

EDITED BY  
**SARAH HEGENBART &  
MARA-JOHANNA KÖLMEL**



**dAada**  
**DVTR**

**CONTEMPORARY ART  
PRACTICE IN THE ERA  
OF POST-TRUTH POLITICS**

# Dada Data



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*Contemporary Art Practice in the  
Era of Post-Truth Politics*

Edited by  
**SARAH HEGENBART AND  
MARA-JOHANNA KÖLMEL**

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# CONTENTS

*Note on Cover Design* vii

*Illustrations* viii

*Notes on Contributors* xiii

*Acknowledgements* xviii

Introduction: From Dada Tricks to Post-Truth Politics  
*Sarah Hegenbart and Mara-Johanna Kölmel* 1

## **PART ONE** From Dada to Data 21

- 1 Dadadatadada: From Dada to Data and Back Again *Mara-Johanna Kölmel* 23
- 2 Clouds, Critique & Contradiction: Programming Dissent in Dada and Data Art *Meredith Hoy* 41
- 3 The Legacy of the Berlin Dada Media Hoaxes in Contemporary Parafictive Acts *Rebecca Smith* 55

## **Visual Essay by montage mädels** 69

## **PART TWO** Global Dada 73

- 4 Sheida Soleimani, Cyborg: Photomontage in an Expanding Network *Matthew Biro* 75
- 5 Black Dada Data: Collage as a Tool of Resistance against White Supremacy Thinking in the Digital Age *Sarah Hegenbart* 105
- 6 Dada's African South *Roger van Wyk* 125
- 7 Paula Rego: A Dada Attitude against Authority in the Post-War Period *Leonor de Oliveira* 143

## Visual Essay by donna Kukama 159

### PART THREE Big Dada Data 163

- 8 Big Dada, Big Data: Schwitters's Merzbau, the Private and the Trash *Natalie P. Koerner* 165
- 9 Identity, Ecology and the Arts in the Age of Big Data Mining *Roberto Simanowski* 183
- 10 The Digital Revolution as Counter-Revolution *Joshua Simon* 197

## Visual Essay by Kemang Wa Lehelere 213

### PART FOUR Dada x Alt-Right. Faking the Truth 215

- 11 Down the Rabbit Hole of the Alt-Right Complex: Artists Exploring Far-Right Online Culture *Inke Arns* 217
- 12 Fashwave: The Alt-Right's Aestheticization of Politics and Violence *Lisa Bogerts and Maik Fielitz* 230
- 13 Post-Internet Art and the Alt-Right Visual Culture *Vid Simoniti* 246

## Visual Essay by IOCOSE 261

### PART FIVE Dada Data Tactics 263

- 14 Pixel Pirates: Theft as Strategy in the Art of Joan Ross and Soda Jerk *Jaime Tsai* 265
- 15 Precarious Data Aesthetics: An Exploration of Tactics, Tricksters and Idiocy in Data *Annet Dekker* 280
- 16 The Multiple Narratives of Post-Truth Politics, Told Through Pictures *Jack Southern* 292

# NOTE ON COVER DESIGN – MONTAGE MÄDELS

‘mine human ores’

every time we scroll – when we are at our most tired, our lowest ebb – you  
and i consume.

we are ‘consumers’.

we consume a ready-meal discourse.

we are also rebuilt, slowly.

psychometric components, in 2016 we permanently recalibrated our systems  
of rule.

but we have already forgotten.

now we are mainly picked open & drained.

you and i are mined.

they mine our human ores.

ores in the shape of our fears; aspirations; our political dreams for the future.

time to choose: swap out phone for megaphone, or keep on scrolling

# ILLUSTRATIONS

## Plates

- 1 Hannah Höch, *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands*, 1919. Collage, 114 × 90 cm. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021 / Photo: © bpk / Nationalgalerie, SMB / Jörg P. Anders.
- 2 Casey Reas, *All Your Face Are Belong To Us (Followers 1K)*, 2015. Code, digital images, computer, screen, 1080 × 1920 pixels. © Casey Reas.
- 3 Sheida Soleimani, *Minister of Petroleum (Angola), Secretary of State (United States, 1973–77)*, 2017. Archival pigment print, 40 × 60 in. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani.
- 4 Tschabalala Self, *Pocket Rocket*, 2020. Digital print on canvas, denim, fabric, thread, painted canvas, dyed canvas, acrylic and hand mixed pigments on dyed canvas, 244 × 244 × 4 cm / 96 × 96 × 1 1/2 in. © Tschabalala Self. Courtesy Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York. Photo: Matt Grubb.
- 5 Adam Pendleton, *Black Dada (A/A)*, 2019. Silkscreen ink on canvas, in two panels, overall: 243.8 × 192.7 cm; 96 × 75 7/8 in, each panel: 121.9 × 192.7 cm.; 48 × 75 7/8 in. © Adam Pendleton. Photo: Andy Romer. Courtesy Galerie Max Hetzler.
- 6 Buyani Duma and Thato Ramaisa perform as Desire Marea and Fela Gucci as the performance art duo FAKA. Photographed by Viviane Sassen, 2015. © Viviane Sassen.
- 7 Still image from *Swarm Theory V1.0* directed by Kyla Davis and Daniel Buckland at the National Arts Festival, Makhanda, 2019. Copyright: Kyla Davis, Photo Credit: Daylin Paul.
- 8 Paula Rego, *Salazar vomiting the homeland*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 94 × 120 cm. Calouste Gulbenkian Museum – Modern Collection, Lisbon, Portugal. © Paula Rego. Courtesy of the artist and Marlborough, New York and London.
- 9 Jennifer Chan, *Boyfriend*, 2014. Video artwork (6:26), video still (at 1:24). © Jennifer Chan.
- 10 IOCOSE, *Dadasourcing (Dada means nothing)*, 2018. Crowdsourced image. Printed with permission of the artists.

- 11 IOCOSE, *Dadasourcing (Boom boom)*, 2018. Crowdsourced image. Printed with permission of the artists.
- 12 IOCOSE, *Dadasourcing (Abolition of the future)*, 2018. Crowdsourced image. Printed with permission of the artists.
- 13 IOCOSE, *Dadasourcing (Everything we look at is false)*, 2018. Crowdsourced image. Printed with permission of the artists.
- 14 Joan Ross, 'The naming of things', *The claiming of things*, 2012. Digital video, 7:36 minutes. Courtesy the artist and Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney.
- 15 Erica Scourti, *Difficult to Find the Lost Things*, 2019, detail. Printed with permission of the artist.
- 16 *Flatness screengrab Feb 2019*, showing artwork by Nikhil Vettukattil. © Shama Khanna, 2021. Image courtesy of flatness.eu, and reproduced with the permission of Shama Khanna.

