1
CMS: Content Management System, software for editors to publish and edit content online.

2
"Campaign," tbdemos.org, http://tbdemos.org/?theme=Campaign (accessed March 18, 2018).

3
In the past, animations were made with *Adobe Flash* as rendered films that could interact with users' input. Nowadays, code libraries like *jQuery* made it possible to create animations and interactions that are directly connected to live data and are rendered inside the web-browser. But in these cheap political templates, they are just symbols for the *contemporary* web design, without any deeper technical functionalities.

4
Klaus Schmidt, "Identifikation durch Partizipation," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 5, 2004.

5
Custom websites, built from the ground up, would cost approximately $5,000 or more.

Imagining Terror: Propaganda Art Today

Jonas Staal

1 War on Terror Propaganda

The now seventeen-year-old War on Terror has impacted our present global condition in an unprecedented way. This is in part the result of what I call the "expanded state": the merger of public and private infrastructures, state agencies and corporate organizations that operate largely outside of democratic control.[1]

The expanded state has allowed for private military corporations to influence public foreign policy. It has allowed for a new model of war prisons to emerge—such as Guantánamo Bay—in which the rule of law has been replaced by a paranoid military order. It has even allowed for what Jeremy Scahill and Glenn Greenwald have termed "death by metadata": the possibility of being killed through a drone strike simply because one's phone or internet use indicates that one might be indirectly related to a terrorist suspect.[2]

Terror, I argue, begins the moment systems of governmentality move into a realm beyond checks and balances, beyond any form of legal or democratic control. This is the "terror" of the War on Terror. Why did the War on Terror succeed in gaining such enormous political, economic, and judicial power over our lives? When did it claim this power, or when did we as citizens simply hand it over?

In his book *Theater of Operations*, anthropologist and social scientist Joseph Masco claims that to understand the War on Terror we have to look into the heritage of the Cold War, of which he writes the following:

> 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.[3]

Masco emphasizes the importance of fear on a collective, nationwide scale. Fear has a political and affective capacity, as it allows regimes of power to forge the idea of a community or nation united in the face of a common threat, across radically different groups and classes. Fear is also what brings us to hand over our agency as citizens to our government: the perpetual image of imminent self-destruction of our families, friends, and communities by a nuclear threat or terrorist agent that paralyzes our capacity for critical examination. It provokes the feeling that we must act instantly, without identifying who exactly we are fighting against, or who exactly we are fighting for.

Inducing this culture of fear is crucial in the construction of a new normative reality in which citizens accept the workings of their government against a supposed enemy without question. This process is essentially what political theorist Noam Chomsky and media theorist Edward Herman defined in the late eighties as the workings of modern propaganda, which deploys fictional threats to increase monopolies of power in the realm of the state and corporate organizations.[4] Essentially, we accept that we are *no longer citizens*, but instead we become a form of "civil defense" vis-à-vis imagined threats, first in the Cold War, and now in the War on Terror, for the benefit of the shareholders of fear and war. Yet a war to fight fictionalized enemies, once the West's supposed allies such as the regime of Saddam Hussein or the Taliban, has resulted in actual enemies in the franchises of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

For a fictional threat to become reality, we have to imagine this threat and visualize it to the point where it becomes an actual reality. Art and culture are crucial means to make a fictionalized war a real one. Film, of course, has always been an essential medium in this regard. In the context of Cold War cinema, we can think of animated films such as *Duck and Cover* (1951) or the televised *The Day After* (1983). Through Cold War cinema, citizens were asked to witness their own destruction, as well as the imminent destruction of the American dream—their consumer utopia and the social order it represented. It is not irrelevant that at the moment of attack in such films women tend to be performing care labor, while men are always laboring for the economic well-being of their families. Yet the image of destruction was also intended to reinforce order at the very same time: this is how life should be.

