356</sup> One's interpretation of this criterion may differ, between a form of educating foreigners on their own gaze or as a form of censorship of the filmmakers' message – although it must be said that registration with the Film Commune by foreign filmmakers is on a voluntary basis.

The Film Commune's four wings show us clearly how the reorganization of culture alongside the reorganization of society takes place. The aim of the Film Commune is not simply to make art, but to create the infrastructures through which a different cultural production and representation becomes possible. The four wings of the Film Commune invest as much in creating a public as in regaining control over and redistributing the means of cultural production and representation among the Rojava population.

Both in the case of Abdul's work and that of the Rojava Film Commune, we witness a constant interplay between the specific conception of power brought about through the model of stateless democracy and Stateless Propaganda Art. As much as the Rojava society is in the process of construction, so is its art. Whereas Abdul attempts to create a cultural continuity between stateless Mesopotamian history and stateless democracy, the Rojava Film Commune attempts to re-organize the means of cultural production and representation in the service of

355 Brigitte van der Sande adds a critical note: "[D]anger looms on the horizon [...], that of censorship. Article 33, 34 and 35 of the Social Contract assure the freedom of expression and information, but each book to be published must pass through a committee." Brigitte van der Sande, "Inside Hell We Build Paradise," *Open! Platform for Art, Culture and the Public Domain*, Jan. 15, 2015.

356 Retrieved from the website of the Rojava Film Commune, section "For Foreigners," <https://www.kominafilmarojava.org/english/join-us-in-rojava/for-foreigners/>.

a revolutionary realism by juxtaposing stateless democracy's culture to the history of cinema as it has largely been appropriated by statist capitalist modernity. In both cases, we observe an attempt to break with a past represented by the state, while re-engaging a neglected past in the form of stateless history. Although we may find certain overlaps with Popular Propaganda Art, Rojava's Stateless Propaganda Art differentiates itself quite evidently. Simply put, Rojava's Stateless Propaganda Art 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 a self-recognition of the stateless community *to become stateless on one's own terms*.

Possibly most telling in this interplay between Rojava's stateless democracy and its Stateless Propaganda Art is the people's parliament of Qamishlo. Situated in an old theater from 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 new political reality intersects with the staging of its new artistic productions. The theater as a space of both artistic and political imaginary; a space in which the performance of politics and that of art co-exist. Augusto Boal, following Freire, coined the concept of *The Theater of the Oppressed* (1974), a practice of theater in which passive spectators would be transformed into active spect-actors, embodying the politicization of the oppressed as actors and creators of their own faith. 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."<sup>357</sup> In the case of Rojava, we are faced with a 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*.<sup>358</sup> 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 counter-point of state oppression, but which attempts to articulate the very condition of statelessness as a point of departure of a new reality under construction. It is through Stateless Propaganda Art and its revolutionary realism that we have attempted to witness hints of what that society and culture of the future might bring.

357 Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, p. 98.

358 In this case, a full reversal of what we have earlier discussed as the *Theater of Operations* in the War on Terror Propaganda segment and the War on Terror Propaganda Art section.

## STATELESS PROPAGANDA ART: SUMMARY

Before arriving at a general comparison and conclusion to our exploration of categories that help us to define contemporary propaganda art in the 21st century, let us first provide a summary of Stateless Propaganda Art based on our observations in this section:

- Stateless Propaganda Art is a contemporary propaganda art structured on specific conditions of statelessness, aimed at performing the demands for a reality in which either (1) the stateless are recognized within an existing state; (2) the stateless realize a state of their own; (3) the stateless reject the state altogether;
- Stateless Propaganda Art aims to different degrees 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 as a means of visibilization towards the stated (those who seek recognition in an existing state), in some cases as a means to radically separate themselves from an existing state or the state altogether (those who create a state of their own, or reject the state in its entirety);
- Stateless Propaganda Art can be analyzed through the educational and artistic work of liberational practitioners such as Fanon, Freire, and Boal, whether it relates to the pedagogy of the oppressed enacted to create alliance between the stateless and stated (We Are Here), the creation of new national culture separated from an occupying state (Touré), or a pedagogy and theater of the stateless, which starts from the liberational dimension of statelessness altogether (Abdul, Rojava Film Commune);
- Stateless Propaganda Art in all cases aims to construct reality on the basis of the condition of statelessness, whether this is a reality in which the stateless become equally stated (refugees, terrorist suspects), in which the stateless become stated in a state of their own (Azawad), or in which statelessness becomes the precondition of a new stateless reality altogether (Rojava).