## Figures

- 1.1 Tristan Tzara, *DADA soulève tout*, 1921. Text by the artist (recto). Letterpress, sheet: 10 13/16 × 8 1/4' (27.4 × 21 cm). The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. Acc. no.: 3216.2008, © 2022. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence, Christophe Tzara. 24
- 1.2 Raoul Hausmann, *Sound-Rel*, 1919. Sound poem, coll. Musée d'art contemporain de la Haute-Vienne, château de Rochechouart. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021. 25
- 1.3 Grayson Earle, Binary view of the Bail Bloc mining algorithm – a software that mines cryptocurrency which is then traded for US dollars to bail low income people out of US jails, 2021. © Grayson Earle. 27
- 1.4 Hannah Höch, *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands*, 1919. Collage, 114 × 90 cm. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021 / Photo: © bpk / Nationalgalerie, SMB / Jörg P. Anders. 29
- 1.5 Anonymous, George Soros Meme, 2016. [shorturl.at/eistQ](https://shorturl.at/eistQ), accessed 18 January 2022. 33
- 2.1 Casey Reas, *All Your Face Are Belong to Us (Followers 1K)*, 2015. Code, digital images, computer, screen, 1080 × 1920 pixels. © Casey Reas. 50
- 4.1 Sheida Soleimani, *Lachrymatory Agent*, 2014. Archival pigment print, 24 × 17 in. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. 77

- 4.2 Sheida Soleimani, *Nedā*, 2014. Archival pigment print, 24 × 17 in. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. 79
- 4.3 Sheida Soleimani, *Vitriolic Acid: An Eye for an Eye*, 2015. Archival pigment print, 24 × 17 in. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. 81
- 4.4 Sheida Soleimani, *Atefeh*, 2016. Archival pigment print on cotton, paracord, dimensions variable. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. Photograph by Will Amlot. Courtesy Edel Assanti. 83
- 4.5 Sheida Soleimani, *Raheleh*, 2016. Archival pigment print, 40 × 27 in. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. 85
- 4.6 Hannah Höch, *Russische Tänzerin (MeinDouble)* [*Russian Dancer (My Double)*]. Photomontage. 12 × 8 7/8 in. Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Brunswick, Germany (joint property of Braunschweigischer Vereinigter Kloster- und Studienfonds). © 2021 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. 88
- 4.7 John Heartfield, “*Die Nation steht geschlossen hinter mir*” (*The Nation stands united behind me*), from AIZ, Vol. 12, No. 27, July 13, 1933, Page 467, 1933. Photogravure 14 3/4 in × 10 3/8 in (37.47 cm × 26.35 cm). © 2021 The Heartfield Community of Heirs / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. 89
- 4.8 Installation view of Sheida Soleimani: *Medium of Exchange*, Atlanta Contemporary, 2018. Courtesy Atlanta Contemporary. 92
- 4.9 Sheida Soleimani, *Vice President and Secretary of Defense (United States), Halliburton CEOs*, 2017. Archival pigment print, 60 × 40 in. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. 94
- 4.10 Sheida Soleimani, *Minister of Petroleum (Angola), Secretary of State (United States, 1973–77)*, 2017. Archival pigment print, 40 × 60 in. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. 95
- 4.11 Sheida Soleimani, *Inauguration (United States, Iraq)*, 2017. Archival pigment print, 18 × 24 in. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. 96
- 4.12 Sheida Soleimani, *Medium of Exchange*, 2018. 32-minute digital video, screen grab. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. 97
- 4.13 Sheida Soleimani, *Medium of Exchange*, 2018. 32-minute digital video, screen grab. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. 97
- 4.14 Sheida Soleimani, *A Whole New World*, 2014. Archival pigment print, 24 × 30 in. © 2021 Sheida Soleimani. 99
- 4.15 Unknown Photographer, *Claude McRay (i.e., McKay) and Baroness v. Freytag (i.e., Von Freytag-Loringhoven*, n.d. (before 1924). Digital file from glass negative, 5 × 7 inches or smaller. Library of Congress, Bain News Service, LC-B2-5677-3 [P&P], LC-DIG-ggbain-33941. 100
- 5.1 Tschabalala Self, *Pocket Rocket*, 2020. Digital print on canvas, denim, fabric, thread, painted canvas, dyed canvas, acrylic and hand mixed pigments on dyed canvas, 244 × 244 × 4 cm /

- 96 × 96 × 1 1/2 in. © Tschabalala Self. Courtesy Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / New York. Photo: Matt Grubb. 106
- 5.2 Hannah Höch, *Die Süsse (Aus einem ethnographischen Museum) (The Sweet One [From an Ethnographic Museum])*, 1926. Collage with watercolour © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021. 111
- 5.3 Romare H. Bearden, *The Prevalence of Ritual: Baptism*, 1964. Collage; Photomechanical reproductions, paint, and graphite on board, 23.2 × 30.5 cm. © Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966 (and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021). 113
- 5.4 Adam Pendleton, *Black Dada (A/A)*, 2019. Silkscreen ink on canvas, in two panels, overall: 243.8 × 192.7 cm; 96 × 75 7/8 in, each panel: 121.9 × 192.7 cm; 48 × 75 7/8 in. © Adam Pendleton. Photo: Andy Romer. Courtesy Galerie Max Hetzler. 115
- 6.1 Kemang Wa Lehulere performance during the opening of *Dada South?* outside the Iziko South African National Gallery, 2009. © Photo credit: Alexia Webster. 130
- 6.2 donna Kukama performs *The Great South African Queue*, Iziko South African National Gallery, 2009. © Photo credit: Alexia Webster. 131
- 6.3 Protestors carry paintings from the surrounding student residences to be burnt during the ‘Shackville’ protest at the University of Cape Town, 16 February 2016. © Photo: Ashleigh Furlong, for GroundUp. 133
- 6.4 Buyani Duma and Thato Ramaisa perform as Desire Marea and Fela Gucci as the performance art duo FAKA. Photographed by Viviane Sassen, 2015. © Viviane Sassen. 134
- 6.5 Brett Murray, *Triumph*, 2015. Two-screen video, 6 min. 48 sec. © Image courtesy of Brett Murray. 137
- 6.6 Still image from *Swarm Theory V1.0* directed by Kyla Davis and Daniel Buckland at the National Arts Festival, Makhanda, 2019. © Copyright: Kyla Davis. Photo Credit: Daylin Paul. 138
- 7.1 Paula Rego, *Salazar vomiting the homeland*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 94 × 120 cm. Calouste Gulbenkian Museum – Modern Collection, Lisbon, Portugal. © Paula Rego. Courtesy of the artist and Marlborough, New York and London. 145
- 7.2 Paula Rego, *Trilogy of fear* or *The three faces of fear*, c. 1964. Acrylic, oil, crayon, graphite and paper glued on canvas, 86 × 138 cm. Private collection. © Paula Rego. Courtesy of the artist and Marlborough, New York and London. 151
- 7.3 Paula Rego, *Iberian dawn*, 1962. Acrylic, graphite and paper glued on canvas, 72.5 × 92 cm. Private collection. © Paula Rego. Courtesy of the artist and Marlborough, New York and London. 152

