ARTIVISM

The Art of Subverting Power

DISRUPTIONLAB.ORG/ARTIVISM

Friday June 23, 2023

16:30 · Doors open

17:00 — 17:15 · OPENING & INTRODUCTION

Tatiana Bazzichelli (Artistic Director, Disruption Network Lab, IT/DE).

17:15 — 18:45 · KEYNOTE

Inverted Gaze: Watching the Watchers in a Well-Watched World

Manu Luksch (Artist, Filmmaker, Researcher, AT/UK). **Lauri Love** (Computer Scientist, UK). Moderator: **Tatiana Bazzichelli** (Artistic Director, Disruption Network Lab, IT/DE).

As surveillance tends towards omnipresence yet invisibility, art, activism, and hacking intersect to highlight, critique, disrupt and counter the encroachments of the surveillance state and extractive personalised data economy.

Our information environment is subject to extraordinary interference. As both traditional and user-driven social media landscapes fall vulnerable to automated surveillance, disruption and trolling, and as the datasphere more broadly becomes a target and product of machine analysis and management, so the distinctions between democracies and authoritarian regimes are becoming blurred. This is further fuelled by growing influence in the sports, culture and education sectors bought by nations and corporations engaged in reputation management.

Under these circumstances, **Manu Luksch** seeks to carve out new niches for action and engagement by inhabiting the space between art, film, academia and activism. Straddling disciplinary boundaries with hybrid forms opens up diverse information cultures and distribution channels. She will present ongoing initiative that focuses on the case of Emirati blogger, poet, engineer and father-of-four Ahmed Mansoor. In 2017, Mansoor was jailed for 10 years for a tweet that allegedly insulted the 'status and prestige of the UAE'. A few months prior, he had exposed his government's purchase of spyware to exploit an insecurity on his iPhone.

Behind Mansoor's personal tragedy lie power struggles within the sheikhdom and the region, the scramble for a post-oil tech-utopia, and a foreign investment strategy that implicates the UK government and affects football fans in the stadium. Alongside the development of a feature documentary, this project has resulted in academic publications, posters, a translation of Mansoor's poetry, a graffiti campaign, gallery installations, and witness statements to a UK Parliamentary Seminar.

Lauri Love will focus on how art and hacking enable critical discourse on the erosions of unwatched spaces and uncommodified selves, reclaiming technology to enable creative expression, agency and praxis, unobscuring, averting and inverting the gaze through "sousveillance" – strategies for empowerment via monitoring and vigilance from below. He will discuss how artists and hackers employ sousveillance, both to reverse the gaze onto power structures and challenge the status quo, question normative boundaries of privacy, and reimagine agency in our data-saturated society.

This keynote addresses artivism and artistic practices in the age of surveillance and sousveillance, reflecting on critique and empowerment at the frontiers where future unfurls. Can dialogue displace defeatism? Can aesthetics embrace artifice? Can the umwelt of the underseers uphold digital rights, privacy, and democratic engagement?

19:30 — 21:30 · PANEL

Fighting Technologies & Systems of Domination

Derek Curry & Jennifer Gradecki (Artists, US), **Yasmine Boudiaf** (Artist, DZ/UK), **Tobaron Waxman** (Artist & Curator, CA/US/PL). Moderated by **Magdalena Tyzlik-Carver** (Associate Professor of Digital Communication and Culture, Aarhus University, PL/UK/DK).

This panel connects three different experiences of the role of art in fighting systems of control and exploring technologies and bureaucracies of domination. The line-up conceptually combines Derek Curry and Jennifer Gradecki's artistic works dealing with financial instruments, facial recognition, dataveillance technologies, social media misinformation and disinformation; Yasmine Boudiaf's artistic research and practice on AI and algorithms of domination, and how technological biases are targeting minorities in the UK; Tobaron Waxman's project "Gender Diasporist", which traces his complex experience through Polish bureaucracy in the context of gender transitioning, examining ways in which the state determines the parameters of our bodies.