Film and television have been crucial artistic means to inscribe the image of imminent threat, and cultivate the continuous anxiety and instability that make us willing to voluntarily hand over our political agency to a ruling order. Eyewitnesses to the attacks of September 11 on the Twin Towers experienced immense and devastating shock; witnesses from afar experienced the same horror repeated on screens, with a strange sense of it all having happened before. Had we not already experienced the high-resolution cinematic collapse of our political order in the form of comets in *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact* (1998), Soviet nuclear attacks, aliens, volcanoes, and tidal waves? The conflict experienced by the television audience was that the imagined attack had in a way already superseded the actual attack: real life terrorism was a mere footnote to the countless hours of cinematic destruction that had been internalized already.[5]

Rather than decreasing the level of cinematic apocalypse after September 11, the representation of our own destruction has only expanded to a planetary scale. September 11 was child's play compared to the high-resolution disaster cinema in the form of Roland Emmerich's *2012* (2009) or Zack Snyder's Superman film *Man of Steel* (2013)—the latter of which was subsidized with military materials through the Pentagon Liaison Film Office in Los

Angeles. In contrast, pre-September 11 disaster cinema like *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon* already seem like the new normal.[6]

War on Terror Propaganda Art thus serves to normalize the War on Terror itself. Compared to the planetary state of exception displayed in spectacular disaster cinema, the War on Terror itself seems like a rather modest, contained, and even rational endeavor. Yet there is also a long history of theater and performance wherein citizens not only watch their own destruction but rehearse it, in preparation to become the frontline of civil defense.

Think of the Cold War mass rehearsals of fictional nuclear detonations, evacuations of cities, and so-called duck-and-cover drills, such as the 1955 state-engineered scenario called "Operation Alert." This nation-wide exercise involved a scenario in which sixty cities were hit by a variety of atomic and hydrogen bombs, resulting in over eight million instant deaths and another eight million radiation victims. "Operation Alert" went much further than progressive playwrights and directors like Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, or Augusto Boal, whose works challenged the relationship of actor and spectator. It turned sixty cities into a theater stage, and turned all of its citizens into actors, and it went beyond questioning the staged nature of reality to create a whole new one through spectacular mass theater.

War on Terror Propaganda Art has continued to develop and perfect the strategies in which citizens perform their own destruction and survival. We can think of the contemporary, biennial state-engineered mass theatrical spectacles known as TOPOFF (Top Officials), consisting of fictional attack scenarios involving supposed weapons of mass destruction used by terrorist agents. The TOPOFF 2 spectacle that took place in 2003 for example, involved eight thousand participants in Seattle and Chicago.[7]

Theater theorist Michelle Dent observed the TOPOFF2 spectacle first hand, and asked herself who exactly was the audience in this bizarre spectacular theater—"the virtual citizens of Seattle? The government officials in-play? The real-time media? The would-be terrorists?"[8]

The answer seems to be all of them, at the same time—yet not just as spectators, but simultaneously as actors. They are, as Boal termed it, "spect-actors," establishing the new realities of the War of Terror by collectively performing their destruction from it.[9]

The new normal is constructed through continuous threat production: War on Terror Propaganda Art gives visual form to these threats. What we perform, when we are engaged in War on Terror Propaganda Art through its cinema or theater, is to become "Us," in the "Us/Them" dichotomy that lies at the ideological foundation of the War on Terror.

The paradoxical reality of our time is that we are actually faced with real threats, in the form of massive economic deprivation and inequality, diminishments of civil rights and democratic control, structural racism and violent exclusion, and the planetary danger of climate change. War on Terror Propaganda Art forces us to forget these actual existential threats by turning our attention to an imagined imminent threat.

3 Stephen K. Bannon: A Case-Study

Separating propaganda art into different disciplines—into separate domains of film or theater—in fact counteracts its interdisciplinary essence: propaganda art aims to be everywhere, through every possible means of mediation. Constructing a new normative reality demands repetition through all possible channels, without interruption or hesitation.

In that context, we turn to a contemporary propaganda artist who connects art with cinema, popular culture, media, politics, and activism: Stephen K. Bannon. His career spans widely different fields of interest: after climbing ranks in the United States Navy, Bannon joined the investment bank Goldman Sachs, before becoming editor of Breitbart News.