- 7.4 Paula Rego, *The dogs of Barcelona*, 1965. Oil, crayon and paper glued on canvas, 160 × 185 cm. Private collection. © Paula Rego. Courtesy of the artist and Marlborough, New York and London. 153
- 8.1 Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau*, 1933. © bpk / Sprengel Museum Hannover. Photo: Wilhelm Redemann. 166
- 8.2 Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau*, 1933. © bpk / Sprengel Museum Hannover. Photo: Wilhelm Redemann. 167
- 8.3 Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau*, 1933. © bpk / Sprengel Museum Hannover. Photo: Wilhelm Redemann. 168
- 12.1 Unknown. Internet meme from the Telegram channel *Fashwave Images*. Posted on 9 September 2019. 236
- 12.2 Unknown. Internet meme from the Telegram channel *Fashwave Images*. Posted on 1 October 2019. 239
- 12.3 Unknown. Internet meme from the Telegram channel *Fashwave Images*. Posted on 14 June 2019. 241
- 13.1 Jennifer Chan, *Boyfriend*, 2014. Video artwork (6:26), video still (at 1:24). © Jennifer Chan. 247
- 14.1 Soda Jerk with Sam Smith, *Hollywood Burn*, 2006. Digital video, 52 minutes. Courtesy the artists. 271
- 14.2 Joan Ross, *'The naming of things', The claiming of things*, 2012. Digital video, 7:36 minutes. Courtesy the artist and Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney. 273
- 14.3 Soda Jerk & The Avalanches, *The Was*, 2016. Digital video, 13:40 minutes. Courtesy the artists. 275
- 14.4 Soda Jerk & The Avalanches, *The Was*, 2016. Digital video, 13:40 minutes. Courtesy the artists. 275
- 15.1 Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *A Dozen Cocktails – Please*, 1920. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven papers. Special Collections and University Archives. University of Maryland Libraries. 282–83
- 15.2 Constant Dullaart, *Phantom Love – Institutions Based on Lore*, 2017. Screenshot. 286
- 15.3 Erica Scourti, *Difficult to Find the Lost Things*, 2019, detail. Printed with permission of the artist. 288
- 16.1 *Flatness screengrab Feb 2019*, showing artwork by Nikhil Vettukattil. © Shama Khanna, 2021. Image courtesy of flatness.eu, and reproduced with the permission of Shama Khanna. 302

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**montage mädels** are a five-woman artists’ collective from the US and UK, founded the morning after Donald Trump’s election as US president in 2016. Their net-art photomontages denounce contemporary mass media’s hate-driven ideologies and probe the conditions of our Late Capitalist moment. Exhibitions: ‘Landscape: A Reconstruction’, Rutland House (New York, 2019); East Wing Biennial, Somerset House (London, 2018); ‘Nice Sky’, Galerie 102 (Berlin, 2017); Brick Lane Gallery (London, 2017). Features: Abstract Mag TV; The Courtauldian.

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**Jack Southern** is an artist, researcher and senior lecturer, currently working at the University of Gloucestershire and at City and Guilds of London Art School. His research into the social, cultural and political implications of our increasingly mediated contemporary experience has been disseminated

widely through symposium and conference contributions, as well as published writing. Current work specifically focuses on exploring creative modes of digital intervention and resistance in response to the exploitative nature of financialized models of digital/data technologies.

**Jaime Tsai** is lecturer in Art History and Theory at the National Art School, Sydney. Her research explores how the strategies of Dada and Surrealism inform alternative knowledge practices in contemporary Australian art. Recent publications include 'Equivocal Taxonomies: Fiona Hall and the Logic of Display' (*Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*), and 'Jane Graverol' (*International Encyclopedia of Surrealism*). Her recent curatorial project *CAUGHT STEALING* (The National Art School Gallery, Sydney) explored Surrealist inspired theft as a tactic in the work of Australian artists such as Daniel Boyd, Destiny Deacon, and Fiona Hall.

**Roger van Wyk** is an independent curator, artist and writer based in Cape Town, South Africa. His critically acclaimed exhibition *Dada South? Experimentation, Radicalism and Resistance* at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town in 2010 explored the legacies of Dada in South African art, and has spurred ongoing research and discourse. He coauthored an essay for the exhibition *Dada Africa: Dialogue with the Other* (Zurich's Museum Rietberg and Berlinische Galerie, 2016) that drew attention to the role of the avant-garde in South Africa. His training as a sculptor and urban planner combines in his critical contributions to public art in South Africa. He consults to the City of Cape Town on public arts development, and flies the flag for Situationism, and art as a catalyst for social change, through his involvement with the South African chapter of *Burning Man, AfrikaBurn*.

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This book emerged out of the political climate the editors experienced in 2016 while undertaking research at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.

For many, 2016 was a shell shock that began with the UK voting to leave the EU and was further amplified by the presidential election in the US. A decade of financial crisis and social insecurity had resulted in a political surge to the far-right in Europe and the US. The outdated ideologies back on the political agenda, however, came in the form of progressive-looking social media campaigns commingling seemingly humorous memes and videos with hipster aesthetics. Observing how central aesthetic and cultural means featured in this resurgence of the right and blurred the boundaries between fact and fiction, we asked ourselves as art historians how we ought to respond. Could the use of images in the twentieth-century avant-gardes – and in particular Dada's visual concepts, such as montage, collage, the play with mimicry, acts of provocation and irony as well as the ready-made – perhaps even have contributed to the present moment? What is the difference between Dadaist sabotaging the 'truth' in their work and a political communicator intentionally misleading the public? These questions are also linked to a view which had become increasingly popular around this time: holding postmodernist thinkers responsible for the dissolution of truth in the era of post-truth.

While we found these attacks too simplistic and untenable, we were keen to dig deeper into questions related to the responsibility of the historical avant-gardes, visual cultures and postmodernist thinkers. In addition, we wanted to understand better how the increase of digital (visual) communication impacts on our capacities to differentiate between fact and fiction. This initially led to a panel we organized for the Association for Art History Annual Conference, which took place at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London in Spring 2018. We thank all our participants on this panel, whose contributions form the core of this volume. The scope of the book was further expanded and refined by contributors including artists, scholars and curators whom we approached after the conference. We were thrilled that our array of contributors were as excited as we were about the project and generously wrote new texts, accepting the constraints of not being paid an honorarium. Equally, numerous artists whose work is featured and discussed in this book generously granted us permission to use their artwork. In the process of refining this volume, we benefited enormously from the

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# Introduction:

## From Dada Tricks to Post-Truth Politics

*Sarah Hegenbart and  
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The era of post-truth politics poses a new challenge for contemporary art practice. In 2016, Brexit and the election of Donald Trump gave rise to the term ‘post-truth politics’ – a type of politics that ignores accepted standards of truths, objective facts and critical thinking, and appeals instead to people’s emotions and personal beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Misinformation, alternative facts, fake news, hoaxes and parafictions mark the discursive currency of the post-truth age. But is this really a description of ‘post-truth’? Does it not in fact hark back to an earlier period? Loving ‘the absurd’, knowing that ‘life asserts itself in contradictions’, and enjoying ‘every play at hide and seek in which there is an inherent power of deception’ is not how Hugo Ball describes post-truth politics.<sup>2</sup> Rather, he references a much earlier time: the emergence of the Dada movement in diverse centres from 1916 on. Ball’s Dada colleague Hans Arp summarizes the aim of Dada in his ‘Notes from a Dada Diary’ as transforming ‘the perceptible world of man today into a pious senseless world without reason’.<sup>3</sup> Parallels between Dada’s decentering of a world order structured by reason and oriented towards truth and the attack on truth by post-truth politicians spring to mind.<sup>4</sup> To take into account how characteristic the appeal to emotions is for post-truth politics, Jayson Harsin introduced the concept of ‘emo-truth’: ‘Emo-truth is truth where emotion serves as inference ... It is felt

(though not necessarily consciously), and not accompanied by long temporal reasoning.<sup>5</sup> Needless to say, this description could also be applied to the arts which operate on an aesthetic, hence affective, emotive level.

