

Venice
WARREN NEIDICH
Rumor to Delusion

Zuecca Project Space
May 10th – Nov. 30th, 2019

by Ann-Katrin Günzel



Warren Neidich, photographed during his opening performance "Rumor to Delusion", photo: Karolina Sobel, courtesy of PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.

Instagram – BOT – Comet Ping Pong – Edgar Welch – Pizzagate – Twitter – 4chan – James Alefantis... these are just some of the names and terms which catch our eyes at Zuecca Project Space in Venice. In the semi-darkness of the central gallery they thicken into an impenetrable fog of information.

In his work, American post-conceptual artist, theorist, Warren Neidich (b. 1958), who studied neuroscience and medicine, analytically and critically examines the conditions of human perception. In doing so, he explores the impact the Internet and other new technologies, novel communication media and modes – as well as the new patterns of reception emerging from them – have on the material conditions of our brains. On a daily basis, newsflashes and reports from all over the world bombard us with information – continually, fast and ceaselessly. Taking the shape of visual signs, they flare up simultaneously, transfixing our conscious minds. Meanwhile, relevance, scope



Warren Neidich, installation view "Rumor to Delusion", photo: Karolina Sobel, courtesy of PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.

and substance of these pieces of information blur, and so does their credibility and reliability. Today's culture of information and communication stresses the visual, stimulating us with an incessant flow of images. The eye is dominating human perception in ways it never has before. As Neidich reveals, the new perceptual conditions we live in also inform the underlying psychic and physical mechanisms of human perception. If the structure of our brains is being modelled and remodelled by the changing contexts and environments we inhabit, it also can – respectively – be conditioned by a "process of environmentally driven neuromodulations", as Neidich warns. Thus, even manipulated and made-up pieces of information (so called 'fake news') affect us just as deeply and directly as truthful facts about actual world events.

Neidich's installation "Pizzagate" (2017) negotiates the same-named scandal, which resulted from a conspiracy theory and smear campaign issued and directed by 4chan and Reddit as part of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. According to the aforementioned news channels, the basement of the Washington D.C. pizza parlour "Comet Ping Pong" served as a headquarter of an international child pornography ring – its participants, as was being maintained at the time, including not only the owner of the pizza place, James Alefantis, but also presidential candidate Hilary Clinton. Within days, these fake news spread via various news channels and social media networks, reaching millions of people. Events climaxed on December 4th, 2016, when a

man, who had travelled from North Carolina travelled to Washington D.C., stormed "Comet Ping Pong" and fired a rifle inside the restaurant – his absurd self-imposed 'rescue mission' coming to an abrupt halt upon realizing that the pizza parlour didn't even have a basement. The events around Pizzagate are a telling example of the dangerous momentum fake news gain as they go viral without any background checks, and for the severe consequences they may engender. Neidich's installation captures the names and catchwords associated with this digitally generated 'reality' – creating, thus, a legible image: Crafted in neon, key terms of the scandal float in space like hash tags, while arrows between them establish a network of terms and meanings. Following a diagrammatic logic, the all elements together form a three-dimensional, extensive structure – a network of associations materialized in space, if you will. Neidich presents us with a cloud of data, evoking at the same time a model of the neuronal workings inside the human brain. One could maintain that the artist's cloudlike light sculpture represents something along the lines of a 'fictional documentation' – scientific and documentary at first glance, but in fact reproducing emotionally charged mainstream terms. Archival newspaper clippings presented on the gallery's walls (Washington Post reports on the events around "Pizzagate") illuminate the context of the installation. Information unrelated to the event have been blacked out by the artist.

In the entrance hall, Neidich's video "Pizzagate. From



Warren Neidich, "Scoring the Tweets", installation view "Rumor to Delusion", photo: Karolina Sobel, courtesy of PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.

"Rumor to Delusion" (2019), which the exhibition owes its name to, is cut in a documentary style, as well. Here the viewer is presented with a rapid flow of information: Clips taken from Internet streams, footage shot 'on site' in the pizzeria, TV interviews and news regarding the "Pizzagate" scandal, as well as documentation of Neidich's performance "Scoring the Tweets". The latter connects various fake news spread by Donald Trump on the one hand with PR methods on how to control information flows on the other. On a formal level, Neidich's performance deploys collage techniques as well as (in the performers' spoken contributions) a use of language, which explores the indeterminacy and poetry of language as such, evoking references to art history and literature from Dada to William Burroughs. Like a soundtrack, Neidich's aforementioned video establishes a dialogue with installative elements of "Scoring the Tweets" such as a series of scores, which list one hundred and forty-nine fake news re-tweeted by Donald Trump. "Scoring the Tweets" will be staged at opening night, as well as on several occasions announced beforehand.

www.zueccaprojects.org

Centre of page: Warren Neidich, "Scoring the Tweets" (detail), installation view "Rumor to Delusion", photo: Karolina Sobel, courtesy of PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.

Bottom of page: Warren Neidich, "Pizzagate. From Rumor to Delusion", 2019, video still, courtesy of Warren Neidich

