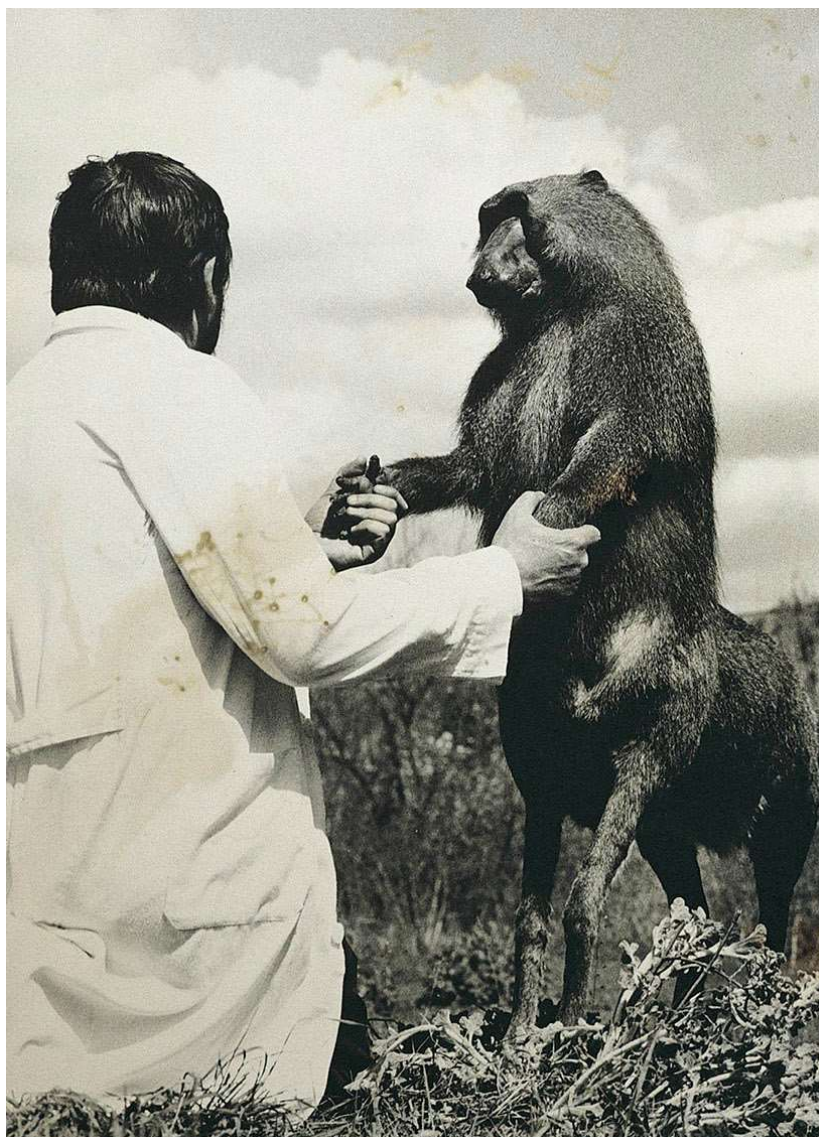


# PARAFICTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

BY ROBIN SPALDING



**Joan Fontcuberta & Pere Formiguera**  
*Centaurus Neandertalensis from Dr. Ameisenhaufen's Fauna, 1988*

# INTRODUCTION

In *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility* Carrie Lambert-Beatty coined the term 'Parafiction' to describe artworks which "reside in the space between fact and fiction." <sup>1</sup> In these works "real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived," allowing fictions to be "experienced as fact," with various effects and intentions. <sup>2</sup> Lambert-Beatty's seminal essay on this subject is still one of the most significant contributions to the orientation of this practice within a fine art context.

Many contemporary artists use the parafiction as a tool to perform interventions which blur the boundaries between fiction and reality to convey messages to their audience. However, the practice is not limited to fine art. One most successful parafictions of all time is Orson Welles' 1938 adaptation of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. Orson Wells' dramatisation of the science fiction narrative was delivered as a radio broadcast in the style of a breaking-news report and led many listeners to believe that an ongoing Martian invasion was happening at the time of the broadcast.