## 4.4 CONCLUSION

In this fourth and final chapter, we have explored and mapped the practices of Contemporary Propaganda Art in the 21st century by identifying three key actors, three different subjectivities, which define the conflictual theater of the contemporary, namely the neoliberal public-private infrastructures of the *expanded state*, politicized civil society and its *popular mass movements*, and those dispossessed by the expanded state in the form of *stateless peoples*.

To understand how each of these 21st-century actors attempts to construct reality through different propagandas, we revisited the propaganda model of Chomsky and Herman, and proposed an expansion in the form of the inverted propaganda model, which replaces Chomsky and Herman's "filters" with "demands." Whereas the revisited propaganda model of Goss can be used to understand the performance of power through the expanded state, the inverted propaganda model can be used in relation to the performance of power through popular mass movements and stateless peoples. As a result, we were able to diversify different contemporary propagandas: War on Terror Propaganda, which attempts to construct reality based on threat production and the Us/Them divide to consolidate the interests of the expanded state; Popular Propaganda, which aims at constructing reality by enacting collective demands through the assemblies of popular mass movements; and Stateless Propaganda, which through the performance of precarious power aims at different forms of self-recognition and recognition by others, in some cases with the construction of a stateless reality as a result.

To gain insight into how these different models of power attempt to construct different realities, we examined different structures of power and their performance as art, based on the equation *propaganda = power + performance*. As we established in previous chapters, we did so through a multidisciplinary approach, following from our earlier conclusion that propaganda art can never be understood in the form of an isolated artwork, but only by mapping out the process in which different artistic forms relate to a larger interface of politics, economy, technology and industry. It is through such an interdisciplinary approach to propaganda art that we are able to trace what McSweeney termed the "master narrative" of propaganda.

In the case of War on Terror Propaganda Art, we tried to expand Masco's work into a proper art discourse. Through the work of Lütticken, Dipaolo, Robb, Eisenman, Fusco, Paglen, and others, we observed two interdependent styles through which the expanded state performs and constructs the reality of the War on Terror in the form of projects

of imminent destruction structured on the Us/Them divide. We defined these styles as that of Expanded State Realism and Expanded State Abstraction. Whereas the latter is directed at erasing public history, territories, and bodies, the former aims to replace these with the image of imminent destruction and future survival. These two styles manifest themselves through different interrelated media. In the case of Expanded State Realism, we discussed theater, games, cinema and television in particular, to trace their impact in extended performances in the forms of the actual torture and destruction of those designated as Them. In the case of Expanded State Abstraction, we approached the creation of abstract voids in public records and even geographies as an aesthetic practice, and showed how even a critical art practice such as that of Paglen, is affected and altered through them.

In the case of Popular Propaganda Art, we started from alternative historiographies of art which examine the relation of artists to popular mass movements and its precarious constituents. Through the work of Sinclair, Guillermo, Lippard, Bishop and others, we saw how throughout history Popular Propaganda Art has been the product both of the impact of such movements on the way artists understand reality, and of how artists contribute to the construction of reality as aimed for by these movements. In the process, we defined the aim of Popular Propaganda Art as the contribution to the performance of the popular and the construction of a people, the former describing the enactment of popular demands as we traced them in the inverted propaganda model, the latter relating to assembling a collectivity as an outcome of the enactment of these demands. We articulated the overall aim of Popular Propaganda Art as the objective of Popular Realism: the construction of reality structured by the demands of popular mass movements. We further discussed how these aims of Popular Propaganda Art translate into different models of artistic practice, namely in the form of Assemblism, Embedded Art, and Organizational Art. Through the work of Butler, Athanasiou, McKee, Garza and others, we defined Assemblism as the term through which we describe the aesthetic dimension of popular assembly in popular mass movements: not necessary as a form of “art,” but rather as the artistic and aesthetic component that emerges in the process of devising alternative social forms. Through the work of Steyerl, Not An Alternative, De Bruijne, and Decolonizing Art Architecture Residency, we defined Embedded Art in terms of art practices that directly relate their artistic competences to or operate within popular mass movements, and who re-invent their artistic vocabulary in the process. Finally, through the work of Bruguera’s *Immigrant Movement International* and Ögüt’s *Silent University*, we defined Organizational Art as an artistic practice in which organizational poli-

tical models are devised both as means to support the aims of popular mass movements – if not to instigate them – as well as artworks in and of themselves.

