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Making and Faking the News: Editorial Introduction

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It seems an appropriate testament to our troubled times that there has been a groundswell of academic work examining "Bullshit", as both epistemic category and political and social phenomenon. Philosopher Harry Frankfurt's much-cited musing "On Bullshit" (1986/2005) paved the way for so many psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, media studies scholars and, indeed, art and design practice researchers with the now familiar opening line: "One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit" (2005: 1). For Frankfurt, who first crafted this phrase in the mid 1980s, there was a need to interrogate bullshit on its own terms, for unlike straight up "liars" – whose deceptive outbursts at least hew to a belief that they are in possession of the facts (and an understanding that they are deliberately subverting them) – bullshitters possess no such belief in, or concern for, anything resembling the truth. An "indifference to how things really are" (29), an invention of both facts and contexts "to suit a purpose", a complete unconcern as to whether its fabrications are found out – "bullshit", argues Frankfurt, "is a greater enemy of truth than lies are" (52-58).

Scholars have subsequently built on, challenged, questioned the value of, reconceptualised and considered Frankfurt's original arguments in the light of new exigencies (e.g. Briciu 2021; Cassam 2021; Meibauer 2025). But there is little disagreement that an excretal odour pervades the contemporary media landscape. For the purposes of this Introduction, we can note an array of studies emerging in response to recent political developments (the two Trump administrations; Brexit; the rise of populist ideologues, "influencers" and conspiracy theorists), the increased presence of terms like "fake news" and "post-truth" in everyday discourse, and new technologies, most notably AI. While the likes of Nigel Farage and Donald Trump casually shrug off "pertinent and decisive falsehood[s]" dismissing critics not with facts but with claims that such criticisms are ideologically motivated (Truwant 2024: 6-7), the "addiction machine" (Seymour 2019) of social media enables the amplification of views, arguments and perspectives as wanting of evidence as they are of rationality (see also Lichtenberg 2021: 17-18; Kaussler et al 2020; MacKenzie and Bhatt 2019; Carter 2018; Wardle 2027). In an age characterised to the point of cliché as "post-truth", observers highlight the political mileage and media platform afforded those who trade in "epistemic vices", whether that be bullshit or just old-fashioned lies, deception and manipulation (Cassam 2019; MacKenzie and Bhatt 2019; Gibbons 2024). And inevitably, recent scholarship on "large language models" has suggested the hallucinations, vacuousness and misinformation provided by ChatGPT and its peers can be understood as "bullshitting, in the Frankfurtian sense"

for the fact that they are "designed to produce text that looks truth-apt without any actual concern for the truth" (Hicks et al, 2024: 37). AI in this sense becomes just a potent contribution to discourse argued to be ever-present across the media; another technology developed, in Raymond Williams' terms, "with certain purposes and practices already in mind" (1974: 14).

For all their contemporaneous urgency, none of these debates are particularly new in and of themselves. Discussions of bullshit – as is the case with fake news, post-truth and every other veracity-questioning epithet currently in use – are but the latest manifestations of long-standing concerns about spin, misinformation, propaganda and conspiracy in the media (Arquob et al, 2022; McNair 2017: 11). The visibility of such concerns today offers nonetheless an opportunity to explore past and present for ideas, methods and developments in how art and design practitioners have and can address this timely theme. As Hadas Emma Kedar notes, there is also a rich vein of "fake news" outputs by activist-artists interested in critiquing and exposing the problem (2020: 132). The rise of "tactical media" since the 1990s has seen artists and art collectives (the Yes Men and "Newstweek", for example) subvert media codes and conventions, creating invented news stories intended to challenge corporate and governmental malfeasance (Kedar 2020: 136-145). The term "parafiction" has been mobilised to describe art practices – fake advertising campaigns, hacked museum tours, fictionalised histories and so forth – as attempts, not always received positively, to confront viewers with the manifold fabrications they encounter on a daily basis (Lambert-Beatty 2009: 51-83). Digital and interactive designers have reflected on the potential of their discipline to provide "tactical disinformation" as a means of critiquing and exposing contemporary data mining practices and surveillance capitalism (Tsuan-Hsiang Day 2022: 327-331). The articles contained in this special issue, Making and Faking the News, contribute to the debate, suggesting how art and design practice research can offer new perspectives on this broad array of issues, concerns and anxieties.