In a fine art context, the genre emerged gradually, perhaps beginning with General Idea's *Miss General Idea Pageant*. Produced in 1971, this was a fake beauty pageant satirising the conventions of the medium. Fifteen years later the practice began to grow in popularity, starting in 1986 with Peter Hill's *The Museum of Contemporary Ideas*, a fake museum conjured into being by a convincing press campaign. Over the next few years, the field developed steadily through numerous significant contributions to the genre including Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera's fake anthropological archive *Fauna*, presented at MoMA in 1988 and David Hildebrand Wilson's still extant *Museum of Jurassic Technology* launching in 1988.

The practice of the parafiction also gradually filtered into popular culture in the following years, with notable contributions to the tradition from Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez with their 1999 feature film *The Blair Witch Project*, and Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant's 2001 mockumentary *The Office*. In the years that followed the parafictional format of storytelling became a convention in the horror and comedy genres of cinema and television.

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<sup>1</sup> Kirsty Robertson: *The Disappearance of Arthur Nestor: Parafiction, Cryptozoology, Curation* in *Museum & Society*, July 2020, pp. 98-114

<sup>2</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, pp. 51-84.

Closer to the present-day and in a fine art context Damien Hirst's 2017 exhibition of faked artefacts, *Treasures of the Wreck of the Unbelievable* is one of the most ambitious parafictionions ever produced, indicating that the parafiction is still a powerful and popular artistic strategy today.

This essay focuses on examples of parafictionions which hoax their audience in order to make an intervention in their beliefs. These works use deception as a methodology to allow a fictional narrative to escape from the confines of the artform and into reality. Through this trickery, a simulation of a possible future can be imagined, a mode of critical thinking can be encouraged and authorities can be subverted, all within the experimental safety of the art experience.

## **SIMULATING POSSIBLE WORLDS**

Lambert-Beatty explains that the parafiction as an art form has an important role in contemporary society as it allows artists to perform an exercise of modelling alternate versions of reality. These models are temporarily experienced by the audience as fact. This facilitates a useful condition where the audience does not need to suspend disbelief to be enveloped in the story told by the artwork. This can be used as a tool for artists to subvert and critique dominant narratives and authorities which has included wealthy multinational companies, museums and political organisations.<sup>3</sup>

The critical function provided by the parafiction as a tool for modelling fictional scenarios that interrogate dominant narratives is best exemplified by the works of The Yes Men. In one of their most significant interventions, *End of the WTO*, 2002 the Yes Men created a fake but authentic looking website ([www.gatt.org](http://www.gatt.org)) for the World Trade Organisation which led to numerous invitations intended for representatives of the WTO to lecture at events. In one instance, when addressing the Certified Practicing Accountants Association of Australia at a 2002 trade seminar in Sydney, the Yes Men's Andy Bichlbaum<sup>4</sup> in character as a representative of the WTO, delivered a speech in which he outlined the WTO's intention to rebrand as the 'Trade

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<sup>3</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, pp. 51-84.

<sup>4</sup> The artist Jacques Servin, who performs in the Yes Men under the name 'Andy Bichlbaum'

Regulation Organization'.<sup>5</sup> This new organisation would be devoted to "making corporations behave responsibly towards all world citizens, not just the wealthy. Instead of serving to help businesses do business it will henceforward make sure that business helps people."<sup>6</sup>

Bichlbaum then went on to deliver an hour of shocking statistics "drumming home the need for this massive transformation,"<sup>7</sup> and highlighting the hypocrisy of the World Trade Organisation. In this action, which the Yes Men term 'Identity Correction' they stole the identity of the WTO "in the same way that an identity thief steals someone's identity in order to engage in criminal practices." They then used the authority of this stolen identity to "make them honest by presenting their honest face," and through the public spectacle created by the intervention "reveal(ed) something about our culture that is profoundly a problem."<sup>8</sup>