In the case of Stateless Propaganda Art, we shifted away from the overall construction of a “we” throughout this thesis, in order to acknowledge the limitations for a stated writer – someone recognized, administered, and living under relative protection of the state – to draft a series of observations on stateless practices of propaganda and propaganda art. Taking into account the fact that the condition of statelessness embodies particular knowledges inaccessible to the stated, we thus shifted from a model of mere analysis, to one of learning. In that process, we articulated three specific conditions of statelessness: first the demand of the stateless to be recognized by an existing state; second the demand of the stateless to establish a state of their own; and third the demand of the stateless to reject the very model of the state all together. Subsequently, we examined several case studies from the domain of art and culture to see how these different conditions of statelessness translate into different models of Stateless Propaganda Art, and how the aims of self-recognition and recognition by others play out differently in each of the examples. In the case of the demand of the stateless to be recognized by the state, we discussed the work of the collective of undocumented migrants and refugees *We Are Here* in relation to Freire. Subsequently, we observed how through its artistic and pedagogical practices *We Are Here* attempts to create an assembly that consists of citizens and refugees/undocumented migrants, a composition that introduces the stated and stateless as part of a collectivity. In the case of the demand of the stateless to create a state of their own, we discussed the work of Touré and his Artist Association of Azawad in relation to Fanon’s work. Subsequently, we observed how through his artistic and agitational practice, Touré attempts to bring about a process of collective self-recognition for a diverse stateless people to recognize itself as part of a new collective state in the making. Finally, we discussed in more detail the demand of the stateless to reject the state in its entirety through the work of Öcalan and his proposition of a “stateless democracy,” a radical proposal to separate democracy from the state by engaging the condition of statelessness as an alternative liberational paradigm, rather than as a condition of oppression. We traced the impact of this alternative model of self-governing power in the domain of Stateless Propaganda Art through the work of Abdul and the Rojava Film Commune, which attempt to historicize statelessness on the one hand, and aim to organize the notion of a stateless reality through artistic means on the other. Referencing the work of Freire and Boal, we have presented the possibility that these practices could

be understood as a Pedagogy and Theater of the Stateless.

In the 21st century we have so far avoided to engage actively with the term propaganda in a more complex manner. In popular discourse, the term propaganda continues to be used predominantly to describe the output of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships. While the Trump administration in some cases is confronted with the accusation of using propagandist means to achieve its goal using terms such as the “alternative fact” and the designation of mainstream media as “fake news,” the propagandistic notion that democracy stands in opposition to propaganda remains largely intact. This is even the case in key propaganda studies, such as Ellul’s and Chomsky and Herman’s, as they are only capable of understanding alternative approaches to constructing reality as forms of “non-propaganda,” or “counter-propaganda” at best.

Instead, through our historical exploration of Modern Propaganda and Modern Propaganda Art in the first two chapters of this thesis, we have approached propaganda as a performance of power, and concluded that the practice of propaganda is inherent to any society impacted by modernity – even when described as “advertisement” or “public relations.” To that end, we have emphasized that we should diversify the performance of different structures of power in the form of different propagandas. In this fourth and final chapter, we have tried to do so by showing that even emerging powers or extremely limited forms of power still show themselves capable of propagating alternative realities. We did so to gain insight in the plurality of realities that are constructed through propaganda, simultaneous to one another: sometimes in conflict, sometimes in overlap, but all define our existence in the 21st century.