Derek Curry and **Jennifer Gradecki** will discuss several research-based artworks that address and intervene in the socio-technical dimensions of technological power structures. These projects expand debates beyond a limited group of technocratic experts and reflect on the broad social impacts of these systems, from false positives in mass surveillance systems, to the algorithmic spread of misinformation and disinformation through content aggregation filters. By creating interactive artworks that replicate corporate and governmental technical systems, including the errors they produce, they allow the public to experience what are typically hidden or inaccessible systems while foregrounding the capitalist or governmental agendas that produced the technologies.

Through a performative lecture, **Yasmine Boudiaf** will offer an insight into her artistic approach, situating the influence on public life of the entanglement between state and corporate tech actors as part of a wider pattern of behaviour that replays across history and geographies in different forms. Focusing on the UK context, she interrogates power, society and technology and explores these themes through a series of case studies.

'Gender Diasporist' is an interdisciplinary project combining video, photo, vocal performance, historic documents and artifacts, using what **Tobaron Waxman** calls 'transsexual knowledge' to interrogate how borders and concepts of citizenship make moral and ethical claims on our bodies. The project outlines the theocratic 'gender recognition' law in Poland regarding transsexuality and citizenship that Tobaron experienced when he applied for Polish citizenship as an out transsexual person of Polish-Jewish heritage. This was both a decolonial gesture, a refusal of the 'right of return' and an act of solidarity with feminists and LGBTQ+ allies and activists in Poland. This ongoing project is an interdisciplinary artwork that examines this legal process and its socio political and cultural implications in relation to issues of migration, inhabitance and border.

Saturday June 24, 2023

15:00 · Doors open

15:30 — 16:10 · VIDEO

Giacomo Verde: The Little Diary of Ailments

Il piccolo diario dei malanni, a video performance in homage to Giacomo Verde, 36 min, IT, 2019.

"I don't feel like a technological optimist, much less a fetishist. My cultural background has led me to share the cyberpunk point of view: the democratic and creative use of technologies is the result of a constant battle. Even if the digital gives great possibilities, there are economic interests (of the few) that do everything to put brakes and cages in place." – Giacomo Verde

The Little Diary of Ailments (*Il piccolo diario dei malanni*) is the last performance by Giacomo Verde, an Italian pioneer of video experimentation bridging theatre performance, activism and net art, who passed away in early May 2020. The performance is a sort of artistic testament of an author who always crossed trans-disciplinary research with a focus on artivism, DIY technology, popular theater, storytelling, and poetry.

In 2019 Giacomo Verde opened at SPAM! the Aldes Company's theatre space in Capannori, in the province of Lucca, northern Tuscany, a truly touching, personal and precious show, "The Little Diary of Ailments" (*Il piccolo diario dei malanni*). It is a tale of an illness that comes to you unexpectedly one day just as you are writing a diary, "a little diary of ailments," those of lifelong friends, those of your mother and those of society. And then at a certain

date, you also add your own, a bloody invisible, unpredictable, and unpreventable cancer. The play is made up of a journey through colourful drawings and short notes written down on a diary, where daily life, art and resistance intertwine. The tale began in 2012, the year of his mother's death, which caught Giacomo Verde while he was on a train, headed for one of the thousand far-off destinations where this world whips you to survive. It is the dark side of self-employed and independent work that forces you into a condition of self-exploitation, it is the cut-off of the much applauded "gig economy".

16:15 — 17:00 · PANEL DISCUSSION

Hacktivism, R(Ǝ)O Dada & Resistance

Superazione Collective & Dada Boom Collective (Murat Önol, Virginia Orrico, Alessandro Giannetti, IT), **Guido Segni** (Artist & Hacktivist, IT).

Following the screening of "The Little Diary of Ailments" by Italian artist and activist Giacomo Verde, this discussion with Superazione Collective & Dada Boom Collective (Murat Önol, Virginia Orrico, Alessandro Giannetti) and Guido Segni reflects on the impact of artivism from hacktivism to r(Ǝ)o dada, presenting artistic interventions and tactics of resistance in the grassroot scene of Italy.