Might this mean that a liberal and left avant-garde movement paved the way for a novel type of politics, which is exercised by rather conservative politicians with an alt-right mindset? Are post-truth politicians perverting artistic ideas of the twentieth-century avant-gardes? Or are the Dadaists and their artistic attacks on truth even partly to blame for the times we live in? How can art foster critical discourse that is often abandoned when subscribing to simplified notions of reality? These and related questions have inspired this anthology, which touches on the relation between the art and tactics of the avant-gardes and the perversion of truth in contemporary politics. In considering an array of cultural and artistic representations, this edited volume seeks to offer new insights into the artistic modes of persuasion and resistance marking our post-truth era. The goal is to generate new ideas about the reading of our contemporary moment through the lens of artistic production from Dada to data-driven, post-truth politics.

We believe that an analysis of the recent phenomenon against the backdrop of the Dada movement is fruitful for numerous reasons. First, this comparison will illustrate that the attack on truth is actually not a novel phenomenon, but has a much longer history. Dada, however, as we will argue, is not to be blamed for the current distortion of ‘truth(s)’. Rather the early Dadaists’ attack on ‘truth’ actually has little to do with the norms, values and beliefs of the post-truth society. Taking the Dada perspective on board will, secondly, enable us to counter an argument that has recently become very popular. Researchers have attacked the scholarship of left-liberal postmodernism, to some extent adumbrated by the subversions of Dada, arguing that postmodernism enabled the discursive climate of ‘post-truth’ in the first place.<sup>6</sup>

Such observations bring up the two main queries implicitly inspiring this volume:

- 1 How do Dada strategies pertain to our current moment marked by post-truth politics, information floods and big data?
- 2 If populist politicians persuade the masses by tailored data strategies that have Dada analogies, how can contemporary art highlight the neglected nuances of our post-truth moment and especially its cultural representation?

Before diving into the argument in more detail, there are a number of concepts structuring this book which require elaboration. While these will be further discussed and refined by the individual contributions to this volume, the following provides a short overview of the notions of Dada, post-truth, the digital and the alt-right.

## Dada

‘What is Dada? An Art? A Philosophy? A Politics? A Fire Insurance? Or: State Religion? is Dada really Energy? or is it Nothing at all, i.e., everything?’ Written out in bold lettering, Berlin Dadaist Raoul Hausmann pondered the meaning of Dada in his mock advertisement for his journal *Der Dada 2*.<sup>7</sup> By overtly seeming to simultaneously announce and deny the meaning of Dada, Hausmann was deliberately treading the fine line between fact and fiction.

Working in the aftermath of the atrocities of World War I and a climate of rising nationalism, the Dadaists were quick to understand that a long-enduring balance between the ‘fictional in language and the concreteness of experience’ had been shattered.<sup>8</sup> Dada’s protagonists, based in Berlin, Paris, New York, Cologne, Hanover and Zurich, investigated the mechanisms of behaviours, words, symbols and objects, and how they provided working ‘fictions’ in their immediate surroundings.<sup>9</sup> Their interest was further catalysed by the rise of a modern media landscape. Propaganda poster campaigns, the development of communication technologies (radio, cinema, newsreel), wireless telegraphy, innovation in printing technologies, and the circulation of massive quantities of photographic images triggered a post-war mass-media explosion.<sup>10</sup> The development engendered a palpable shift from what Dada expert Hanne Bergius has called ‘the bourgeois function of explication and enlightenment in the press to that of manipulation through sensational reporting’.<sup>11</sup>

Satire, transgressive humour and parafictions were important tools for Dadaists in reflecting such change. They exploited the press as a testing ground for alternative fictions allowing them to gain attention and reach. In Berlin, Johannes Baader together with Raoul Hausmann used the local press ecology to declare the formation of the Dada Republic of Berlin-Nikolassee.<sup>12</sup> In Paris, Picabia and Tzara convinced a newspaper to report a fictitious quarrel between poets.<sup>13</sup> In Zurich, reports of fictive events in the Dada Soiree were planted in the press.<sup>14</sup> The name ‘Dada’ was chosen by a random dictionary search. The historical meaning of the word is, among other things, ‘hobby horse’, as Tristan Tzara mentions in his ‘Dada Manifesto’ (1918).<sup>15</sup> The choice of the name indicates that the Dada artists wanted to move away from a solemn understanding of art defined by the beauty it possesses. Rather they sought to form a transnational movement, which dissolved the artistic genres, rejected an elitist conception of art as high culture, which integrated everyday material and popular culture. The transnational openness of Dada invites a translocation of Dada to other regions, e.g. the Global South, as exhibitions such as *Dada South? Experimentation, Radicalism and Resistance* (2009–10 at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town) and *Dada Africa* (2016–18 at Rietberg Museum Zurich, the Berlinische Galerie Berlin, in conjunction with the Musée d’Orsay and the Musée de l’Orangerie) have brought out.

Dada's diverse artistic strategies – never unified by one particular artistic style – aimed to arouse emotions and stimulate reactions in their audience. This, in turn, enabled them to approach and disclose the underlying mechanism of their surrounding cultural life, to render them visible and perhaps even more concrete. By means of scandal and shock their interventions sought to reveal 'the whole of brutal reality'.<sup>16</sup> The Dadaists targeted and parodied the prevalent structures, rhetoric and beliefs of their times, embedding their critique of society in the very communicative means of that society. Dada thereby proceeded from a self-elevating concept involving many truths, in whose production and manipulation the media could be co-opted.

## Dada and conceptions of (post-)truth

The label 'post-truth' is a problematic one as the prefix suggests that there was once a time in which *the* truth existed. The distortion of truth in politics, however, started long before 'post-truth' was named the 2016 word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries. The tactic of dismissing those facts conflicting with one's own political views as 'fake news' is not in principle new. It has its roots in a long history of suppression and oppression of anything not recognized as desirable or legitimate.