Let us now, based on this chapter, propose the following definition of contemporary propaganda art in general:

- Contemporary propaganda art is the performance of power as art in contemporary society



# CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have tried to narrate how modern and contemporary propaganda art have shaped and constructed the manifold competing realities in which we find ourselves today. I have laid out a different canon, not that of the great masters, but of actors of our time, from the War on Terror to popular mass movements and stateless peoples – those who make our world as we speak. As different as their objectives might be – from Steve Bannon to Judith Butler and Abdullah Abdul – they follow Judith Balso’s dictum to “present ourselves to the present.”<sup>1</sup>

I have narrated the history of propaganda art as a performance of power from modernity to the 21st century. And contrary to what the stakeholders of power would like us to believe, I have argued that although propaganda art has a history, it does not belong to the past. Contemporary propaganda art is and has always been an art of the present, as it is an art of the world we inhabit and make. Now, our challenge I believe is what conclusions we can draw from our own implication in the performance of power and construction of our present-day reality. Propaganda studies is among the least innocent forms of research. As we have seen throughout these chapters, the way propaganda is defined often implicates how it is practiced. But it can also mean that realizing how propaganda operates makes us ask ourselves how to practice it *differently*.

Currently, as far as the term propaganda is still in use, we are presented with what I consider a false choice between propaganda or counter-propaganda, the latter meaning as much as “non-propaganda.” But an absence of propaganda would suggest an absence of power. And power is everywhere, even though that doesn’t tell us anything about the *kind of power* we dedicate ourselves to. Democracy, as we have seen throughout this thesis, is often framed as the opposite of propaganda. But not only is democracy the birthplace of modern propaganda, the use of the term itself says little to nothing about an egalitarian distribution of power. From the regimes of Trump and Duterte to those of Erdoğan and Orbán, elected dictatorships are ruling many parts of our world. And so-called “secular” and “liberal” Western society is far from immune to them; rather, it seems to be the ideal breeding ground for such new contemporary forms of violent ultranationalism and authoritarianism: it might even be worth a new term, “democratic fascism.” Nonetheless, democracy as a word that could uphold a different ideal of power and a different distribution of power is re-invented in the sta-

1 Judith Balso, “To Present Oneself to the Present. The Communist Hypothesis: a Possible Hypothesis for Philosophy, an Impossible Name for Politics?” in Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *The Idea of Communism* (London/New York: Verso), p. 32.

teless region of Rojava and on our city squares. These are the emerging powers I believe we must dedicate ourselves to articulate our side in the contemporary propaganda struggle.

In my introduction, I have clarified my own stakes in this thesis, as a propaganda researcher and as a propaganda worker. Many examples and categories of propaganda art we discussed in the fourth chapter are ones that I have been implicated in myself, and I would not have been able to conceptualize them otherwise. I was a member of Artists in Occupy Amsterdam, an artist collective that aimed to be a Dutch equivalent of Not An Alternative by both challenging and supporting the social movement from within the protest camp. In 2015, I initiated the Artist Organizations International with curator Joanna Warsza and dramaturge Florian Malzacher, an attempt to ally artist organizations from all over the world, amongst which Bruguera's Immigrant Movement International and Ögüt's Silent University. I joined Matthijs de Bruijne in his actions with the Dutch Unions, his collaboration with the Socialist Party (SP) in the former miner-town of Heerlen, and taught art students alongside him and filmmaker Rob Schröder during the occupation of the University of Amsterdam in 2015. And, as mentioned in my introduction, I worked with the artists of the Azawadian and Rojavan movements, amongst which Mazou Ibrahim Touré and Abdullah Abdul, to develop temporary embassies and the People's Parliament of Rojava

In other words, my own work is situated in between the categories of Popular Propaganda Art and Stateless Propaganda Art, a result of my direct involvement in Assemblism, my practicing of Embedded Art and founding of my own artist-organization in the form of the New World Summit. That does not mean that these categories of propaganda art "belong" to me, as I have myself only been able to articulate them by learning from fellow artists and political organizations alike. It is for this reason that I have not wanted to write a thesis about my own work, but have aimed to employ my own knowledge and experience in propaganda work to open the larger field of propaganda art research and practice. Nonetheless, that does not excuse me from clarifying the definition of both art and propaganda that I hold central to my own work, which has informed the writing of this thesis, and that I aim to pursue in the future.