After the delivery of *End of the WTO* members of the trade event "rallied behind the plan with excitement...thrilled at this radical new direction the WTO is taking," and "gave suggestions for ensuring that the new organization will serve the poor rather than only the rich."<sup>9</sup> For the duration of this performance, until the intervention was debunked as a hoax, members of the Certified Practicing Accountants Association of Australia believed and "had a concrete experience' of the Yes Men's motto, that "another world is possible." <sup>10</sup>

The function of this work was to simulate an intended change in the world through fiction as a precursor to this change happening in fact. Lambert-Beatty comments on the effect of this intervention, theorising that "If a group of Australian accountants can suddenly find it thinkable—even credible, even actionable—to realign world trade to the benefit of indigenous people and the global poor, then something like a new distribution of the sensible has, at least temporarily, been brought into being."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> TheYesMen.org, *End of the WTO: Behind the Curtain*, 2003 **How the World Trade Organization ended one day / The Yes Men**

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Servin speaking as Andy Bichlbaum in : *The Yes Men* (2003) Dan Ollman & Sarah Price. DVD published by Freepeech & LLC and MGM Home Entertainment Inc.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Igor Vamos speaking as Mike Bonanno in Ibid

<sup>9</sup> TheYesMen.org, *End of the WTO: **How the World Trade Organization ended one day / The Yes Men***

<sup>10</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, pp. 51-84.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

Through the process of fictioning the World Trade Centre's announcement, the Yes Men temporarily brought this alternate world into being for the audience of the intervention. Until the hoax was debunked, that change continued to catalyse action under the false pretence posited by the Yes Men. In this instance, the fictional narrative reached as far as being announced by politician John Duncan in Canadian Parliament, allowing the lie to insinuate itself into spheres of genuine political change.

## TRAINING FOR INFORMATION CONSUMERS

Parafictional strategies can also function as a form of training in "the pragmatics of trust,"<sup>12</sup> which "prepare us to be better, more critical information consumers and therefore citizens."<sup>13</sup> It could be said that in a contemporary society plagued by 'fake news', 'paid content', advertorial promotions and fake social media accounts, parafictional artworks provide essential training for information consumers who are constantly required to interrogate the sources of 'factual' information. In this chapter I will outline how parafictional artworks can perform an important social function by reflecting on and providing an antidote to the timely problem of unreliable facts being distributed by news sources.

As was previously illustrated, the Yes Men used the authority secured by a convincing looking fake internet site to catfish their audience of TV and political researchers into providing them the platforms necessary for their interventions. In a similar way to the Yes Men, artist duo 0100101110101101.ORG<sup>14</sup> exploit the parafictional possibilities offered by the internet to mislead their audience into believing false narratives. In their 1998 work *Vaticano.org*, they highlighted the potential for the internet to be used to hijack an organisation's authority to disseminate a different, subversive message. The work, which took the form of a believable copy of the Vatican's internet site at the address [www.vaticano.org](http://www.vaticano.org), included teachings falsely attributed to the Pope which "exalted free love, soft drugs...and claimed the Church's duty to civil and electronic disobedience."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, pp. 51-84.

<sup>13</sup> Kirsty Robertson: *The Disappearance of Arthur Nestor: Parafiction, Cryptozoology, Curation* in Museum & Society, July 2020, pp. 98-114

<sup>14</sup> Artists Eva & Franco Mattes are also known as 0100101110101101.ORG

<sup>15</sup> Eva & Franco Mattes' official website, webpage on [Vaticano.org](http://Vaticano.org) (1998) at [0100101110101101.org](http://0100101110101101.org)

The website received numerous views and interactions, including emails from "sinners," requesting absolution from the Pope.<sup>16</sup> Miraculously "nobody questioned it for an entire year,"<sup>17</sup> illustrating the potential of a convincing looking fake internet site to hijack the authority of an organisation and use this platform to distribute a misleading message.

