

## PROJECT PROPOSAL Salvador Miranda

### OBJECTIVES

The following projects are understood under the framework of critique as proposition. While my first year's work presented a critique of War on Terror propaganda and neo-orientalism through the images produced by propagandistic media, my current research attempts to provide an affirmative political position through post-propaganda, usability, and aesthetic languages of power.

**The Trial (film)** – A 2-channel film inspired by the Soviet show trials of the 30s in its aesthetic form. Activists, artists, hackers are 'put on trial' who engage in subversive practices in the name of political freedom/autonomy. The film seeks to expose the possibilities of working outside capital/state control and how the latter works against the former. It does this by 'profiling' each individual. The individuals stand accused of neoliberal sabotage and contempt of institutionalized power, etc. What is called into evidence are the tactics they use to circumvent, or to 'otherwise' toward a different political-economic model. Their testimony offers instruction, while the examiner outlines how power and control are established within the current state model. Material objects, documents are examined (as evidence) as well. A second channel shows footage provided by the individual of their activities, and gives context to the trial. What characterized the Soviet trials was that everything said was a lie dictated by the state. This work attempts to speak to truths prohibited by the state. Much like the early Bolsheviks that stood on trial, these individuals can also be thought of as a vanguard in an ossifying system of (capital) hegemony.

**Worldmapping (photo-collage)**– consists of a series of large visual "maps" (or infograph-like works) based on alchemical engravings from 17<sup>th</sup> C. The engravings illustrate a highly structured and ultimately usable universe: they list the elements of alchemy, the virtues of the alchemist, and their universal arrangement in relation to a godhead. Can these offer visual models for providing a visible understanding of the complexities of contemporary politics/neoliberalism and their counter aspirations? Much like Left Accelerationist Nick Srnecik's call to create "maps" that allow us to understand the complex relationships of power, capital, etc. of neoliberalism, these visual maps provide a framework for orienting oneself in the world and providing an understanding of the world's arrangement. These maps are populated with symbols, historical figures, flags, and "values" that relate to current competing worldviews. They are meant to be understood as a sort of propaganda poster that allows the viewer to begin to make sense of the dynamic forces behind certain understandings of the world.

**Imphe (booklet)**– this is an ongoing project framed as a booklet that explores archeological material from the medieval city of Imphe. It is based on the mention of Imphe in the *Song of Roland*, as a city visited by Charlemagne to lift the Muslim army's siege. There are also many scholarly attempts to identify Imphe with a historical location. The booklet itself is a work of fiction positioned as a para-fiction, positioning itself as an analysis of a historical archeological excavation. It uses 3D 'reconstructed' images of artifacts from these archeological excavations and speculatively extrapolates the social arrangements of Imphe as a unique site of eastern-western cooperation, of an alternate timeline to the West's

orientalist history. It posits a history of a medieval city that has been purposely forgotten for its embarrassment to the ‘western canon’, and its contradiction to established worldviews. It largely follows the format of Borges’ writings as well as the “

*The Living Theatre of Medieval Art* by Henry Kraus. The work also examines discourse as a material practice, and the relationship between history and evidence. In particular, I am interested in the fabrication of physical artifacts and objects that are used to attest to a particular history or reality.

## METHODOLOGY

### Guiding Research Questions:

- How can artists engage in ‘useful’ critique and affirmative practices?
- Can aesthetics provide a non-discursive but affirmative political language?
- How can political actors move toward emancipatory economic and political models and how can artists serve that interest?
- How can political power and economic power be visualized given the complexities of the current neoliberal model?
- How do economic realities determine political priorities?
- What spheres of life can be reclaimed for political agency?
- How does the autonomy of art relate to embedded practices, usability and social engagement?

**Trial** – I will get in contact with the individuals by the end of the year (currently working off an extended list of potential people). I am also currently looking at historical Soviet trial films, as well as contemporary trials for aesthetic dimensions. My aim is to secure all individuals assisting with the project by the end of December. The work will also be largely unscripted, with each individual providing prepared answers to scripted questions. I will also need to secure a space for one month in March. During this period, I will construct a basic set, including staging, lighting and likely a single track for filming. This will offer me a chance to do multiple tests and all filming. I’m currently in discussion to secure a space in an artist studio building. Costs will include: set building, lighting rental, track building, travel costs for participants and a participant stipend. Likely no rental fee for the space will be required.

**Imphe** –The text follows a Borgian model as an ‘outsider’s’ speculation on scientific material that has been collected from other authoritative texts. Like *The Living Theatre of Medieval Art*, it extrapolates from single works of art social relations as well as providing historical and apocryphal anecdotes relating to those social themes. Each chapter is devoted to the interpretation of an artifact (in fact a digital model). Collectively, these artifacts and interpretations construct a city that offers a distinctly different worldview. The work will likely be 30-50 pages, hand bound.