For me, it is impossible to define art without taking into consideration the structures of power through which art has been produced, presented, circulated, and validated. I agree with Sinclair that "all art is propaganda," although that does not yet define what kind of power and thus what kind of propaganda art we are dealing with exactly. And more importantly, the fact that art must be understood in its relation

to power does not by definition mean that it always succumbs to it. Even in Sinclair's militant reading of art history as a site of class struggle, we still encounter a variety of artists which, in the most compromised of situations – and one could ask what situation is not compromised in one way or another – were able to challenge or even change the powers that be, sometimes at great personal risk. So, the paradox here is that art cannot be understood outside of power, but that art at the same time is something else or "more" than the sum of the powers that be. Power shapes art, but art also shapes power. That brings us to the question, what exactly is this "more," this surplus of some kind, that the competences of artists bring about? Or, phrasing the question differently: is this "more" a kind of power that art itself lays claim to?

Even though the definition of art is subject to continuous change, as we have seen from examples from the French to the Russian Revolution, from the War on Terror to Stateless movements, there are nonetheless re-occurring competences that characterizes the work of a wide array of artists. Visual literacy – whether visual artist, film maker or architect – is possibly one of the most important competences if we wish to articulate some continuity between them; the capacity to "read" form, and thus the acquired competence to think and act the world through a morphological perspective. We touched on such morphological readings of the world when we discussed some case studies of Popular Propaganda Art, in which we encountered artists that analyzed Assemblist practices in terms of a "social montage" or "social assemblage." These artists' morphological approach expands artistic concepts such as the assemblage or montage into a larger social realm. If we understand morphology as a genealogy of form, as a competence to "read" form and to produce form, then morphology relates both to how we understand the world visually, how we represent it, but even so how we imagine it to be changed.

Does that mean that no one else but artists can acquire such morphological competences? Certainly not. The mythology of the artist genius and its exceptional sensitivity and magnetic attraction to the sublime, looming underneath the shadows on the cave-wall of our ephemeral reality, is to be done with. Nonetheless, one could say that at least one continuity amongst the wide array of people we have called "artists" through the ages, is that they practice a morphological approach to the world, training and refining this competence as their primary occupation. This does not mean that art is only made by what we traditionally define as artists. In this thesis we have seen that, through the prism of contemporary propaganda art, the nature of the artist, the curator, or the art institution can radically change. While not generally recognized as such, it is hard not to describe Philip Strub as a



*curator* when modifying scripts of film makers, and it is equally difficult not to understand the cultural wing of the Pentagon that subsidizes the films that pass Strub's rigid curatorial criteria as an *art institution* – or at least as an *art fund* – in the context of War on Terror Propaganda Art. We have seen similar changes in what defines art and the role of artists in Stateless Propaganda Art, for example in the case of the Rojava Film Commune, in which the meaning of being an artist expands into simultaneously being an educator, an institutor of new artistic platforms, a distributor of cinematic knowledge, and a revolutionary. But however different these two examples are – the worlds of Philip Strub and Diyar Hesso undoubtedly are radically opposed – in both cases power changes the very definition and form of art, but the engagement of artists with the domain of morphology remains, whether it is by employing visual literacy to imagine ever changing threats of non-existing terror, or by employing such imaginative capacities to bring into being the revolutionary model of stateless democracy. To change the world, for better or worse, we will need to imagine such change first. In that sense, the capacity to imagine the world differently might be the most important aspect of the morphological practice that we call “art,” and it is simultaneously the reason why art, in a grand variety of shapes and forms, has been of continuous importance in propaganda past and present.

This approach to art as morphology could count as a definition of art in general; or at least, as a possible way to find a master narrative in the many different practices that have been termed as art. But it does not yet say anything of the kind of art, and most of all the kind of propaganda art, to which I dedicate my own practice. The morphological competences of art can be applied left and right, from regimes of terror to liberational movements. In my case, I would say that I aim to contribute and help to articulate what I would term as an *emancipatory propaganda art*.