In a similar way to an organisation's website, the authority of the museum as an information source can also be hijacked by the parafictional artist. In their 1987 work *Fauna*, Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera explored the potential to hack a museum's authority by producing a fictional exhibit based on the premise of their 'discovery' of the lost archives of imaginary zoologist Dr. Ameisenhaufen. Presented in various institutions including MoMA, New York in 1988 and The National Science and Media Museum, Bradford in 2014 this archive contained 'evidence' of unusual hybrid animals that were "exceptions to Darwin's theory of evolution."<sup>18</sup>

These specimens, which included doctored photographs, fake x-rays, recordings, field notes and creatively taxidermied specimens claimed to "bear witness to an extinct and astounding fauna, preserved for us in the impressive documentation."<sup>19</sup> During its 1989 exhibition at the Barcelona Museum of Natural Science, "30% of the visitors aged 20 to 30, with university training, believed that some of (the) animals could have existed."<sup>20</sup> As can be seen from the effects of this work, narratives told by museums can also be commandeered by an artist, subverting the authority of the institution. As Kirsty Robertson notes when discussing her similar project, the fake archive *The Disappearance of Arthur Nestor*, 2014, work of this nature provides a "critical lens through which to view conventional museum assumptions bound up in display, collection, and archiving (and) repudiated any perceived neutrality of archives or museums."<sup>21</sup>

As can be seen in the examples outlined above, the parafictional artwork can

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Exhibition description for *Joan Fontcuberta: Stranger Than Fiction*, 2014 on the website of National Science and Media Museum, Bradford

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Artist Juan Magonzalez writing in 2020 on Joan Fontcuberta , *Fauna* 1988 on his website: [juanmagonzalez.com](http://juanmagonzalez.com) Joan Fontcuberta / Art Work / Fauna

<sup>21</sup> Kirsty Robertson, *The Disappearance of Arthur Nestor: Parafiction, Cryptozoology, Curation* in *Museum & Society*, July 2020, pp. 98-114

be used as a tool to critique the authority of various information sources by using these channels to disseminate fictional information. These works can be seen as illustrations of how these platforms can be used to lie. This encourages the audience to interrogate the information they receive from these sources and acknowledge the medium's potential for deceit. As Lambert-Beatty discusses, the use of this revelation in contemporary society relates to a MacArthur Foundation <sup>22</sup> paper which "explains that the crucial skills for thriving in our current and coming information environment—the world of Wikipedia and Google—is the ability to distinguish between various sources' levels of reliability and a proclivity to question the transparency of information."<sup>23</sup> The parafictional artwork provides this necessary training, reminding the audience to be sceptical and therefore developing in them an important skill for living in a society saturated by untrustworthy information sources.

## FUNHOUSE MIRROR

The works described in previously also have a secondary function. By imitating information distribution platforms as artworks, each work becomes a subversive reflection on the nature of these platforms as information sources in the contemporary world. They hold a mirror up to society and reflect a time when the truth and reliability of much of the information that we consume has become undermined. The reason for the emergence of these works, as well as their urgency in the present moment is that they reflect the time that we live in and the future that we may soon arrive at.

As Simon O' Sullivan and David Burrows discuss in their 2019 publication *Fictioning: The Myth Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy* "fiction is a term that has increasing valence in wider political cultures, as indicated especially in the new terminology used to describe contemporary political reality: 'post-fact' and 'post-truth'."<sup>24</sup> The parafiction reflects this

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<sup>22</sup> Henry Jenkins, with Ravi Rurshotma, Katherine Clinton, Margaret Weigel, and Alice J. Robiso, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, October 19, 2006, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, pp. 43-6.

<sup>23</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, pp. 51-84. October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology

<sup>24</sup> David Burrows and Simon O' Sullivan, *Fictioning : The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p. 23.

contemporary political reality, subverting many of the tropes seen in political spheres through playful imitation.

Despite many of the most significant works in the parafictional genre being made over twenty years ago, they are now more relevant than ever. Many of these works, such as 0100101110101101.ORG's *Vaticano.org*, 1998 intervention, speculate on the possibilities offered by the newly invented internet, which developed into the "internet that we know today,"<sup>25</sup> in 1991. These parafictional artists recognised the nefarious opportunities afforded by this unregulated information hub and reflected it back to society with a subversive twist. Since that time, many of these potentials have become realities. These artworks were prescient of the future traps that the medium of the internet could provide to unscrupulous individuals and organisations.