Since its founding in 2007, Breitbart has become the self-proclaimed platform of the "alternative right" or "alt-right" in short, although writer Angela Nagle argues that it fits better to the European-nationalist styled agenda of the "alt-light."[10] It has since mobilized millions of readers through aggressive articles aimed against progressives and left politics, immigrants, refugees, the LGBTQI+ community, and feminists. It was Bannon's success

at Breitbart that brought him to the head of Trump's presidential campaign and later as the Chief White House Strategist for the first year of Trump's presidency. Although Bannon was forced out of the White House for his links to the alt-right, and later stepped down as editor of Breitbart due to the publication of Michael Wolff's *Fire and Fury*, his organizational influence on the international alt-right remains significant. This includes, for example, a recent European tour of talks and lectures for the Italian League, the French Front National, and the German Alternative for Germany.[11]

It is lesser known that Bannon is also a prolific film-maker. He began as a producer of Hollywood films in the 1990s, such as Sean Penn's *The Indian Runner* (1991), and *Titus* (1999) featuring Anthony Hopkins. In between, he headed the Biosphere 2 Earth system science research facility in Oracle, Arizona from 1993 to 1995 (the "first" Biosphere being planet Earth itself): the largest closed ecological system ever created, where he researched the consequences of climate change. In the late '90s he wrote a "rap-musical" with script writer Julia Jones entitled *The Thing I Am*, an interpretation of Shakespeare's last work set in the context of the Rodney King riots in South Central Los Angeles.[12]

Although his work with Biosphere 2 shows Bannon's interests in engineering social environments, and his "rap-musical" displays particular clichés of black culture, one could generally say that in this period he was still influenced by a rather liberal-progressive Hollywood environment.[13] That all changed after September 11, when Bannon began transforming into one of the most influential propagandist and propaganda artists of our time. From then onward, he began to develop his own particular brand of documentary-film pamphlets, of which he would make ten in total from 2004 until 2018.

Bannon's first film is a biopic titled *In the Face of Evil: Reagan's War in Word and Deed* (2004). The film presents a glorified life story of the Republican president, portraying Reagan as a lone but dedicated hero facing the evil of the Soviet Union. In the final part of the film, the attacks on the Twin Towers are shown, emphasizing Bannon's view that yet again, Western civilization faces an existential threat. This time it's not Cold War Communism, but War on Terror Islamism. Bannon's message was clear: a new

Reagan is needed to wage an unapologetic war in the face of the cyclical return of evil.

Like Bannon's obsession with strong leadership, fringe conspiracy sciences mark another characteristic of his work. *The Fourth Turning*, a book by William Strauss and Neil Howe from 1997, argues that civilizations develop through four cycles: from their rise to greatness to their decline and downfall.[14] Bannon, relying heavily on this text in his work, belies a paradoxical view of how "greatness" is defined. He is a free market conservative-Christian who has called for the "destruction of the administrative state."[15] Yet he promotes "economic nationalism" in which a government is responsible to maintain the free market within its national borders, protected by a strong military and massive border control resulting in what we could call "white Christian economic nationalism."[16]

The Fourth Turning was the starting point of Bannon's film *Generation Zero* (2010), which outlines a deterministic view of history. In his perception, the United States gained greatness after the Second World War through a home-grown free capitalist market, strong religious and family values, military might, and a proud national identity. In the post-war generation, however, the Flower Power and feminist movements introduced secular and individualist consumer culture that would bring about the degradation of the US by establishing the rule of a liberal globalist elite, or what Bannon has called the "Party of Davos," referencing the yearly gathering of CEO's in the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. To Bannon, there is a direct lineage from the social movements of the '60s and '70s to the hedonist and individualist culture that led to the 2008 economic crisis, essentially one of liberal-globalist greed. This decline announces the "fourth turning," a great war between his ideal of white Christian economic nationalism against the internal enemy in the form of the Party of Davos, and an external enemy in the form of Islamic terrorism.