A group of researchers, activists, artists, and performers has been active since Giacomo Verde passed away in May 2020, organising distributed events in his memory, including the creation of the Artivism conference in Viareggio last December 2022. During this series of events, art and activism were connected to bring important social issues to light, focusing on different areas of action, from anti-war campaigns to climate justice interventions, to new strategies of activism in the age of big data and the connections between art and whistleblowing (see artivism.today).

Giacomo Verde worked for many decades on developing an ethical and political use of technology, from the early 1980s until he passed away in 2020. His artistic practice can be described as "technological artivism", applying a DIY approach to technology to denounce misconducts embedded in society. He was one of the first Italian artists to create interactive art works, combining different art genres. His book *Artivismo Tecnologico* (Technological Artivism, 2007) describes the practice of artivism within the cultural and artistic scene of Italy. The book includes many contributions such as the collective piece *For a New Cartography of Reality*, that can be considered the first manifesto of the virtual era in Italy, and

interlinks experiences shaped in the Italian grassroots media scene from the 1980s until the middle of 2000s. The artistic practice of **Guido Segni**, together with the one of many other Italian hacktivists, developed within this context.

Giacomo Verde was among the initiators of the **r(Ǝ)o dada** experience, which started in 2019 in Italy with the redaction of a manifesto by the **Dada Boom Collective**, which was signed by the **Superazione Collective** the same year. r(Ǝ)o dada is a political and cultural practice that takes shape through *operActions*, ongoing interventions that develop as an artistic and activist process. It is the expression of a melting pot of actions, artworks, sharing and connections of different people, activists, groups, associations. r(Ǝ)o dada aims to bring to light social problems or conflicts. The artistic process implies to criticize such conflicts, to fight against burning issues of our society and to express dissent and political positions about them. The result is to create open encounters where different people can express their ideas and can approach practices they had never explored before.

17:30 — 19:00 · KEYNOTE PANEL

Unmasking Power as Art: Sharing Tactics & Practice

Mike Bonanno & Jeff Walburn / The Yes Men (Artists & Activists, US), Cornelia Sollfrank (Artist, DE). Moderated by Klara Hobza (Visual Artist, CZ/DE).

How can artists use their special expertise to draw attention to political grievances and contribute to their redress? And what does it do to art when artists get politically involved? This keynote panel brings together three artists that have been working in the field or critical technology and political awareness since more than three decades, Mike Bonanno & Jeff Walburn, from the culture jamming and activist group The Yes Men, and Cornelia Sollfrank, one of the pioneers of net art and cyberfeminism.

In the realm of Artivism, where the boundaries between art and activism blur, **The Yes Men** have been working as provocateurs who delight in unmasking the puppeteers of power through their collectively orchestrated interventions. Combining media-hacking and social-engineering tactics, they challenge corporate malevolence while simultaneously amplifying the voices of activists. Their social-engineering tactics steal media space from commercial interests, questioning the motives of those who wield authority.

The Yes Men have participated in many attempts to ignite a network of truth-seekers, activists, and makers of meaningful mischief. Mike and Jeff of the Yes Men join the ARTIVISM conference with the hopes that they can swap stories and tactics of wit, creativity, and defiance: teaching and learning how to challenge the systems that bind us in today's tumultuous social and political landscape.

They will share some funny videos of their interventions and break down how they are designed to plague corporate evildoers, amplify activist campaigns. and expose the flaws of established power structures. Along the way, they discuss the importance of tricksters in subverting power, and explore how these media-hacking and social-engineering tactics can be stolen and remixed by anyone.

Alongside, **Cornelia Sollfrank** has accumulated a manifold oeuvre in which she is challenging traditional aesthetic categories by confronting them with the potential of digital networked technology. Based on the assumption that there is no place outside the political, she, for example, extends her concept of material into the social and experiments with new forms of organization as aesthetic practice.