In her article *The Year of the Fake* Naomi Klein pronounced 2003 to be "the year when fakeness ruled," sighting numerous examples of "fakery and forgery," in US and UK politics as well as the sometimes lethal punishments enacted by the same governments to whistleblowers such as David Kelly for "truth-telling."<sup>26</sup> In US politics in particular, under the leadership of George W. Bush "fictional narratives and questionable rationales were systematically mobilised in response to the earlier terrorist attacks."<sup>27</sup>

In the same year The Yes Men released *The Yes Men* (United Artists, 2003) their first film documenting a series of their recent parafictional hoaxes which included satirical attacks on the 2000 George W. Bush presidential campaign, McDonald's, and the World Trade Organisation. Each of these interventions highlighted and 'identity corrected' many of the hypocritical aspects of these organisations, using copycat internet sites and political conferences to highlight hidden elements of each organisation's real identity. These included the inherent racism and warmongering of the George W. Bush campaign and the recycling of inedible meat into McDonald's burgers. These works reflected important issues of their time in the same media that the organisations used to propagate their own messages.

Kirsty Robertson, curator of the parafictional exhibition *Beneath the Surface: The Archives of Arthur Nestor*, 2014 also noticed the potential of the parafiction to reflect a current and future political realities. In this

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<sup>25</sup>History.com, *The Invention of the Internet*, 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2010 by History.com Editors [The Invention of the Internet](#)

<sup>26</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Year of the Fake*, The Nation Magazine, 26 January, 2004, pp.86-91

<sup>27</sup> *Double Trouble: Parafictional Personas and Contemporary Art* by Kate Warren in *Persona Studies*, 2016-05-01, Vol.2 (1), p.55-69



project, Robertson, along with 16 graduate students at Western University, Canada staged an exhibition which depicted a 'found' cryptozoological archive produced by the fictional Biology professor Arthur Nestor who had 'disappeared' from the University in 1975. When discussing this project in 2020 Robertson writes that "since the election of Donald Trump in the United States and the rise of 'fake news' and the arrival of 'post-truth politics', many of the issues that lay dormant in *Beneath the Surface* have come to the foreground," <sup>28</sup> revealing an awareness of the capabilities of the genre to reveal important issues of the time. These important issues are reflections of a contemporary society that in 2016 saw master fictionaliser Donald Trump elected as US President, "dirty methods" used to manipulate public opinion in the UK's Brexit referendum<sup>29</sup> and Oxford Dictionaries declare its international word of the year to be "post-truth".

In the same year, Kate Warren writes about how the recent emergence of the 'parafictional persona' in art, film and television has developed in response to the conditions of a post-truth society. In *Double Trouble: Parafictional Personas and Contemporary Art* she discusses a scenario wherein "actors, performers and artists...play versions of themselves...involving artists and performers appropriating their own "proper name" (and so) constructing fictionalised doubles of themselves." A recent example of this would be in Tom Gormican's film *The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent*, 2022<sup>30</sup> in which Nicolas Cage plays a bloated caricature of himself who is paid to make an appearance at a billionaire fan's birthday party. In this work it is difficult to distinguish between the fictionalised Nicolas Cage of the film's narrative and his actual character as a living celebrity.

This produces an interesting effect on the audience, as Tom Gormican's constructed character of Nicolas Cage contains "multiple levels of fiction and reality," which coexist in an irresolvable manner<sup>31</sup>. This facilitates an interesting tension between the director's intention for the character, the actual personality of the actor and our interpretation of each party's genuineness. Throughout the film, the audience must question and interrogate the level of sincerity of the representation of the 'Nicolas Cage' character

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<sup>28</sup> Kirsty Robertson: *The Disappearance of Arthur Nestor: Parafiction, Cryptozoology, Curation* in *Museum & Society*, July 2020, pp. 98-114

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Boffey, *'Dirty methods' in Brexit vote cited in push for new laws on Europe's elections / European Union*, *The Guardian*, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020

<sup>30</sup> *The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent*, 2022, directed by Tom Gormican, written by Tom Gormican and Kevin Etten, produced by Saturn Films, distributed by Lionsgate

<sup>31</sup> *Double Trouble: Parafictional Personas and Contemporary Art* by Kate Warren in *Persona Studies*, 2016-05-01, Vol.2 (1), p.55-69

and ask to what extent this character has "one foot in the world of the real."<sup>32</sup>

As Warren observes "connections could be drawn between this phenomenon and contemporary forms of social media, which allow individuals to actively and publicly present themselves."<sup>33</sup> Therefore the parafictional persona in film, television or fine art could be seen as a mirroring representation of the carefully curated version of the self that is projected into the world through social media. This fictional self bears a conceptual resemblance to the real person and uses their name and image, but is only an avatar controlled by the real person.