Robert Mejia, Kay Beckermann and Curtis Sullivan hence describe 'post-truth' as tainted by 'racial amnesia', which has led to the misinformed belief that an agreement on what counts as truth once existed within a society.<sup>17</sup> There is an analogy to be drawn here with European colonization and white settler colonialism, which simply ignored the epistemic systems of Indigenous people. As the truth or 'the idea of any transcendental universal Truth (capital T)' requires a normative principle, scholars such as Johan Farkas and Jannick Schou suggested that the origins of post-truth can be traced back to Enlightenment thinking.<sup>18</sup> Most famously, Jean-François Lyotard emphasized that multiple narratives have replaced a singular meta-narrative embedded in the belief that a singular truth exists.<sup>19</sup> The publication in 1979 of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* clearly marked that perspectival approaches to truths in the plural have replaced the belief into a universal truth. Farkas and Schou emphasize that there have 'historically been *different truths* (small t) that have been the product of social and political struggles'.<sup>20</sup>

Laying the blame for the perversion of our political climate in the 'post-truth era' at the door of postmodernism – and avant-garde art movements such as Dada – ignores the fact that Dada artists as well as postmodernist thinkers were concerned with demolishing existing power structures. 'Post-truth' politicians, by contrast, are often driven by the desire to sustain precisely those power structures which maintain their often white and male privilege.<sup>21</sup> How 'successful' post-truth politicians were in implementing these structures that will continue to shape the landscape even after their time

in office is exemplified by the appointment of three supreme court justices during the presidency of Trump. When the liberal justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died on 18 September 2020, she was quickly replaced with the conservative law professor Amy Coney Barrett – a decision that led to a conservative majority in the supreme court and created ‘a new legal landscape that could last at least 30 years’.<sup>22</sup> The attack on the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 by Trump supporters who did not want to accept the election of Joe Biden revealed how falsehoods and lies about the 2020 US presidential elections turned into violence. Conspiracy ideologies disseminated by pro-Trump supporters and QAnon further claimed that Trump would be reinstated on 13 August 2021.<sup>23</sup> As Sam Levine argues, ‘2021 was the year that America’s democracy came under attack from within’, as Republicans used numerous strategies, among them gerrymandering, to limit the political influence of people of colour and the continuous dissemination of falsehoods about the election.<sup>24</sup> This is mirrored in the CNN poll which led to the outcome that 78 per cent of Republicans claim that ‘Biden did not win’.<sup>25</sup>

The disproportionately high murder rate of Black people through the police, e.g. in the case of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 in Minneapolis, based on racist stereotypes, highlights another problematic failure of democratic institutions within the US, but also globally, as the worldwide Black Lives Matter protests highlighted. The acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse, who shot two people during Black Lives Matter protests and subsequently turned into a ‘hero’ of the alt-right, proved again how these oppressive structures persevere in the post-Trump era in the US.<sup>26</sup>

Alt-right ideologues have familiarized themselves with theoretical approaches from the left in order to invert them.<sup>27</sup> Cambridge Analytica whistleblower Christopher Wylie described this quite memorably when remembering his first encounter with Steve Bannon. In 2013, Wylie was instructed to meet ‘Steve from America’ in Cambridge.<sup>28</sup> In an interview with journalist Carole Cadwalladr, Wylie described Bannon as:

Interesting. Really interested in ideas. He’s the only straight man I’ve ever talked to about intersectional feminist theory. He saw its relevance straightaway to the oppressions that conservative, young white men feel.<sup>29</sup>

This example illustrates how such prominent alt-right figures conspire to maintain a ‘political ideology that has as its core myth the homogeneous nation—a romantic and gendered version of the homeland and homeland culture, both of which act as emotional resources in the appeal to ontological security’.<sup>30</sup> Since avant-garde art movements beginning with Dada and streams of cultural theory rooted in postmodernism have ‘endangered’ this myth, it is not surprising that culture wars feature centrally in the post-truth age to protect it. Interestingly, these culture wars have led to an ‘appropriation’ of left-wing liberal strategies by right-wing thinkers that appear to use

Dadaist tactics for their own political ends. In order to understand how culture is exploited in the current post-truth climate, this volume views our post-truth predicament against the backdrop of the Dada movement in order to arrive at a better understanding of current phenomena. Post-truth has frequently been linked to the argument that the crisis of democracy is expressing itself in an increase of populism.<sup>31</sup> Even before the emergence of post-truth, Colin Crouch announced the era of post-politics.<sup>32</sup> According to Farkas and Schou, the ‘problem is not that truth is disappearing, but that democracy is’.<sup>33</sup> Felix Stalder, professor of digital culture, suggests that the experience of a loss of democracy is linked with the increase of a society’s capacity to communicate, which is decoupled from opportunities to participate and decide.<sup>34</sup> Stalder relates this to an ‘enormous amplification of cultural opportunities – an expression of the culture of digitality’.<sup>35</sup>

While the digitization of society throughout the 1990s was initially celebrated as an opportunity to increase democratization and freedom of speech through enhanced participation of citizens and a widening of discourse to regions beyond the mainstream centres of exchange in the Global South, it appears today that the opposite has transpired. Stalder emphasizes how the Dada strategy of montage might indicate a way out: ‘The montage deals with assembling disparate precast elements ... This gave the experience of multiple ruptures within modernity – the fragmentation and disruption a new aesthetic form.’<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, as a culturally critical phenomenon, Dada can be freed from its direct context and be seen as having a direct relevance to the twenty-first century.<sup>37</sup> However, the Dada aesthetics of montage is now frequently seized by alt-right ideologues in their visual culture, and features in memes driving conspiracy theories such as QAnon.

## From Dada tricks to data-driven politics

One of the many differences between our post-truth environment and the Dada movement era is, of course, the prevalence of digital infrastructures and the internet. Today, most aspects of the everyday are digitally mediated. Digital technologies have inscribed themselves in our lives. ‘Being digital’ as much as ‘being online’ has become the default condition. While this development can be traced within the scientific and technological developments of our information age, it is only in recent years that the focus of artistic and critical discourse has distanced itself from notions such as New Media as a discrete entity of culture. Rather, a discussion has evolved about a conscious reconfiguration of *all* culture through the digital, a post-digital condition.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, the digital is not to be understood as a medium, but as a mode of configuration, which consequently does not lead to a subordination of existing media, but to their hybrid transformation.

In her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff carefully maps out the shift from industrial capitalism based on the exploitation of resources and labour to surveillance capitalism.<sup>39</sup> This form of capitalism profits from the capture, rendering and analysis of behavioural data. Surveillance capitalists have commodified information to the point that people's behaviour data points have become more valuable than their actual existence.<sup>40</sup> Hidden behind a smoke mirror of ethics, accountability and free choice architectures, Zuboff makes explicit how surveillance companies such as Google and Facebook quash and harness free will as a means to profit.<sup>41</sup> Without abiding by the standard research ethics of consent framework, they have significant social and political influence, thus endangering the project of liberalism and our individual sovereignty. Such systematic 'digital dispossession' has played into the hands of data-driven politics by post-truth politicians.<sup>42</sup> In the case of Donald Trump, employees of Google, Twitter and Facebook were actively embedded in his election campaign and shaped its communication strategies.<sup>43</sup> In countries such as Germany, Facebook's global government and political team provided their services to the right-wing party *Alternative für Deutschland* to help them enter the Bundestag.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, behavioural micro-targeting and psycho-graphics as used by Cambridge Analytica have allowed political actors to model political campaigns to individuals and actively influence voter behaviours. The commodification of personal data through 'surveillance capitalism' has thereby made the spreading of lies and sensational misinformation easier and more persuasive.<sup>45</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic labelled by the World Health Organization as 'infodemic' is another good example of the impact of misleading and false information spread through on- and offline networks.<sup>46</sup> It has fuelled anti-vaccine narratives and the distrust in health authorities and public health response.<sup>47</sup> Research data confirms a clear connection between 'anti-vaccine conspiracy theorists, anti-government actors, and extreme right-wing movements'.<sup>48</sup> This intersection becomes particularly evident in the overlap of Covid-19 misinformation and QAnon conspiracies, for example, at anti-mask or anti-lockdown demonstrations.<sup>49</sup>

