

PRESS RELEASE

Fake News. The factory of lies can be seen on the 3rd floor of the Espacio Fundación Telefónica free of charge until 19 November 2023

ESPACIO FUNDACIÓN TELEFÓNICA PRESENTS 'FAKE NEWS. THE FACTORY OF LIES', AN EXHIBITION THAT REFLECTS ON HOW DISINFORMATION IMPACTS OUR SOCIETY

- Through historical pieces, works by contemporary artists and real case studies, *Fake News. The factory of lies* invites us to understand the complexity of the phenomenon in order to identify different types of disinformation, learn to recognise them and combat their spread.
- The exhibition features around 120 pieces, among them some by ten creators, including those by the Domestic Data Streamers, Tactical Tech and The Yes Men collectives, together with big names such as Joan Fontcuberta, Jonas Bendiksen and Hao Li.

Madrid, 14 June, 2023. - In the digital age, we have more information than ever before, information that is generated at an unprecedented speed. Globally, 6,000 tweets, 740,000 WhatsApp messages and 694 Instagram posts are published every second. However, our exposure to manipulation increases in parallel. Every day we are confronted with news and disinformation strategies that test our ability to distinguish what is true and what is false. Although we are dealing with a complex phenomenon with centuries of history, the Internet and mass dissemination channels have taken the impact of this phenomenon to an unprecedented level.

Fake news makes media literacy more necessary than ever. What are they really and how do they spread? What tools do we have to make them? How can we detect and combat them? Through historical pieces, works by contemporary artists and real case studies, *Fake News. The Factory of Lies* aims to review the phenomenon of fake news over the centuries and to reflect on the impact it has on our society today.

The exhibition, curated by journalist Mario Tascón and Fundación Telefónica, and with the collaboration of the Biblioteca Nacional de España, the Universidad CEU San Pablo and Fundación Maldita.es, features around 120 pieces, including the collectives Domestic Data Streamers, Tactical Tech and The Yes Men, together with Joan Fontcuberta, Jonas Bendiksen

and Hao Li. *Fake News. The factory of lies* can be seen on the 3rd floor of the Telefónica Foundation Space free of charge until 19 November 2023.

What is fake news?

In 2017, the phrase *fake news* was chosen from over 4,500 terms as Word of the Year by Collins' dictionary, coinciding with the election battle between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump and the cascade of disinformation that ensued. The exhibition introduces us to these concepts through animated front pages from various media such as *The Guardian* or *BBC News* that highlighted this news, as well as famous phrases from people who have referred to this phenomenon throughout history, such as Machiavelli, George Orwell or Plato. In addition, a large installation shaped like a staircase defines and distinguishes between the concepts of *deepfakes*, *fake news*, disinformation, propaganda and de-contextualisation, which are so often confused with each other, to take us deeper into the world of information manipulation.

The brain plays tricks on us

The desire to learn - which makes us favour new information - and, above all, the drive to be part of a social group, are two essential traits in how the human brain evolved that shed some light on our predisposition to fake news. The human brain's search for efficiency also causes so-called cognitive shortcuts: unconscious automatisms that seek to speed up mental processes, but which often lead us to perceive reality through inaccurate judgements and illogical conclusions. Attention economy must also be added to this; we live in a world full of stimulations, where exaggeration, content personalisation, immediacy, rapid spread of information and a lack in fact-checking sources increase the success and spread of fake news.

This section contains three audiovisual projections. One of them presents a selection of 10 cognitive biases - such as confirmation bias, authority bias, the third-person effect or false consensus - that affect the way we consume and understand information. Another projection explains the so-called 'plausibility index', which highlights two key elements of what makes a hoax work: the receiver's emotion and the sophistication or quality of the simulation.

The third installation dissects fake news based on which channels it spreads through, the type of content, speed and quantity. The data show that fake content spreads and is shared faster and generates more interaction. Those linked to politics are the most popular, ahead of topics such as terrorism, the economy or natural disasters. In fact, a study by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid states that 90% of Spaniards have shared fake news at some point.