The parafiction as an artform reflects something "powerfully and uniquely appropriate to our historical moment,"<sup>34</sup> both in its prescient explorations of new media channels such as the internet, to the parafictional personas of ourselves which many of us now control through social media. The parafiction has become a "funhouse-mirror" <sup>35</sup> which reflects a distorted version of the world in which we currently live.

## JESTERS LICENCE

The parafiction as a medium has great potential to effect change in the world by "undermining dominant myths,"<sup>36</sup> and misleading the audience for constructive purposes. However, although this tool of deception is functionally useful for the artist to representing their ideas, it also presents various ethical dilemmas. I will address the potential ethical problems of the parafiction and discuss the artist's moral responsibility to their audience from different perspectives.

The scenario which best exemplifies the moral implications of the parafiction

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<sup>32</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, pp. 51-84. October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology

<sup>33</sup> *Double Trouble: Parafictional Personas and Contemporary Art* by Kate Warren in *Persona Studies*, 2016-05-01, Vol.2 (1), p.55-69

<sup>34</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, pp. 51-84. October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> David Burrows and Simon O' Sullivan, *Fictioning : The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p.32

is the Yes Men's most famous intervention *Dow Does the Right Thing*, 2004. In this intervention the Yes Men's Andy Bichlbaum posed as a representative of the Dow Chemical Company in an interview broadcast on BBC World TV on the twentieth anniversary of the Union Carbide chemical spill at Bhopal, India. This disaster leaked toxic pesticides over Bhopal, killing 15,000 people and polluting the landscape. Dow Chemical, who absorbed Union Carbide in 2001, have "categorically refused to take responsibility for cleaning up the environmental damage or compensating the victims." <sup>37</sup>

The Yes Men saw this injustice as an opportunity for 'Identity Correction' and during the interview with the BBC announced that the company would pay reparations to the region and clean up the environmental damage left in the wake of the disaster. It took the BBC two hours to detect that the speaker was an imposter and retract the statement, during which time viewers of the BBC news broadcast temporarily believed that there would be justice for those effected by the crisis.

In its aims to raise awareness of the disaster, this parafiction was extraordinarily efficacious. Hijacking the BBC's news distribution network ensured a massive global audience for the work and the intervention also had tangible economic consequences for Dow Chemical as within minutes of the announcement Dow Chemical's stock price dipped by \$2 Billion.<sup>38</sup> However, Dow Chemical ignored the Yes Men's challenge to 'do the right thing' and repair the damage to the region and the parafiction caused significant collateral damage to friendly parties as a result of the intervention.

Lambert-Beatty points out that it is likely that the casualties of the spill in Bhopal, would also have been taken in by the hoax: "One can only imagine their joy and corresponding disappointment when they learned that they still awaited justice."<sup>39</sup> Clearly there is a delicate balance to be found between the artwork's power to raise awareness of an important issue and their responsibility to a public which could genuinely be harmed by their intervention.

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<sup>37</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, pp. 51-84. October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology

<sup>38</sup> Vincent Graff, *Meet the Yes Men who hoax the world*, The Guardian, 13 December 2004

<sup>39</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, pp. 51-84. October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology

The second collateral victim was the BBC's reputation for rigorous journalism. "Their (the Yes Men's) big regret is that it was the BBC that fell into the trap; most other broadcasters were not at risk, since they ignored the Bhopal anniversary."<sup>40</sup> It was precisely because "the BBC is one of the only news outlets that has consistently given a tonne of coverage to the Bhopal disaster,"<sup>41</sup> that they were so vulnerable to the Yes Men's catfishing. Unfortunately, it was because of the BBC's similar commitment to maintain pressure on Dow Chemical Company that they ended up becoming embroiled in discussions on "lax standards in journalism,"<sup>42</sup> as a result of the Yes Men's intervention.