In "Critical Distance: On Illustrating News Events from Afar", Stephanie Black and Luise Vormittag encourage us to rethink the potential of illustration as a form of current affairs analysis. Acknowledging the value of in-situ, "reportage" drawing, they nonetheless contend that images produced "at a distance from events" can afford the practice researcher equally rich and diverse insight. Discussing the work of artists such as Daniel Heyman, Tings Chak and Catherine Anyango Grünewald, Black and Vormittag argue that illustrating major, traumatic episodes such as war and murder "from afar" enable an empathetic, meaningful engagement with the episode itself, but also allow for self-conscious critical reflection on how events are constructed and portrayed in more rapidly produced, immediate, witness-based accounts. Thus, their article suggests ways in which illustrators can offer fresh perspective on the media – its conventions, potential biases and structural inequalities.

Tom Sykes' contribution "Truths Under the Carapace? Historical Fact and Fiction, the Metahistorical Sublime and the Insane Rationality of the Bomb in Tangled Saviours: A Novel" explores creative writing as an innovative form of metahistorical commentary. Sykes provides an excerpt from his forthcoming novel Tangled Saviours (Roundfire Books, 2025), an inventive, kaleidoscopic story that careers across 500 years of US and Filipino history. He then discusses the creative strategies he used to counter dominant Western accounts of historical events like WWII and challenge the persistence of colonial stereotypes. Grappling with historiographical and political theory, Sykes suggests the fruitful encounters to be had between creative writing and a critical engagement with the past and its discontents. He identifies and analyses various literary devices that furnish the novelist-as-historian's arsenal as they set about deconstructing and reimagining the past.

Louis Netter and Oliver Gruner consider the potential of comics as a form of historiographic analysis, focusing in particular on questions of "trust" as they have appeared in the past and present. Their comic, "The Mock Down: Comics and a History of Trust" anchors itself to debates surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic while drawing visual and thematic connections back to various historical contexts. Netter and Gruner experiment with a range of formal and stylistic strategies – symbolic allusions, temporal leaps, heteroglossia expressed through images and words, abrupt changes in tone and register – and, in doing so, reflect on the contemporary breakdown of trust, its historical roots and nefarious impact on society. At the heart of the comic is a concern with the power of creative practice to self-consciously engage with questions of historical "truth", verisimilitude and the past's symbolic import in ideologically charged conflicts of our time.

Simone Gumtau's practice-based design project "Telling a Story Well: Communicating Covid-19 Variants to a Wide Audience through a Generative Graphic System" turns to data visualisation and how it might counter some of the dishonesty and inaccuracies associated with science communication. Gumtau's own visualisations focus on the early spread of Covid-19 in the Hampshire area of the UK and she exhibits various iteration of work conducted in collaboration with health organisations and data sources. Her work suggests the potentialities of design to enter wider scientific discussions, engage scientists and the public, impart accurate information and facilitate a healthy scepticism toward a wider culture inured to the fake news and conspiracy that appears so frequently in discussion of developments in science and health. Gumtau suggests data visualisation can, in interesting, self-reflexive ways, make manifest the systems of knowledge and power that help structure the ways in which information (scientific and otherwise) is disseminated and passed down to the public.

Making and Faking the News was an issue some years in development. We're grateful to the contributors for their vibrant, incisive and rigorous variety of practice-based methods and to the editors at IJCMR for their support in developing the project. We hope readers find much to consider in the creative work undertaken and analysed throughout and perhaps also a few

suggestions for taking forward practice-based analyses of all things fake, duplicitous, lie-mongering and disingenuous. If art can't cut out the bullshit, what can?!

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