Formally, Bannon's work follows clear documentary stylistic conventions. Voiceovers of frequently unnamed "experts" lead us through what look like historical documents that are to provide proof to his argument of a cyclical rise and fall of civilizations. This narrative is strengthened by less informative footage, such

as ticking clocks, rotting fruit, blazing tanks, and guns, all of which affirm a sense of inevitability. Bannon's narrative cannot be paused or reversed, but races from one cycle to the next. Arousing music underscores each of these phases, adding an emotional and affective dimension to the viewer witnessing the rise and fall of its own society. The viewer is made to feel powerless and alone: repetitive cycles cannot be reversed or stopped, we are passive witnesses to our own rise and fall without control over our destiny.

Regarding his inspirations, Bannon has said: "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."[17] It is a rather ambitious statement: Bannon's fast-produced films, full of stock footage, lack the originality of Moore or the artistic innovation of Eisenstein or Riefenstahl—but that does not mean that they're not effective. He has termed his style "Kinetic Cinema," characterized by situating repeated narratives closely to a bombardment of images to the point at which, in his own words, it "almost overwhelms the audience."[18] At such a peak moment of induced anxiety and fear, Bannon's answer is introduced. In his first film the answer was Reagan, who faces up to the threat of communism; the intention of his subsequent films is to seek for the Reagan of the 21st century who stands up against the two-headed enemy of the Party of Davos and Islamic terrorism. As Bannon has put it: "What I've tried to do is weaponize film."[19]

In *The Undefeated* (2011), Bannon portrays former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin as his champion. Combined with images of Reagan, Palin is depicted as a people's hero: an icon of the free west, a fighter for economic nationalism, and simultaneously a dedicated mother who upholds the values of family and defends Christian doctrine. Liberal-democratic leaders such as Barack Obama are, on the other hand, portrayed in his film *The Hope & The Change* (2012) as symptoms of a degenerate secular and individualist culture of appeasement. Bannon also sees a direct link between the Obama administration and the Occupy movement, which he considers a staged protest orchestrated by Obama administrators, labor unions, and the hackers collective Anonymous. In the narration of his film *Occupy Unmasked* (2012), the globalist

elites (represented by Obama) and the radical-left, or "alt-left" (represented by Occupy), are both part of a "cultural Marxist" coup, aimed to take-over and collectivize the state from within.[20] Obama and Occupy are the threats within, Islamic fundamentalism is the threat outside. A strong leader is needed to defeat both.

Torchbearer (2016), Bannon's paranoid and apocalyptic view of a Western civilization on the brink of collapse, takes the most extreme stance. It is also his most explicitly religious film: only the return to the Christian, nationalist, and free-market ideal of American society—the majestic "first turning"—provides a solution to inevitable apocalypse. Narrated by arch-conservative figurehead Phil Robertson, a prominent anti-gay, anti-feminist, and anti-abortion activist known from the reality television show *Duck Dynasty*, Bannon does more than simply overpower us with images of violence, chaos, and decadence: he provides us a way out, exemplified by the final scenes in which Robertson baptizes what seem to be the viewers of the very same film. In the peace and quiet of rural America, they are inaugurated by their religious leader into the civil defense of Bannon's white Christian economic nationalism.

Torchbearer came out the year Bannon joined the Trump campaign. It might be hard to imagine Trump as the symbol of white Christian economic nationalism, considering his sexism, playboy persona, and multiple marriages, previous financial support to democrats, and his continued use of government aid for his failing casinos and real estate ventures. Bannon's campaign, however, secured the support of evangelicals and Christian communities who helped bring Trump to power. Bannon scripted and staged Trump according to how his constituents desired to see him. What Bannon failed to do with Palin, he did with Trump: he made his own Reagan.