True to the motto "the mode is the message," she strives to create space for the quiet, the minor, the difference – for what happens in the cracks and in-between spaces, for the cement that holds the social together by activating individual agency within a collective structure while never losing sight of the symbolic power of art.

As the initiator of the campaign *TammTamm – Artists Informing Politicians* (2005/06), she created a form of protest that involved several hundred actors. At the same time, the protest was based on private conversations between one politician and one artist in each case. In this way, a massive political confrontation over a controversial museum project and 30 million euros of public funding was broken down to an encounter between two people. Eventually, the action developed its political impact by gathering the reports on the individual encounters on a joint website, which allowed to create attention and support also beyond the local.

Although this campaign deals with a very specific situation in a local context with a clearly defined goal, it will be presented through an artistic production at the Artivism conference, and it will serve as a basis for this keynote discussion of the core questions regarding the relation of art and politics.

19:30 — 21:30 · PANEL

Breaking Evil: Artistic Actions for Justice

Steal This Poster (Subvertising Collective IT/UK), **Michelle Tylicki** (Artist & Activist, PL/US/UK), **WeiterSo! Collective** (Activist Art Collective, DE). **Moderated by Natalia Ivanova Mount** (Curator & Activist, BGR/US).

This panel brings together artivists challenging corporations, systemic powers and social injustice and fighting for the public good. Their tactics aim to empower people touching issues of political and social relevance in the field of corporate copyright laws, greenwashing in advertising, and the power of gas lobby. They organise artistic actions and generate collective projects that span from subvertising, adbusting to awareness campaigns, showing how art and activism can contribute to imagine a better world and do it collectively.

StealThisPoster, a network of subvertisers based in the UK and Italy, presents the project stealthisposter.org, an online archive of subversive posters. They will discuss different examples of artivist actions organised by the stealthisposter's network: how this public domain archive of posters helped its authors in hacking the laws of copyright and how they subverted the logo of the petrol company Shell into Hell; the protest of the squatted women house Lucha y Siesta in Rome and the action of "Linea Fuxia", a fake pink washing campaign run by the company who wanted to evict their premises; the short mockumentary "Blasphemy from the world", presented at the Post Porn Film Festival in Warsaw from June 12-19, 2023 (and now available through their website).

Multidisciplinary artist and activist **Michelle Tylicki** takes us through her creative practice across media, exploring the notion of benevolent vandalism, solidarity not charity, squatting as a career choice, and how doom, anger and despair can be utilised and transformed creatively through humour and mischief. In a violent world Tylicki responds creatively by building functioning mediaeval weapons against the arms fair or staging theatrical combat for the climate. She will tell stories of how to call out greenwashing in advertising through ad busting / ad hacking, collaborative performance in occupied coal mines, to creating subversive installations of a fridge full of 'humanely slaughtered' human meat. In the difficult struggle for a better world, enjoying the process and having fun is her key to a sustainable activism. More: brandalism.ch

WeiterSo! Collective will talk about their current campaign, which aims to make visible the ways in which the gas lobby manipulates public discourse. What makes the gas lobby so powerful and successful? And how can we cut them off? As always in politics, this struggle is about knowledge and information as levers and tools of power. When government ministries withhold relevant information, there may be courageous employees who are willing to make this information public via anonymous mailboxes. If companies with public shareholdings conceal financial flows, perhaps press law can help. There are many ways into the backroom, people just must find them. In this presentation, WeiterSo! will look at some of their attempts and explain their understanding of impact orientation in political campaigning. How do we make change measurable and how do we ensure that our activism does not dissipate? Visit zukunft-gasfrei.de, the current WeiterSo! campaign against the German gas lobby.

Workshops

Sunday June 25, 2023
Not Streamed

11:30 — 14:00 · WORKSHOP #1

Investigative Tactics To Dismantle Supremacist Cuteness

Noura Tafeche (Artist & Scholar, IT)

STUDIO 1, KUNSTQUARTIER BETHANIEN, MARIANNENPLATZ 2, 10997 BERLIN

Workshop suitable for an 18+ audience.