The QAnon movement started forming in 2017 on the online imageboard 4-chan.<sup>50</sup> An anonymous user called Q, who claimed to have high-level security clearance, started posting cryptic messages about Trump's supposed battle against child-trafficking corrupt elites and a 'deep state'.<sup>51</sup> QAnon quickly started spreading from a fringe movement to platforms including Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, evolving into a cult-like movement with millions of followers.<sup>52</sup> With the conspiracy theory becoming mainstream, it has been linked to a number of brutal offline incidents such as a series of mass shootings in the US and the attack on the US Capitol in January 2021.<sup>53</sup> As misinformation about the pandemic converges with falsehoods related to QAnon, a hybrid threat landscape emerges that blurs 'boundaries between disinformation, hate speech and harassment, conspiracy theories

and extremist mobilisation'.<sup>54</sup> QAnon, whose origin can be linked to live-action role-playing (LARP), Cicada online puzzles and 'shit-posting' – the deliberately provocative and off-topic spreading of fictitious content – has become an epitome of a post-truth predicament.<sup>55</sup>

## Dada and the alt-right

Digital platforms have empowered individuals and organizations from across the political spectrum to spread misinformation to audiences globally.<sup>56</sup> They have increasingly given rise to a culture of hate, deception and extremism.<sup>57</sup> According to recent studies, however, fake news and misinformation linked to extremist, conspiratorial or racist content is proportionally more consumed and shared by social media network users on the (far)-right wing of the political landscape.<sup>58</sup> In this context, the 'far-right' has become an umbrella term for actors on the far end of the political spectrum. According to Cas Mudde's definition, right-wing extremist movements are characterized by a combination of at least three of the following five features: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and strong state advocacy.<sup>59</sup> Other terms used in relation to groups on the right of the political spectrum are 'alt-lite' or 'new right', a term for far-right groups and individuals who oppose globalism and social progressivism. While the 'alt-right' (abbreviation for 'alternative right') intersects with these groups, it has mainly become 'a catchall phrase for a loose group of extreme-right individuals and organisations who promote white nationalism'.<sup>60</sup> Needless to say, the alt-right is far from alternative but is inextricably linked to historical fascism, Nazism and white supremacist thinking.<sup>61</sup> It uses distinct vocabulary and ideological reference points linking back to its origins in US online communities leading up to Trump's election. Since then, however, it has become increasingly transnational.

Since the 1990s, the internet and later social media have become important breeding grounds for the dissemination of far-right ideologies.<sup>62</sup> Alongside strategic alliances between differing but globally interconnected right-wing groups, their early adoption of digital technology and at times coordinated, data-driven online strategies has led to the mainstreaming of extremist, far-right ideas.<sup>63</sup> Nationalist, racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic, anti-democratic or fascist ideas have migrated from the fringe of society into the centre ground, asserting significant political pressure on the neoliberal democracies of Europe and the US.<sup>64</sup> This attack on the values of an open and free society, as research has argued, is predominantly driven by aesthetic and cultural means targeted at influencing media and culture.<sup>65</sup> Angela Nagle's book *Kill All Normies* is one of the first studies into the role that online sub- or net-cultures played in the emergence of an organized and globally connected alt-right movement. According to the author, the non-conformist aesthetic of the right-wing online cultures shares more similarities with the left-wing,

1960s counterculture movements and certain artistic historical avant-gardes than with a more traditional right wing.<sup>66</sup> Other publications have come to similar conclusions by tracing the adaptation of left-wing intellectual attitudes, aesthetic and performative protest strategies by populist politicians and members of the new right.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, strategies such as transgression, exploded mimicry, acts of provocation, humour, the distortion of reality, as well as attacks on elites and rationality, have for a long time been endorsed by artistic avant-gardes and left subcultures and, in particular, the Dada movement.

## The structure of this book

Dada's artistic response to the aggression, nationalism and rising fascism defining its time thereby offers a fruitful backdrop and analogy to our contemporary situation. This book analyses diverse cultural and artistic representations spanning from Dada collage to data montage under categories foregrounding their thematic and conceptual affinity. Such synchronic presentation promises to reveal new cross-historical connections between Dada strategies and their resurfacing in data-infused environments. We also hope to suggest the importance of *discontinuity* in constructing a history of the relation between the Dada movement and our present moment and to draw attention to the significance of ruptures and misalignments in this relation. Bringing together visual and textual contributions by artists and theorists, the book thereby functions like a Dada-data montage.

Based on a panel that we organized at the Courtauld Institute of Art during the AAH conference in London, our volume gathers contributions from an international group of emerging and established scholars and practitioners. Representing different disciplines and specializations, some texts are written in an academic, others more in an essayistic and playful, style. The title we have adopted to present this material reflects the shared intellectual and methodological concerns of this diverse group of contributors.<sup>68</sup> Their contributions are dedicated to carefully unpacking these questions to further explore the complex ways Dadaesque strategies, data power and post-truth political discourse intertwine. The international and trans-disciplinary list of contributors thus significantly expand the horizons and sociocultural perspectives of such a relation. The publication is rounded off by artistic contributions which have been developed in dialogue with its theoretical contributions. In *Our Collective Practice: A Visual Essay*, the montage mädels have resurrected the Dadaist photomontage to reflect on the maelstrom of data consumed online on a daily basis. Their work denounces hate-riven online cultures, resisting their toxicity with creativity and sisterly communality. In *Dog of Orion*, Kemang Wa Lehulere highlights how Dada inspired the liberation struggle in South Africa when suggesting to interpret his Dada sculpture against the backdrop

of Sandile Dikeni's poem 'Guava Juice'. The artist researcher donna Kukama designed an artistic intervention specifically for our volume that opens up the Dada archive and sneaks *Dada Data* into it. IOCOSE's work *Dadasourcing* appropriates the exploitative and colonialist dynamics of crowdsourcing. The collective experiments ways of undoing them as part of the same gesture, and explores their potential for creative, critical and surrealist acts.