Ethical concerns which were presented by *Dow Does the Right Thing* raise an important criticism of the parafiction as an artform: that there is often collateral damage caused by the misdirection that is essential to the work. In this case, disastrously for the Yes Men, their targeting of the Dow Chemical Company inadvertently deceived the victims of the disaster and placed the integrity of the BBC's journalism in the crossfire, attacking one of their greatest allies in the fight against Dow Chemical Company over their handling of the tragedy.

The Yes Men's answer to this criticism is "that precisely in such a climate...we need to be devious in order to achieve a condition of honesty."<sup>43</sup> Their mission statement, which is a common strategy amongst parafictioneers, particularly those with activist tendencies, is that "lies can expose truth."<sup>44</sup> It is tempting to agree with Lambert-Beattie when she argues that "the fact that parafiction is queasy-making is key to what they are and what they do."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, when dealing with issues of violence perpetrated against an oppressed and largely voiceless population by a wealthy multinational company, perhaps the blunt instrument of the parafictional intervention is necessary to achieve some semblance of justice, even when collateral damage to allies is sustained.

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<sup>40</sup> Vincent Graff, *Meet the Yes Men who hoax the world*, The Guardian, 13 December 2004

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> TheYesMen.org, *Frequently Asked Questions* on the Yes Men's website : <http://theyesmen.org/faq>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, pp. 51-84.

In an interview with 0100101110101101.ORG, Alan Bieber asked whether being labelled 'artist' was like getting a "jester's license," <sup>46</sup> which is an interesting perspective to take in order to rethink the artists responsibility to their audience. If the artist's role is considered to be analogous to that of a comedian, merely highlighting the comedic nature of a scenario, then perhaps they are partly relieved of their responsibility to be truthful or morally accountable for their actions. Lambert- Beatty seconds this opinion, stating that "art...is understood as a fundamentally frivolous zone," where "you can speculate, make up facts, blend different types of facts, or even lie." <sup>47</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Parafictions are a contentious but useful genre of contemporary artistic practice. They have the potential to simulate future realities, train their audience in scepticism, reflect on and question elements of society and highlight important contemporary issues in order to instigate political discussion.

Although many of these artworks are contemporary, the parafiction is an old artform. Work within this genre connects to a far larger tradition of hoaxing which can be traced back to the timeless practice of con-artistry first celebrated as an artform in Ming dynasty China by Zhang Yingyu's in *The Book of Swindles* published in around 1617. Additionally, one of history's most famous parafictioneers is the American showman P.T. Barnum (1810-1891) who achieved notoriety for numerous entertaining hoaxes such as his simple but effective "Feejee Mermaid", involving a hybrid taxidermy animal made from the body of a monkey and the tail of a fish. As can be observed from this description, this work was not dissimilar to Joan Fontcuberta and Pere Formiguera's *Centaurus Neandertalensis*, 1988 pictured on the title page of this essay.

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<sup>46</sup> *How to provoke today?* Alain Bieber interviews 0100101110101101.ORG on Nike Ground in *Rebel:Art Magazine*, April 1, 2004

<sup>47</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility*, 2009, October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, pp. 51-84.

An ancient artform, the parafiction reflects an essential characteristic of human nature: the desire to lie in order to get something. The parafiction taps into this timeless, archetypal human behaviour wearing the clothing of a fine art practice and makes use of it as a tool. The deception itself is not the final aim of the parafiction however, the parafiction intends for "fiction to function in truth,"<sup>48</sup> and "operate as a kind of manual, offering up case studies for a life that might be lived differently."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Foucault cited in *Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* by Hubert L. Dreyfus, Paul Rabinow and Michel Foucault, *History and Theory*, Feb., 1984, Vol. 23, No. 1 pp. 84-105

<sup>49</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1988 cited in David Burrows and Simon O' Sullivan, *Fictioning : The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, Edinburgh University Press, 2019 p.72