**Worldmapping** –Images are digital images to be printed. They follow a close reading of the Alchemical prints using contemporary symbols, images and values to create ‘maps’ of worldviews and processes.

## CONTEXT

I will discuss my work alongside recent developments in propaganda, worldmaking, the democratization of communication channels, the contemporary separation of power and politics, the historical relation of artists to activism, embedded art practices as well as state propaganda. These will be discussed using examples of other lens-based artists engaged in the same work. In particular, I will be looking at lens-based artists whose work engages in forms of propaganda and worldmaking, particularly filmmakers whose filmmaking process is itself 'usable'. Lastly, some theoretical context will connect the image and its politics through David Levi Strauss, Alain Badiou, Villem Flusser, Boris Groys, Hito Steyerl. Artists to be discussed include Yael Bartana, Isuma, Molleindustria, Tania Bruguera, Jordi Colomer, etc.

## OUTCOMES

My research to date has included neo-orientalism, War on Terror propaganda, computational propaganda, the politics of art, and neoliberalism in art. My work during the first year of this Masters took a critical stance to these phenomena. I am now exploring critique as proposition, worldmaking and politically affirmative strategies that move beyond critique. I am interested in art as propaganda as well as 'useful' art as (the latter draws from Stephen Wright's formulation of usability in *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*) as a means of positioning my artwork in relation to its societal context. Political art that expands audience and usership beyond the artistic sphere deploys its own critique/political position as praxis (whereas political art exclusively within the gallery space often remains within its echo chamber). As an artist engaged in political art, I'm interested in exploring art as a vehicle for enabling political agency, as well as affecting those agents, beyond any relation to the art sphere. This also implies creating new images rather than examining existing images of propaganda that we are subjected to (a strategy I used in the previous year). Given the need to create affirmative images, I would also like to explore the use of aesthetic languages and their affective power in communicating political ideas or affirming political agency. The role of aesthetic languages as a vehicle for politics, as opposed to discursive language, has been a new aspect of my research. This further connects to the use of languages of power, including those already established historically (most famously fascist and communist imagery) and exploring their structure and potential malleability for emancipatory purposes.

## SCHEDULE

### **December**

- Trial: -film testing, map out all technical details: get in contact with actors, begin screenplays, begin production plans; complete screenplay; begin storyboarding;
- Worldmapping: in progress
- Imphe: initial sketch: chapters defined and image models sketched
- possible funding – seek

### **January**

- Thesis: first thesis draft complete by end of month
- Trial: -all resources/people/support secured by month's end, complete storyboarding, fix schedule with all individuals
- Worldmaking: in progress
- Imphe: image designs finalized; need support in image design for 3d images – will locate designer for renders; writing continued

### **February**

- Thesis: second draft
- Trial: set design etc., schedule for filming fix
- Worldmaking: complete
- Imphe: writing continued; images rendered

### **March**

- Thesis: complete thesis
- Trial: all filming
- Imphe: writing continued

### **April**

- Trial: editing and contingency for filming
- Imphe: complete writing and images first draft

### **May**

- Trial: final editing and completion
- Imphe: final draft complete
- Exhibition: exhibition layout plan; printing/construction of any supporting work

### **June**

- exhibition
- Imphe: complete

## TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Below are a list of individuals who will be needed for the proposed film, as well as for some 3D modeling for image work:

**Film equipment** – Budgetcam Rotterdam; WDKA

**Actors:** TBD

**Camera work:** Teejo Renaud or Abel van Dijk or Seecum Cheung

**Sound recording:** Eric G.

**Lighting:** Lara D.

**Prop/set building:** Gill B.

**Soundtrack:** Evan P.

**3D work:** Jordan L.

**Technical support:** PZI staff: Barend, Javi

**Conceptual support:** PZI staff, Florian Kramer, Maria Hlavajova, Samer Abdelnour

## RELATION TO PREVIOUS PRACTICE

In my first year, my work largely dealt with the ‘soft’ propaganda that has emerged from the War on Terror. This propaganda reinforces the Us/Them dichotomy as neo-orientalism. *Aim Down Sights* explored the recreation and role-playing of terrorism through gaming, where the game reinforces tropes from the war. A subsequent paper, *The Simulated Real: Aesthetics and the Semblance of the Real in Terroristic Images* argues that terroristic images are not a return to a Lacanian real but rather can be subjected to aesthetic critique. *While Gazing Through a Monitor*, I explored neo-orientalism as the abstraction of the Middle East through drone images that come to inform our mental map of the ‘Orient’.

My current thesis explores the possibilities of art as propaganda, or affirmational art of alternative political and economic world models. At the same time, I am interested in artwork that challenges the current propagandas to which we are subjected (not necessarily an anti-propaganda but an alter-propaganda) and situate it within contemporary artistic practices.

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