Fake news in history

The term fake news immediately brings us back to today's world, but despite its novel appearance, falsehood, sensationalism and manipulation have always marked strategies with dubious purposes in transmitting information. The spread of these has depended on one hand, on communication media and, on the other, on how the methods used to spread them have evolved during each era. This technological progress has gone hand in hand with the evolution of information structure itself, from the mere presentation of facts to appealing to the receiver's emotions.

This section traces, through different periods and media, some of the most iconic fake news stories that have occurred throughout history. From ancient times to the present day, it explores how media evolution has contributed to its spread and viralisation, in which the Internet, social networks and the recent irruption of artificial intelligence have played a decisive role.

History

In addition to law, civil engineering and culture, we have also inherited the creation of *fake news* from ancient Rome. Lies in the form of legends, hoaxes, defamation and malicious propaganda transcend over the centuries to glorify some and destroy others. Is it possible that Nero did not set fire to Rome or that Livia did not plan the assassination of all her heirs to the throne? There are many lies spread in the Ancient Times that still resonate today, but those that the Romans themselves told about themselves, especially in the political sphere, are even louder.

The Middle Ages

In the Middle Ages, the *Donation of Constantine (1520)* is considered to be the *fake news* par excellence of this period: a fabricated document that served as a pretext to legitimise papal political aspirations.

The Modern Age

During the Modern Age, misinformation grew by leaps and bounds for several reasons. The emergence of Gutenberg's printing press, among other things, led to its rapid spread and marked what we consider to be the precursors of today's press. This leads both to the proliferation of religious propaganda - notably blood libels and anti-Catholic allegations - and political propaganda - fuelled by the interests of the great European powers, leading to information manipulation, as can be seen in a letter recounting the false victory of the Invincible Armada. To illustrate this area, there are valuable original copies from the Spanish National Library.

The Contemporary Age

In the Contemporary Age, with the Industrial Revolution, we witnessed an explosion in the information circulation, thanks to transport advances and the new high-speed presses, elements that popularised the cheap and sensationalist press. Also, with the rise of totalitarianism in the 20th century, radio burst onto the scene, with its peak during the Second World War as a means of propaganda. In 1950, television became popular and became the most powerful *mass media*, both in terms of its persuasiveness and its accessibility to the population. Examples include *The Sun's "The Great Moon Lie" (1835)*, considered the first great fabrication of this period, which will be shown alongside the radio broadcast of *Orson Welles' "The War of the Worlds" (1938)* and the *"Eyes on Saddam" Project (2003)* on the alleged sites of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, an argument used by the US to justify the launch of the military campaign.

Present Day

Today, the capacity for mass distribution through social media has brought about a radical shift in the way the public accesses, consumes and spreads news. To a large extent, this change is based on social networks' interest in building communities, the so-called "echo chambers", which are digital bubbles where members themselves share information that supports their points of view and which are breeding grounds for spreading *fake news*. As a result, the way of thinking is polarised and encourages a split into two extremes of thought, two antagonistic extremes. All this has thus dealt a blow to the quality of democracy.

Based on the premise of infoxication that we are currently experiencing, the art collective **Domestic Data Streamers** seeks to reflect on the dizzying consumption of information we are exposed to through the immersive piece *Data Heartbreak* (2022).

Fabricating lies

Technological advances have facilitated the construction of lies up to the present day, when mass broadcasting channels, coupled with artificial intelligence, have brought visual manipulation well within the reach of many. In this section, current artists and creators reflect on this phenomenon and offer their own particular reflections through humour, criticism and dissemination. Among the pieces is *The Book of Veles* by Norwegian photographer **Jonas Bendiksen**, who photographed the empty streets of the Macedonian town of Veles during the Coronavirus pandemic - which, during the election campaign between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in 2016, became a hub for spreading fake news. He later edited the images by adding avatars and supplemented them with robot-generated stories. The result was a deception that fascinated the international photographic scene and came to be accepted as the real thing.