To explain what I would like to call emancipatory propaganda art – a term I touched upon lightly in the introduction – I wish to return to the People's Parliament of Rojava: the public parliament that my artist-organization, the New World Summit, was commissioned to develop for the Democratic Self-Administration of Rojava. I have already discussed some of the morphological dimensions of the parliament that resulted from my collaboration with Minister of Foreign Affairs Amina Osse, such as the transformation of the parliament from a closed hall to a public space, and the transformation of the half circle into a full one, denying a clear center of power. But how exactly is the parliament's morphology performed as a form of propaganda, in the light of the idea of an emancipatory propaganda art?

Throughout this thesis we have expanded the Chomsky and Herman propaganda model, which we discussed as a multilayered performance that comprehends both a macro- and micro-performative dimension. In the case of the expanded state, we have seen how Chomsky and Herman's model operates through monopolized power, in which the interests of the proprietors of the expanded state shape desired attitudes and convictions in a given population through politics, the economy, mass media, the military industrial complex, et cetera. But in the case of popular mass movements and stateless peoples, we have also seen how this multi-layered performance can operate differently, as these emerging powers depart from a collective demand for the democratization of power. Through the inverted propaganda model, we have analyzed how popular mass movements and stateless peoples enact the macro-performative dimension of propaganda departing from a common interest, which is furthered in the form of micro-performances of the diverse constituencies that make up a movement. In other words, the difference in the multi-layered performance of power that is propaganda between the expanded state, and popular mass movements and stateless peoples, is defined through the change in distance between sender and receiver, between proprietor and the subject of ownership. In the case of War on Terror Propaganda Art, the senders are defined by an elite status and their subjects are not, whereas in the case of Popular Propaganda Art and Stateless Propaganda Art, sender and receiver occupy similar positions in the process in which an egalitarian claim to power takes shape.

In the case of the People's Parliament of Rojava, the macro-performative dimension is defined in the process of creating it: the assembly of Rojavans and my own artist-organization, that together follow the decision-making process of stateless democracy to conceptualize, design and construct the parliament as a morphological translation of Rojavan ideology. The micro-performative dimension is of equal importance, namely the moment after the inauguration of the parliament, when different Rojavan communes will one by one occupy the space for the day to day practice of self-governance; the day to day performance of stateless democracy. The decentralized model of power that is stateless democracy thus informs the morphology of the parliament, but simultaneously, this morphology contributes to further shaping of stateless democracy in practice. Emancipatory propaganda art is the result of exactly this interplay between the macro- and micro-performative dimension of propaganda: the morphology that is art is shaped through a specific emancipatory paradigm of power, but that same power is shaped through the work of art at the very same time.

The ambiguity located in the very term performance, becomes par-

ticularly clear in the case of the People's Parliament of Rojava. Here, performance is simultaneously a concrete act that leads to the construction of a material presence in the form of the parliament. But at the same time, it embodies an imaginative dimension which surpasses the process of conceiving and building a space. What defines this imaginative dimension is what the parliament signifies in a future-present. How the parliament will be used from day to day; how its shape and form impacts its users who are simultaneously its owners; and how it will continue to operate as a space in which the real and the imaginative co-exist. The People's Parliament of Rojava is a space that exists and which – in terms of its functions – simultaneously is in the process of becoming; and is that ambiguity, that duality, not exactly what is signified by the word *emancipation*?

Our choice as propaganda artists is what kind of process of becoming we desire to contribute to; in which performance of power do we partake? If our choice is that of an emancipatory propaganda art, then it means we choose to participate in a performance of power of which the outcomes are, different than War on Terror Propaganda, partially unknown. For “emancipation” is defined not simply by an objective we can set from the start; rather, it is the understanding that in the present material conditions that define our reality, we are limited in what we can desire to become. It is for this precise reason that, in line with Butler, we have spoken of Assemblism as a practice of a “people-in-the-making,” as their collective demands do not define them as a homogeneous category, but as a transformative one. What this people will become we do not know, but that they must become something else in the present we know for sure. Emancipation thus means to alter the material conditions that currently stop us from *becoming more*.<sup>2</sup> The paradox of emancipatory propaganda art, is that it is a performance that takes place in the limited conditions of the present with the aim to open a space of imagination of a future-present, in which we might perform differently.