## The chapters

'Part One: From Dada to Data' begins with a historical survey of the Dada movement and its legacy. Mara-Johanna Kölmel's text, 'Dadadatadada: From Dada to Data and Back Again', investigates whether Dadaist strategies of abstraction, hacking and photomontage still bear relevance in our big data economies. The chapter turns its focus onto data-driven strategies of persuasion on the far-right political spectrum appearing to have Dadaist analogies. It concludes by speculating how an engagement with the tactics of Dada can help foster critical vocabularies for confronting the complexities posed by our age of algorithmic power and big data. Meredith Hoy's contribution, 'Clouds, Critique & Contradiction: Programming Dissent in Dada and Data Art', continues such reflections by tracing critical notions of resistance and dissent from Dada to data art. Dadaist tactics, Hoy argues, resurface in the works of data artists to reveal the contingency and instability of code, software, interfaces and the ubiquitous computing devices that shape contemporary techno-cultural landscapes. The speculative dialogue traces the asynchronously shared goal of Dada and data artists to launch campaigns against cultural complacency and political complicity. Berlin Dada's performative actions in the public sphere becomes the departure point of Rebecca Smith's essay, 'The Legacy of the Berlin Dada Media Hoaxes in Contemporary Parafictive Acts'. Smith contrasts the performative actions by Berlin Dada members Johannes Baader and Raoul Hausmann with contemporary parafictive acts conducted by UBERMORGEN and The Yes Men to demonstrate the legacy of Dada's media hoaxes in contemporary artistic modes of intervention. Her text probes the importance of effective artistic strategies as a means to alter perceptions and, consequently, comment upon and challenge the era of post-truth politics. By exploring Dada's historical motives and strategies and how they resonate in contemporary artistic practices, Part One thus carefully unpacks Dada's motives for attacking institutions and the ways in which they differ from post-truth politics.

'Part Two: Global Dada' focuses on the reception of Dada strategies in a global context. In 'Sheida Soleimani, Cyborg: Photomontage in an Expanding Network', Matthew Biro analyses how Soleimani employs the digital to develop Dadaist photomontage further. The American artist of Iranian

descent operates like a ‘social critic’ and a ‘subaltern cyborg’, as she employs contemporary technologies to negotiate between a broad range of global themes, such as colonialism, gender violence, and Iranian history and perception. In ‘Black Dada Data: Collage as a Tool of Resistance against White Supremacy Thinking in the Digital Age’, Sarah Hegenbart traces the history of so-called ‘post-truth politics’ back to settler colonialism and white supremacist thinking. She explores how collage in the digital age provides a platform of resistance for Black artists to invert the canon established by structures of white supremacy. The South African curator Roger van Wyk explores in ‘Dada’s African South’ how Dada’s rejection of Eurocentric Enlightenment thinking resonates in the artistic practice of South African artists who challenged apartheid thinking and the ways in which its racist ideologies still impact on contemporary South African society. His essay also interrogates the colonial and neocolonial aspects of post-truth politics, which is mirrored in the centralized collection of data and the control through artificial intelligence systems. Relegating to the political agency of images within the Dada movement, Leonor de Oliveira’s essay, ‘Paula Rego: A Dada Attitude against Authority in the Post-War Period’ on the Portuguese artist, restores art as the horizon of political possibility, arguing for iconographies of resistance.

‘Part Three: Big Dada Data’ examines the systems and operations that make up the assemblages of Dada and data. It contrasts the role big data plays in steering our patterns of behaviour with Dada strategies to influence our unconscious. In ‘Big Dada, Big Data: Schwitters’s *Merzbau*, the Private and the Trash’, Natalie P. Koerner examines Kurt Schwitters’s *Merzbau* as a precursor of digital archives. Understanding social media as a type of *Merzbau*, she interrogates how data trash, the vast material of data produced, impacts on the structures of our personal memory and the archives of cultural memory more broadly. Exploring the phenomenon of Big Data Mining, Roberto Simanowski analyses how digital technologies impact on our conception of the public sphere. In ‘Identity, Ecology, and the Arts in the Age of Big Data Mining’, he introduces ‘data love’ and dismantles the economic interests behind data collection. The implication of data love is the creation of artworks that only aim to please – e.g. to achieve the goal of attention-seeking in terms of numerous ‘likes’ – are opposed to the form of resistance targeted by Dada avant-gardes. Joshua Simon’s ‘The Digital Revolution as Counter-Revolution’ carefully examines assemblages of technology and labour in order to assess our neocolonial digital frontiers linking back to a time of racialization and colonization. By drawing parallels between the archaeology of various media and art history, Simon traces a lineage of machinic, image-making technologies that reaches from artistic advances in the early modern period to extractive and oppressive forms of automation such as machine vision. This part thus traces genealogies of the digital and relates them to the artistic sphere providing a nuanced account of data aesthetics.

'Part Four: Dada x Alt-Right. Faking the Truth' critically interrogates whether artistic avant-gardes, such as Dada, potentially paved the way for the era of post-truth politics and the rhetorical strategies of the alt-right. Inke Arns, curator of the *The Alt-Right Complex* at the Hartware MedienKunstVerein in Dortmund, shows how contemporary artists shed light on hidden networks of the alt-right by employing visual tactics, which resemble the aesthetic strategies of the Dada avant-garde. Her contribution, 'Down the Rabbit Hole of the Alt-Right Complex: Artists Exploring Far-Right Online Culture', persuasively argues that not only have the alt-right appropriated Dada tactics, such as transgression or a distortion of reality, but also the very artists who debunk how the alt-right sabotages the truth. In 'Fashwave: The Alt-Right's Aestheticization of Politics and Violence', Lisa Bogerts and Maik Fielitz analyse the aesthetics of the alt-right against the backdrop of white supremacist thinking. They argue that the production of fascist art possesses a strategic value in the process of radicalizing online communities. Vid Simoniti focuses in his 'Post-Internet Art and the Alt-Right Visual Culture' on two phenomena of digital collage, which can both be traced back to Dada principles. While post-internet art, the first phenomenon, critiques the capitalist modes of the art world, neofascist visual culture utilizes Dada tactics to attack 'mainstream society' more broadly. While pursuing entirely different aims, both forms of digital imagery employ Dada humour.

If democratic institutions coined by liberalism facilitate the rise of the alt-right and threaten the very foundations of freedom of thought and expression, how does genuine artistic resistance need to be rethought in the era of post-truth? 'Part Five: Dada Data Tactics' contrasts the demagogic rhetorics discussed in the previous section with affirmative artistic approaches. Jaime Tsai's contribution, 'Pixel Pirates: Theft as Strategy in the Art of Joan Ross and Soda Jerk', turns its critical eye on the artistic strategies of theft and remix as means of resistance. Berlin Dada challenged the ownership of language and campaigned for social justice during a period marked by political ferment and the rise of fascism. Tsai sees their strategies of theft resuscitated in the Australian video artists Soda Jerk and Joan Ross's use of critical remix practices. Re-emerging in a different context, Dadaist tactics are here employed to contest the corporate control of the cultural sphere, its form of knowledge production and cultural memory linked to the colonial mythologies that underpin Australian national identity. Annet Dekker's essay, 'Precarious Data Aesthetics. An Exploration of Tactics, Tricksters and Idiocy in Data', interrogates how the notion of tactics as a mode of intervention into the existing status quo has changed over the decades from Dada to data. By comparing the performative and linguistic interventions of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven to contemporary tactical media artists, Constant Dullaart and Erica Scourti, Dekker's essay carefully examines Dadaist tactics of defamiliarization, destabilization and disruption, and how they pertain to artistic work critically reflecting contemporary

digital infrastructures. Jack Southern rounds off the section with a reflection on aesthetic and activist strategies as a means to create forms of digital resistance and facilitate new ways of developing communities both on- and offline. His contribution, ‘The Multiple Narratives of Post-Truth Politics, Told through Pictures’, draws parallels between financialized digital architectures, the precarity of our Western democratic systems, and the ascendancy of populist narrators emboldened by the collective coherence of the far-right. Southern calls for a re-evaluation of our relationship to the digital ecosystem and advocates for approaches led by digital equality, cultural consciousness and social justice.