Given the disturbing nature of the workshop's main topics, participants are advised of permanent trigger alerts.

The workshop takes inspiration from *The Kawayoku Inception*, a project delving into the political-artistic value of cuteness and the permanent status of performativity and hypersexualization on social media, as agents of a growing trend of aestheticization of violence. The project aims to shape under new taxonomies contemporary digital evanescence, visual reformulation of violence, unconventional recruiting strategies and militarized entertainment. Areas of research explore Israeli and US military propaganda and recruiting strategies translated into dance choreographies and challenges, weeb

alt-right incel imaginary intertwined with cute manga fan-art and gaming and 2nd Amendment, pro-gun, war enthusiasts or armies employing anime and kawaii aesthetics.

Out of this research, accomplished over three years on popular social media and remote online micro communities, an ongoing archive was built to catalogue nearly 30.000 files (screenshots, memes, posts, videos, etc) with a "geographic map" of digital platforms where the phenomenon proliferates. The workshop aims to provide a strategic toolbox to investigate and analyse fringe internet communities that are involved, in different ways and to different extents, in the production and reproduction of online violence. The workshop exposes participants to a wide array of investigative methods including digital geography and participant observation of such online communities, and qualitative interviews to their members (e.g. channel admins, etc.).

Case studies will include the cute imaginary of Israeli Defence Force's soldiers micro-celebrities and hypersexualized Zionist propaganda's influencers on major digital platforms, the case of former Military police officer awarded certificate for promoting the reputation of the IDF on TikTok, or the intertwining weapons glorification and anime body pillows, as a hyper-niche fetish that visually and culturally convey suprematist values such as female submission, 2nd amendment magnification and rape culture.

Noura Tafeche will guide the participants through an intricate net of a variety of social media like hyper niche telegram channels, discord servers, popular subreddits, official and bogus accounts and user base. The workshop aims to create collaborative strategies for a net of journalists, artists, researchers to share knowledge and methods of analysis to bring to light issues related to the depths of the Internet and directly interface with its community and its pathway to a radicalized ecosystem, with a subversive/investigative slant.

This workshop is for activists, students, teachers, mixed teams of students and teachers, investigative journalists, researchers, emergent artists, art collectives, cyber-flaneurs and groups of people who are joining forces for the occasion.

Individuals with any kind of background are welcome to join as well.

- Number of participants: min. 20 - max. 30 prs
- Participants are kindly asked to bring their laptops.
- To facilitate introductory stages before the workshop, a dedicated discord server is employed, but joining is not mandatory.

14:30 — 17:00 · WORKSHOP #2
OVERLAPS WITH WORKSHOP #3

It Doesn't Work Anyway: Measuring the Impact of Political Art Actions

WeiterSo! Collective (Activist Art Collective, DE)

[SUPERRR Lab](#) · [Oranienstraße 58A, 10969 Berlin](#)

No previous experience is needed, laptops are practical but not necessary.

Since 2020, **WeiterSo! Collective** has been concerned with the question of how the turbulence created by political art actions can be translated into actual change. What needs to be planned and how to not only "attract" media attention for a short period of time but to shift the focus of coverage and discourse in a sustainable way? How can our target, be it a gas lobbying association or a political party, be prevented from sitting out the criticism and then carrying on as before? What could be the means not only to strip the emperor of his clothes, but take them away for good?

How to root a stunt in lasting change by impact oriented strategizing? **WeiterSo! Collective** has some concrete ideas and wants to exchange practical strategies with you. Therefore we are interested in the contexts in which you are working and the tactics you use to reach your goal. In the workshop we will discuss our concept of impact-measuring and apply it together with you to different targets. We want to put our heads together and learn from you! By the end, our campaign planning toolboxes will be filled with new ideas ready to be tested in reality. And we'll be even better thorns in the eye.