What defines art in the context of emancipatory propaganda art, is the imaginative capacity of morphology: the ability to read the world through form, and the ability to imagine to change it. What defines performance in the context of emancipatory propaganda art, is its twofold operation in between the real and the possible: to confront the material conditions of our world, while enacting the imaginative capacity of art to open the possibility for it to become more. What defines the conditions for both art and performance as emancipatory propaganda art, is

2 *Becoming More* was a ten-day public program that took place in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, from May 18 to May 25, 2017.

emancipatory power: the necessary coalition in which art partakes, to further the demand for the communal democratization of power.

The power struggles of the past have frequently been narrated to us as a “clash of civilizations.” But I suggest not to use that dubious phrase, invented by societies that considered themselves rulers of the earth while accelerating its global destruction more than any other in history. Instead, I would qualify the arena of the contemporary as a “clash of worlds.” On the one hand, we witness the world of endless neocolonial war and climate crimes on a global scale, one that will secure a future without human history. On the other hand, we witness the possibility of a “world of many worlds,” as phrased by the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN).<sup>3</sup> The world of many worlds is a world of emancipatory propaganda. These many worlds, fierce and imaginative, are the domain of emancipatory propaganda art. A space of transformation where we defiantly reclaim the present as our true site of struggle. And, in the process, we might make a future history – future worlds – possible once again.

Now is the time to choose our sides. Now is the time to choose for many worlds. Now is the time to choose *what kind of propaganda* will construct our reality anew.

3 In the words of the EZLN: “Today, thousands of small worlds from the five continents are attempting a beginning here in the Mountains of the Mexican Southeast, the beginning of the construction of a new and good world, that is, a world which admits all these worlds.” EZLN, *Zapatista Encuentro: Documents from the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998), pp. 29-30.

# SUMMARY (ENGLISH)

This study explores the development of propaganda art from the 20th to the 21st century. Although it is often assumed propaganda belongs to the history of so-called “totalitarian” states, I show that modern propaganda has its origins in British democracy, and as such, is applicable to all modern structures of power in the past and present.

I define propaganda as the performance of power by means of the equation *propaganda = power + performance*. Through my work as a propaganda researcher and my practice as a propaganda artist, I show that different structures of power generate different forms of propaganda and therefore different forms of propaganda art.

Concerning the 20th century, I discuss the differences between avant-garde, totalitarian, and modernist propaganda art. I do so by comparing structures of power from the Russian Revolution, the Stalinist regime, and the Cold War with specific forms of artistic production that they made possible. The differences between these structures of power and their art forms are manifold, and for this reason I argue that we need to define propaganda in plural: as *propagandas*.

Although the word propaganda has fallen out of use for some time in favor of terms such as “public relations” and “advertisement,” I argue that if propaganda indeed can be defined as the performance of power and exists both in democracies and dictatorships, there should be no reason not to speak of contemporary propaganda and contemporary propaganda art in the 21st century.

Based on theoretical research, field work in Azawad (northern-Mali) and Rojava (northern-Syria), as well as my own practice as a propaganda artist, I argue that propaganda and propaganda art in the 21st century can be understood through three specific categories, namely War on Terror Propaganda Art, Popular Propaganda Art, and Stateless Propaganda Art. By means of concrete examples of artists and artworks within each of these three categories I try to show how the performance of power in the 21st century translates into different visual forms, and how they shape and direct our reality.

My study shows that power and art exist in continuous interaction. Different structures of power create the conditions for different forms of art, while art simultaneously contributes to visualizing, communicating, and legitimizing power. Power and art are not the same, but should not be examined separately to one another. Propaganda and propaganda art are not terms that only refer to the past, but concepts and practices through which we can understand the construction of reality in the present and, most of all, through which new realities can – and must – be created.

# SUMMARY (DUTCH)

Deze studie verkent de ontwikkeling van propagandakunst in de 20ste en 21ste eeuw. Hoewel vaak wordt verondersteld dat propaganda behoort tot de geschiedenis van zogeheten “totalitaire” staten, laat ik zien dat moderne propaganda zijn oorsprong heeft in de Britse democratie, en in principe betrekking heeft op elke moderne machtsstructuur in het verleden en heden.

