

POPULAR

INQUIRY

The Journal of Kitsch, Camp and Mass Culture

**NARRATIVE MODES:
CONSPIRACY THEORIES,
FAKE NEWS, POST-TRUTHS,
NEW WORLD ORDERS, NEGATION
THEORIES AND INFODEMICS**

Volume 1 / 2021

BOARD

Editors in Chief: Max Rynnänen (Aalto University, Finland) & Jozef Kovalčík (Comenius University, Slovakia)

Issue Editors: Paco Barragán (Independent researcher, Spain)

Associate Editors: Michaela Pašteková (Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Bratislava, Slovakia), Zoltan Somhegyi (Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary), Adam Andrzejewski (University of Warsaw, Poland), Yvonne Förster (Shanxi University, China)

Advisor: Stefan Snaevarr (University of Lillehammer, Norway)

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Jörn Ahrens (Justus Liebig University Giessen), Epp Annus (Estonian Literary Museum), Paco Barragan (University of Salamanca), Patrizia Calefato (Università degli studi di Bari Aldo Moro), Arindam Chakrabarti (Stony Brook University), Pauls Daija (University of Latvia), William Erwing (King's College Pennsylvania), Yvonne Foerster (Leuphana University Lüneburg), Philip Freytag (Rheinische-Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität Bonn), Carsten Friberg (independent scholar), Arto Haapala (University of Helsinki), Adam Haupt (University of Cape Town), Anssi Hynynen (independent scholar), Antti Ikonen (Aalto University), Mira Kallio-Tavin (Aalto University), Kari Kallioniemi (University of Turku), Kimi Kärki (University of Turku), Wojciech Malecki (University of Wrocław), Maddalena Mazzo-Cut (Università degli Studi di Milano), Benedikts Kalnacs (University of Latvia), Andrea Mecacci (Università degli Studi di Firenze), Ossi Naukkarinen (Aalto University), Angela Oguntala (independent scholar), Celeste Olalquiaga (independent scholar), Michaela Pasteková (Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Bratislava), Mateusz Salwa (University of Warsaw), Manisha Sharma (The University of Arizona), Richard Shusterman (Florida Atlantic University), Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen (University of Aarhus), Elisabetta di Stefano (Università degli Studi di Palermo), Kevin Tavin (Aalto University), Margus Vihalem (University of Tallinn), Annamari Vänskä (University of Turku), Hiroshi Yoshioka (Kyoto University)

Popular Inquiry: The Journal of the Aesthetics of Kitsch, Camp and Mass Culture is a peer- and double blind-reviewed open-access online journal dedicated to the study of the philosophical aesthetics of popular culture. We publish annually one spring and one fall issue. All issues consist of a minimum of an editorial and four articles. The articles can also be interviews with distinguished scholars or popular culture intellectuals. From time to time we also publish special issues. We are thankful to Aalto University for making possible the publishing of this journal and to Svenska Kulturfonden for funding the development process. Special thanks to David Lewis and Kevin Tavin. Logo(s): Martina Obertova.

© Individual contributors. The moral right of the authors has been asserted.

Mail: Popular Inquiry, Max Rynnänen, P.O. Box 31000, 76000 Aalto University, Finland.