Throughout his body of film works, one can easily recognize Bannon's core narratives and strategies. His "kinetic" cinema became a kinetic political campaign, twisting and manipulating reality to the point where only a Trump could save us. Whether allegations of sexism, racism, or other controversy, Bannon staged and reimaged reality to make Trump. This is the power of War on Terror Propaganda Art, or, in the case of Steve Bannon, something

between War on Terror Propaganda Art and the Propaganda Art of the Alternative-Right.[21] After having cultivated the narrative of a new clash of civilizations through his work for nearly fifteen years, Bannon turned artistic imaginary into a political reality.

To artists and cultural workers, the present task is to research and understand the processes in which propaganda and propaganda art construct our current reality. Propaganda is, in essence, the performance of power, the employment of various infrastructures—in the realms of politics, the economy, media, and the military—to construct a new normative reality.[22] Considering that there is no reality absent from power, one has to question whether there is ever a politics without propaganda. But not all powers are alike, and thus *propagandas* in the plural might differ and conflict as well. The powers of the War on Terror and Bannon's international alt-right are fundamentally different than those of popular mass movements, from Occupy to Black Lives Matter, pan-European platforms such as DiEM25, or the stateless democracy of the Rojava Revolution in northern Syria. They might not be able to avoid performing a propaganda of their own, but theirs is one that proposes an egalitarian narrative about the reality we live in and the world we can create collectively.[23]

As artists and cultural workers, our endeavor should be to introduce new narratives about where we come from, who we are, and most of all who we can still become—not simply in the form of a counter-propaganda, but by exploring the possibility of an emancipatory propaganda art.

This essay was presented in an earlier form as two lectures: the first titled "Art against the War on Terror" during the conference Public Calling, on November 1, 2016, at the National Theatre in Oslo organized by Fritt Ord Foundation and KORO—Public Art Norway / URO; the second titled "Imagining Terror: Propaganda Art Today," on November 30, 2017, at Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam.

Jonas Staal, *Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective*, 2018
Produced by Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam
Stills from Steve Bannon's film *Generation Zero* (2010)
Image: Remco van Bladel and Jonas Staal

Jonas Staal, *The Disappearance of Steve Bannon*, 2018
Produced by Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam

1
According to artist and geographer Trevor Paglen, the complexity of mapping the expanded state in the War on Terror is because 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." Trevor Paglen, *Blank Spots on the Map: The Dark Geography of the Pentagon's Secret World* (London: New American Library, 2010), 140.

2
Jeremy Scahill and Glenn Greenwald, "The NSA's Secret Role in the U.S. Assassination Program," *The Intercept*, February 10, 2014, online at: https://firstlook.org/theintercept/article/2014/02/10/the-nsas-secret-role/.

3
Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 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: Princeton University Press, 2006).

4
Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

5
For a further analysis of the intersection between imagined and material terror, see: Terence McSweeney, *The "War on Terror" and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

6
On the work of the Pentagon Liaison Film Office, see: David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004).

7
US Department of State, "Top Officials" (TOPOFF) information page, http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/about/c16661.htm.

8
Michelle Dent, "Staging Disaster: Reporting Live (Sort of) from Seattle," *The Drama Review* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 109–34.

9
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), xxi.

10
Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2017).

11
According to Joshua Green, this recent tour is the product of a long term international alt-right network build by Bannon, that reaches from "Nigel Farage and UKIP, Marine Le Pen's National Front, Geert Wilders and the Party for Freedom, and Sarah Palin and the Tea Party." Joshua Green, *Devil's Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 207.

12
A table read of the script was presented as an online televised performance by *Nowthis News* in 2016, see: https://nowthisnews.com/steve-bannon-hip-hop-rap-musical.

13
The Washington Post notes in this regard: '"The Thing I Am' presents Los Angeles during the riots as a war zone equivalent to the one created by the clash between the Romans and the Volscians. And Coriolanus' rise and downfall in 'The Thing I Am' present him as someone who could stop the violence in his own community but is temperamentally incapable of making the compromises and taking the strong stands necessary to do so. These ideas have a striking resonance with the ways President Trump now talks about American cities and African American communities." Alyssa Rosenberg, "Stephen Bannon Wrote a Movie about the 1992 L.A. Riots. Now, You Can Finally Watch It," *Washington Post*, May 1, 2017.