Propaganda definieer ik als de opvoering van macht (*performance of power*), middels de formule *propaganda = power + performance*. Doch, aan de hand van mijn onderzoek naar propaganda en mijn praktijk als propagandakunstenaar, probeer ik tevens aan te tonen dat verschillende machtsstructuren evenzozeer verschillende vormen van propaganda voortbrengen, en dus ook verschillende vormen van propagandakunst.

Uit de 20ste eeuw bespreek ik de verschillen tussen avant-garde, totalitaire en modernistische propagandakunst. Dat doe ik door de specifieke machtsconstructies van respectievelijk de vroege Russische revolutie, het Stalinistische regime en de Amerikaanse kapitalistische democratie tijdens de Koude Oorlog te vergelijken met de specifieke artistieke producties die zij mogelijk maakten. De verschillen tussen deze machtsvormen en hun kunstvormen is zodanig, dat ik argumenteer dat wij over propaganda in het meervoud dienen te spreken: over *propaganda's*.

Hoewel het begrip propaganda lang in onbruik is geweest ten faveure van begrippen als ‘public relations’ en ‘reclame’, argumenteer ik dat indien propaganda inderdaad gedefinieerd kan worden als de opvoering van macht, en propaganda door zowel democratieën als dictaturen wordt opgevoerd, er geen reden is waarom wij niet over hedendaagse propaganda en hedendaagse propagandakunst in de 21ste eeuw dienen te spreken.

Op basis van theoretisch onderzoek, veldonderzoek in Azawad (noord-Mali) en Rojava (Noord-Syrië) en praktijkwerk als propagandakunstenaar, argumenteer ik dan ook dat propaganda en propagandakunst in de 21ste eeuw begrepen kunnen worden aan de hand van drie specifieke categorieën, namelijk oorlog-tegen-terreur propagandakunst, populaire propagandakunst en statenloze propagandakunst. Middels concrete voorbeelden van kunstenaars en kunstwerken binnen elk van deze drie categorieën toon ik aan hoe de opvoering van macht in de 21ste eeuw zich vertaalt in verschillende visuele beeldvormen, en hoe deze onze realiteit vorm en richting geven.

Mijn studie laat zien dat macht en kunst in continue wisselwerking met elkaar moeten staan. Verschillende machtsvormen creëren de condities voor het bestaan van verschillende kunstvormen, maar kunst draagt evenwel bij aan het zichtbaar maken, communiceren en legitimeren van macht. Macht en kunst zijn niet hetzelfde, doch zij kunnen ook niet los van elkaar worden gezien. Propaganda en propagandakunst zijn dan ook geen begrippen uit het verleden, maar termen en praktijken waarmee de constructie van onze werkelijkheid in het hier en nu begrepen en ontleedt kan worden. En bovenal: waarmee nieuwe realiteiten kunnen – en moeten – worden geschapen.

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# CURRICULUM VITAE

Jonas Staal (Zwolle, the Netherlands, July 18, 1981) studied monumental art at the AKI academy in Enschede and the SMFA in Boston. He is an artist and founder of the artistic and political organization *New World Summit* (2012-ongoing), the educational platform *New World Academy* (co-founded with BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, 2013-16), and the campaign *New Unions* (2016-ongoing). Staal's work includes interventions in public space, exhibitions, theater plays, publications, and lectures, focusing on the relationship between art, democracy, and propaganda.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Art of the Stateless State* (Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, 2015), *New World Academy* (BAK-Centraal Museum, Utrecht, 2015) and *After Europe* (State of Concept, Athens, 2016). His projects have been exhibited widely, among others at the 7th Berlin Biennial (2012), the 31st São Paulo Biennale (2014), the Oslo Architecture Triennial (2016), and the Göthenburg Biennial (2017). Staal's works are represented in the collections of, amongst others, the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Kadist Art Foundation, Paris; and the Migros Museum, Zürich.

Recent books include *Nosso Lar, Brasília* (Jap Sam Books, 2014) and *Stateless Democracy* (BAK, 2015). The artist is a regular contributor to e-flux journal and his writings further appeared in Art Papers, Parse Journal, de Groene Amsterdammer and NRC Handelsblad. Staal is a member of the Academy of Arts, part of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).