Another example is *The New York Times Special Edition*, an artistic proposal by **The Yes Men** group, which one week after the election that brought Obama to the White House, joined hundreds of writers, artists and activists to create and distribute, in a project that lasted six months, 80,000 copies of a fake edition of the *New York Times*. It anticipated the news for the next 18 months, with a hopeful and optimistic tone, announcing, among other things, the end of the war in Iraq and free universities. A similar proposal is *Nice Fake News*, by **Oli Frost**, a Russian artist and hacker who created a website to share fake news with a tinge of humour and optimism, such as eradicating traffic by 2026.

This section shows the acclaimed work *Sputnik* by Joan Fontcuberta, a project that created a huge commotion and that some media took as real. It tells the story of the alleged Colonel Ivan Istochnikov, whose disappearance in the middle of the US-USSR space race in 1968 caused him to be erased from history by the Soviet authorities.

This section also shows around twenty photographs from the 19th century to the present day that have been altered using different techniques or de-contextualised. These include a doctored image of Putin talking to Trump and Erdogan and the recent image of Pope Francis wearing a white Balenciaga coat, as well as **Alain Josseau's** *G255 n°2* (2022), a device capable of constructing live, fake images of urban bombings and war scenes using a chroma key, and converting them into a mock-up.

This section is complemented by several examples of *deepfakes*, an artificial intelligence technique based on deep learning and developed in two phases: first, the algorithms are fed with real images and videos on which to build new content; second, they are automatically trained in order to detect errors and thus improve them. This has resulted in artificial creations with an uncanny resemblance to reality, which have given rise to such high quality deceptions making it almost impossible to discern the real from the fake. Today, this fabricated content is a dangerous weapon to discredit personalities and anonymous people, and today it floods social media and WhatsApp messages, even crossing the virtual barrier to reach traditional media.

Another work featuring this artificial intelligence technique is *In Event of Moon Disaster* (2019) by a group of artists and researchers from MIT, led by **Halsey Burgund & Francesca Panetta**.

Using *deepfake* audiovisual tools, a TV set in a typical American living room in 1969 recreates what President Richard Nixon's speech would have been like if Apollo 11 had not landed on the moon. The installation invites us to go back in time to this alternate past and discover how new technologies can distort, redirect and blur the truth that surrounds us.

Continuing with pieces starring artificial intelligence, we find *Big Dada / Public Faces* (2019) by Daniel Howe and Bill Posters. This audiovisual installation depicts four avatars created using *deepfake* technology, who impersonate Donald Trump, Kim Kardashian, Mark Zuckerberg and Morgan Freeman. And through the interactive *Real-Time Deepfake* (2022) installation, **Hao Li**, the world's most famous deepfake developer thanks to his famous algorithms and founder of Pinscreen, which specialises in creating avatars through AI, presents a *deepfake* capable of recognising the visitor's face and swapping it with a celebrity's face in real time. The creator thus warns of the great danger behind the misuse of video manipulation.

Fighting lies

The World Economic Forum ranks disinformation as one of the main risks to our societies and the latest Reporters Without Borders 2023 report warns how "the difference between true and false, real and artificial, fact and artefact is blurring, endangering the right to information". How can we know if a photo, a video or a tweet is authentic or truthful? What kind of misinformation is shared and spread and what role do we play in this?

The exhibition culminates by responding to these concerns through three pieces by the Tactical Tech collective, two of them interactive, *Fake or Real and Doublecheck*, where the user can put techniques and knowledge learned about disinformation and manipulation of information to the test during their visit. In addition, a large *Deepfake Lab* mural closes the exhibition with a guide to detecting and combating *deepfakes*.

GUIDED TOURS FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Individuals can book guided tours on the [Espacio website](#) from 27 June, from Tuesday to Friday at 12 p.m. and 5 p.m. and in July from Tuesday to Friday at 12 noon.

For more information: espacio.fundaciontelefonica.com