14
In Strauss and Howe's own words: "Turnings come in cycles of four. Each spans the length of a long human life, roughly eighty to a hundred years, a unit of time the ancient called the *saeculum*. Together, the four turnings of the saeculum comprise history's seasonal rhythm of growth, maturation, entropy, and destruction." William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 3.

15
Max Fisher, "Stephen K. Bannon's CPAC Comments, Annotated and Explained," *New York Times*, February 24, 2017.

16
Fisher.

17
Adam Wren, "What I Learned Binge-Watching Steve Bannon's Documentaries," *POLITICO*, December 2, 2016.

18
John Patterson, "For Haters Only: Watching Steve Bannon's Documentary Films," *Guardian*, November 29, 2016.

19
Keith Koffler, *Bannon: Always the Rebel* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2017), 48.

20
The term "cultural Marxism" originally related to a model of cultural critique of mass standardization and commodification developed in the context of the philosophy and sociology of the Frankfurt School. In movements assembled under Trumpism the term has come to signify a conspiracy theory that claims that the radical left, or sometimes a left-Jewish alliance, is using popular culture to plan a government takeover. The main target is the Jewish-American writer and community organizer Saul Alinsky (1909–72) and his book *Rules for Radicals* (1971). Both the Clintons, Obama and the Occupy movement are considered by Bannon and other right-wing ideologies to operate under the continuous influence of Alinksy ideology.

21
Journalist David Neiwert's detailed reconstruction of converging right-wing extremist movements past and present—from the Patriot militia to the Tea Party and alt-right, resulting in the construction of an "alt-America," comes very close to the alt-right propaganda objective to create a new, parallel reality all together. See: David Neiwert, *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* (New York: Verso, 2017).

22
This definition follows the work of Chomsky and Herman referenced earlier, who speak of the "performance" of the mass media in contributing to a new normative reality that follows the interests over their ownership. Different than Chomsky and Herman though, in the context of contemporary propaganda *art*, I propose to read the term performance both as a formal analysis of the "enactment" of power, but also of the theatrical means necessary to script choreograph and "stage" reality. I further propose a propaganda model that does not exclude progressive and emancipatory forms of emerging power—different than Chomsky and Herman's sole focus on "monopolized" power—to analyze possible alternative forms of "emancipatory propaganda" in popular mass movements, stateless insurgencies and the like.

23
See also, Jonas Staal, "Assemblism," *e-flux journal*, no. 80, March 2017.

Negative Internationalism and Shame as Strategy

Nina Power

How do we conceive of our humanity today? Are "we" post-human (or are "some" of "us"? The problem of the "we" is the question here), living out our lives in indifference to what unifies us as a species, wondering if we have been rendered different by technology, or by capitalism, or by geography? Is the new global divide not between north and south, rich and poor, imperium and periphery, bourgeoisie and proletariat, but rather between those who have transcended humanity (whether through the satiation of want, technology, or fantasy, apathy, indifference) and those who are forced to remain resolutely trapped inside its definition? What do I mean by humanity here? I am not necessarily or directly referring to the biological substrate that unites us, though that is one way of conceiving the shared nature of humanity at the level of species. Nor am I appealing to a putative set of "rights" that some possess and others do not, but that in principle should be universal (though again, this is a possible political avenue, and one with some limited success historically).

Despite all the conceptual ways in which we might imagine that humanity can be conceived in a global sense—the pictures of Earth from space or the "globalization" of capitalism, the implication of which is that we might also be able to imagine a "global humanity"—we are no closer to overcoming the fictions of nations, race, or of defeating fascisms of all kinds. In fact, we are barely able to rise above the creeping, individualizing feeling that "everything is wrong."

Neoliberal individualism has morphed into a terrifying collective suspicion, what Thomas Curran and Andrew Hill call "socially prescribed perfectionism":