15:00 — 17:00 · WORKSHOP #3
OVERLAPS WITH WORKSHOP #2

Listening Structures: A Collective Process for Big Tech's Interrogation

Yasmine Boudiaf (Artist, DZ/UK)

STUDIO 1, KUNSTQUARTIER BETHANIEN, MARIANNENPLATZ 2, 10997 BERLIN

Challenging, undermining and distributing power is not easily done. Participation in discourse, let alone influencing systemic change requires resources; some material and some more symbolic – signalling to all the undeniable legitimacy of the agent. In undermining this process (a process that has become democracy in practice), new constellations of participation and outcomes are necessary.

Listening Structures provide a 2-dimensional environment to capture and orient thoughts on a given technological conundrum. A series of geometric shapes that are gradually populated with words, the process asks: what would listening look like when assigned roles were no longer visible, and participants were not confined by conventional conversational dynamics (such as waiting for your turn to speak)?

The listening becomes detached from any person yet, everyone becomes the listener, as each participant is presented with the output at the same time. This distributed listening becomes active distributed listening when participants have access to the platform where contributions are collected and are able to manipulate them. These contributions, or thoughts, take on a life of their own; they are picked up and moved around by anyone, built on, manipulated and challenged. Half-formed ideas can manifest and be made whole by someone else.

As ideas travel through these structures during this in-person interactive workshop, the nature of these ideas changes, with the output determined in the commons.

We will collectively interrogate case studies where big tech and the public sector become entangled, assessing their impact on public life and minoritsied communities. We will pick up and run with each other's ideas to collectively speculate on alternative figurations for what such relationships could be, if power was distributed and decisions were made in the commons.

Artistic Productions

TammTamm: Artists informing Politicians

Cornelia Sollfrank (Artist, DE).

The campaign "Tamm-Tamm – Artists Inform Politicians" took place in Hamburg in 2005/06 and was a protest against the newly planned Maritime Museum. In order to complement the ongoing HafenCity urban development project with a cultural "attraction", the Hamburg City Parliament had offered the controversial private collector Peter Tamm a large historic building and 30 million euros to transfer his private "maritime" collection into a museum.

The organizers of the protest assumed that the collection did not meet the scientific standards of a public museum and that the notorious right-wing collector would use the premises to celebrate his authoritarianism. The campaign took the political leaders into responsibility. For each elected member of Hamburg's parliament, an artist acted as godfather/ godmother and engaged in a personal dialogue with the politicians in order to provide background information on the project.

Documentation of each encounter was collected on a website, which proved to be an effective tool against the opportunism of the local media. The original website is only partially preserved. Fragments as well as supporting material have been included in the documentation: https://artwarez.org

D A Z Z L E

Lauri Love (Computer Scientist, UK) & **Michelle Tylicki** (Artist & Activist, PL/US/UK)

An interactive tool to teach *computer vision dazzle* – anti-surveillance makeup. Designed to break machine vision systems, this subversively placed art installation satirises the beauty industry and reveals a critique of surveillance capitalism in advertising. For activists planning to take direct action, with D A Z Z L E one can create a custom template of camouflage applicable against modern advances in police surveillance tech.

D A Z Z L E is the facelessness of the resistance.

Cameras proliferate as surveillance becomes ubiquitous, data is invasively collected and commodified without consent. The human face is tracked, profiled, herded. Enter D A Z Z L E, an interactive tool for the reclamation of agency. Designed to break machine-learning facial recognition models, this subversive salon experience satirises the beauty industry to reveal a critique of surveillance as a tool of capitalism and the state. Observe, frustrate and defeat realistic facial detection and recognition systems. Emerge as a certified enigma with a camoflagued look analysis report giving quantitative data that empowers you to reclaim your own.

Through a boutique salon experience, clients have their facial features detected and displayed within a closed system, learn how the technology works, then follow tips on effective methods to defeat it as they customise their camoflagued style, apply dazzling modifications and accessories, and emerge rewarded with a tailored look analysis report to certify their fabulous mystique against eight of the most commonly used detection models.