In the sum of theoretical and visual approaches to the topic, this volume attempts to overcome the mono-perspectival approach endorsed by the era of post-truth politics. Finally, we hope to have mapped out various facets that motivate a reading of Dada and data as interrelated. Dada thereby also exemplifies a model of resistance that is needed to respond to the authoritarian but anonymous heteronomy pervading societies in the age of big data. The title *Dada Data* foreshadows such complex trajectories and ruptures examined throughout this book from the early Dada avant-gardes to our data-driven contemporaneity. We envision that the speculative cross-reading of Dada and data will generate many productive openings for thinking about the challenges of our contemporary moment. It will also bring out quite clearly that it is no longer a liberal avant-garde that revises Dada strategies for contemporary times. We are hoping that this book will stimulate further reflection on these issues. It is time to sharpen our digital tools, inventing tactics and strategies worthy of the complexity of our big data times!

## Notes

- 1 Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018). Numerous academic and non-academic publications have appeared on the question of ‘post-truth’, such as Julian Baggini, *A Short History of Truth: Consolations for a Post-Truth World* (London: Quercus, 2017); James Ball, *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2017); Ilan Zvi Baron, *How to Save Politics in a Post-Truth Era: Thinking through Difficult Times* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Matthew D’Ancona, *Post Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (London: Ebury Press, 2017); Evan Davis, *Post-Truth: Why We Have Reached Peak Bullshit and What We Can Do About It* (London: Little, Brown, 2017); Johan Farkas and Jannick Schou, *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy: Mapping the Politics of Falsehood* (New York/London: Routledge, 2020).
- 2 Hugo Ball, ‘Dada Fragments (1916–17)’, in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets. An Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), 51–4, here p. 51.
- 3 Hans Arp, ‘Notes from a Dada Diary (1932)’, in Motherwell (ed.), *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 221–5, here p. 222.

- 4 Arp, 'Notes from a Dada Diary', 222.
- 5 Jayson Harsin, 'Post-truth populism: The French Anti-Gender Theory Movement and Cross-Cultural Similarities', *Communication, Culture and Critique* 11:1 (2018): 35–52, here p. 45.
- 6 Lee McIntyre dedicates a full chapter in his book to the question, 'Did postmodernism lead to post-truth?', and mentions a wide range of literature on this topic (p. 192, nn. 35 and 36), e.g. Conor Lynch, 'Trump's War on Environment and Science Are Rooted in His Post-Truth Politics,' *Salon*, 1 April 2017, <https://www.salon.com/2017/04/01/trumps-war-on-environment-and-science-are-rooted-in-his-post-truth-politics-and-maybe-in-postmodern-philosophy/>; Andrew Calcutt, 'The Truth about Post-Truth Politics,' *Newsweek*, 21 November 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/truth-post-truth-politics-donald-trump-liberals-tony-blair-523198>; Andrew Jones, 'Want to Better Understand "Post-Truth" Politics? Then Study Postmodernism,' *Huffington Post*, 11 November 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/andrew-jones/want-to-better-understand\\_b\\_13079632.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/andrew-jones/want-to-better-understand_b_13079632.html). In addition, McIntyre recommends the following blog posts: 'Donald Trump and the Triumph of Right-Wing Postmodernism', *Stewedrabbit* (blog), 12 December 2016, <http://stewedrabbit.blogspot.com/2016/12/donald-trump-and-triumph-of-right-wing.html>, and Charles Kurzman, 'Rightwing Postmodernists', 30 November 2014, <http://kurzman.unc.edu/rightwing-postmodernists/>. 36; and Truman Chen, 'Is Postmodernism to Blame for Post-Truth?', *Philosophytalk* (blog), 17 February 2017, <https://www.philosophytalk.org/blog/postmodernism-blame-post-truth>.
- 7 Raoul Hausmann, 'Was ist Dada (1919)', translated by Timothy O. Benson, *Raoul Hausmann and Berlin Dada* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 168.
- 8 Benson, *Raoul Hausmann and Berlin Dada*, 5.
- 9 Benson, *Raoul Hausmann and Berlin Dada*, 3.
- 10 See Leah Dickermann, 'Introduction', in Leah Dickerman et al., *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: DAP/The National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2005), 1–15, here p. 7.
- 11 Hanne Bergius, 'Dada Berlin and its Aesthetic of Effect: Playing the Press', in Harriett Watts and Stephen C. Foster, eds, *Dada and the Press* (New Haven: G. K. Hall, 2004), 67–91, here p. 67.
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- 13 See Harriett Watts, 'Dada and the Press: An Introduction', in Watts and Foster, eds, *Dada and the Press*, 1–9, here p. 4.
- 14 See Watts, 'Dada and the Press: An Introduction,' 4.
- 15 Tristan Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto (1918)', in Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 76–82, here p. 77.
- 16 Richard Huelsenbeck, 'Was wollte der Expressionismus', in Richard Huelsenbeck, ed., *Dada Almanach* (Berlin: Erich Reiss, 1920), 38.

- 17 Robert Mejia, Kay Beckermann and Curtis Sullivan, 'White lies: a racial history of the (post)truth', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 15:2 (2018): 109–26, here p. 111.
- 18 Frakas and Schou, *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy*, 9.
- 19 See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).
- 20 Farkas and Schou, *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy*, 9.
- 21 See, e.g., Jayson Harsin, 'Post-Truth and Critical Communication Studies', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, published online <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.757> (25.03.2021), here p. 13. Mejia et al., 'White lies', 114; and Christine Agius, Annika Bergman Rosamond and Catarina Kinnvall, 'Populism, Ontological Insecurity and Gendered Nationalism: Masculinity, Climate Denial and Covid-19', *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 21:4 (2020): 432–50, here p. 433.
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- 27 See, e.g., Ana Teixeira Pinto, 'Artwashing – on NRx and the Alt-right', *Texte zur Kunst*, 4 July 2017, <https://www.textezurkunst.de/articles/artwashing-web-de/> (29.03.2021); Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies. The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the Alt-Right and Trump* (Winchester/Washington, DC: zero books, 2018).
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- 34 See Felix Stalder, *Kultur der Digitalität* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016), 14.
- 35 Stalder, *Kultur der Digitalität*, 10. The authors' translation.
- 36 Stalder, *Kultur der Digitalität*, 98. The authors' translation.
- 37 See, in this context, Elza Adamowicz and Eric Robertson, eds, *Dada and Beyond, Volume 2: Dada and Its Legacies* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
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- 45 Zuboff, *Surveillance Capitalism*, 677.
- 46 World Health Organization, 'Infodemic', blog, [https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1) (06.01.2022).
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