E-mail: popular.inquiry(at)aalto.fi

ISSN 2489-6748

POPULAR
INQUIRY

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL Paco Barragán.....	2
PART 1: HYPER-NARRATIVITY AS DISCOURSE, CREDIBILITY AS CONDITION	
STORYTELLING HYPERREALITY Andrea Mecacci.....	4
I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE TRUTH, TELL ME A GOOD STORY: NARRATIVITY AS DISCOURSE, CREDIBILITY AS CONDITION Paco Barragán.....	12
PART 2: TOXIC NARRATIVES: FAKE NEWS AND CONSPIRACY THEORY	
FAKE NEWS AS META-MIMESIS: IMITATIVE GENRES AND STORYTELLING IN THE PHILIPPINES, BRAZIL, RUSSIA AND UKRAINE Roman Horbyk, Isabel Löfgren, Yana Prymachenko, Cheryll Soriano.....	30
“NO THEORY HOLDS TOGETHER:“ SUSPICION, ITS PLOTTERS, AND THE PATTERNS OF IMAGINATIVE REASON IN (RE-)CONCEPTUALIZING DIGITAL CONSPIRACIST DISCOURSE Siim Sorokin.....	55
PART 3: THE SELF, LABOR AND OFFICE AS PERMANENT NEOLIBERAL NARRATIVES	
“I, MYSELF AM THE MEDIA.” THE <i>AESTHETICS OF THE SELF</i> AND ITS NARRATIVE MODES IN THE <i>ECHO-SPHERE</i> Maria Teresa Russo.....	76
RESTRUCTURING REALITY – NARRATIVES OF WORK AND IDENTITY Saara Mahbouda.....	89
OFFICE AESTHETICS: NARRATIVES AROUND CONTEMPORARY LABOR THROUGH REPRESENTATIONS OF OFFICE SPACES Paola Jalili.....	106
PART 4: VISUAL ARTS, NARRATIVITY AND POLITICS	
BEHIND CLOSED DOORS: FROM FACTS TO NARRATIVES IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKS OF TARYN SIMON AND THOMAS DEMAND Maribel Castro Díaz.....	120
ON NARRATIVE HYPERSIGN AND FEMININE IMAGINARY: <i>AUDREY FLACK'S PHOTOREALISM</i> Manuel González de Ávila.....	133
NEW WORLD ORDER Yalili Mora, Paco Barragán.....	141
REVIEWS	
STUDYING MEDIA FROM THE MIDDLE OF THINGS Maja Bak Herrie.....	154
NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS.....	159

EDITORIAL

Paco Barragán

Popular Inquiry and I are very happy to present to you this fascinating issue titled *Storytelling and its Narrative Modes: Conspiracy Theories, Fake News, Post-Truths, New World Orders, Negationist Theories and Infodemics*. We sincerely think the topic is not only timely but challenging and mandatory in a time characterized by an exacerbated narrativity fueled precisely by post-truths, fake news, conspiracy and negationist theories and infodemics. The outstanding feature of today's society, where telecommunications networks, information systems, mass and social media coalesce, is that we're all potential producers, manipulators and distributors of alternative narratives able to challenge official statements and commonly accepted truths.

In *Storytelling and its Narrative Modes...* we address this beginning of the century's *Zeitgeist* which, we feel, manifests a strong desire by human beings—be it a celebrity, a politician, or a normal citizen—to deliver a logical and comforting explanation for the origin of a virus or the supposed control that the elites want to impose through vaccines on the world population.

The first two essays are of an introductory and contextualizing nature: while Andrea Mecacci takes a philosophical stand by analyzing the close relationship between postmodernism and hypernarrativity, Paco Barragán looks at its political origins and suggest a communications theory based on the concept of “credibility” as filter or counterpower.

The second block of essays delves straight into the heart of today's fake news and conspiracy theories with a set of recent examples of how these (new) narrative modes compete with and de-stabilize traditional media by offering alternative stories. Roman Horbyk, Isabel Löfgren, Yana Prymachenko and Cheryll Soriano address the fascinating and widespread proliferation of fake news in Brazil (Bolsonaro), the Philippines (Duterte), Russia (Putin) and Ukraine (Zelenksy) and how “mainstream media storytelling is hacked, imitated and hijacked.” On his turn, Siim Sorokin analyzes the crisis of trust in our contemporary societies, that has brought about a “malleable reality and a fluidity of truth,” by looking into the historical, etymological, and epistemological nature of conspiracy and conspiracy theory (CT) and illustrating it with a close reading of the conspiracy forum *Para-Web*.

The third part reflects on the augmented need and pressure of narrating the self and the office or workplace as a highly narrated space. While Saara Mahbouba delves into Reality TV and cultural industries as “avant-garde” sites that forge sophisticated narratives for the

transformation of identity and labor, Maria Teresa Russo suggests that our social media culture of the “show-and-tell”, the “always-on” and of “connectivity” turns life into a permanent stage where the contemporary subject must respond performatively so to meet the demands of our hyper-narrated societies. Paola Jalili analyzes precisely one of those spaces where the neoliberal subject spends most of her/his time—the office—and how “office aesthetics” through its careful staged narratives enhances precarious labor.

In the fourth and final part we address the fascinating relationships between the visual arts and narrativity. While Maribel Castro focuses on the photographic works of Taryn Simon and Thomas Demand and how they both question and contest the limits “between reportage, conceptualism and portraiture”, Manuel González de Ávila investigates the pop and kitschy paintings of Audrey Flack as sophisticated and active “devices of the feminine condition and its production.” Finally, Cuban artist Yalili Mora presents a special visual essay curated by Paco Barragán titled *New World Order* in which a series of world leaders have been portrayed from a rather unusual and fascinating perspective: headless!