

“Under Pressure” Exhibition at the MuseumsQuartier Wien

The emergence of majorities for authoritarian politicians, an obviously authoritarian financial market and authoritarian tendencies in AI development lead to the question of whether new forms of authoritarianism differ in that they allow individual freedoms or at least give this impression. The exhibition “Under Pressure – Forms of the Authoritarianism and the Power of Decision-Making” at the frei_raum Q21 exhibition space, curated by Sabine Winkler, examines the mechanisms, strategies and tactics that are used to restrict freedom of decision. The opening as part of “Vienna Contemporary” is at 19.00 on Thursday 27 September; a press tour will take place at 10.00 on Tuesday 25 September.

Proceeding from the dogmas of neoliberalism and neonationalism, the exhibition deals with authoritarianism in politics, business, technology and art. Driven by neoliberalism, the marginalisation of the political, as well as the financial crisis, has led to an accelerated authoritarian capitalism. Authoritarian neonationalism, on the other hand, can be seen as a reaction to this development.

Conversely, the aim of algorithmic systems is to control future decisions and actions and to exert influence. Technical AI assistants such as Siri, Cortana or Alexa internalise users’ “needs” and anticipate and take over decisions. Are we running the risk that spaces for action and thought are increasingly controlled and programmed by monitoring, big-data rankings, social credit systems, etc.?

The exhibition examines the dispositions of decision and forms of involvement and complicity in authoritarian political and algorithmic systems. What decisions are required of us, how are decisions automated, in what form do we ourselves contribute, consciously or unconsciously, how are decisions made about us by economic, algorithmic and state systems or to what extent do we ourselves act in an authoritarian way? If algorithms know more about us than we do, can they make decisions more appropriate to our respective needs because they are more rational, and what does that mean for the notion of the autonomous self?

Might the resulting marginalisation of the subject (or the separation of subjectivity from subject, person and human being) offer an opportunity for bringing about change, preventing authoritarian tendencies, or is there a danger that as a result hegemonic systems will only shift, be automated, but not disappear? In art, new dispositions are emerging through the questioning of the artist, curator and viewer subject. Whether authoritarian structures in the art system are thereby abolished or only shifted remains speculative.

In **Rod Dickinson’s** installation “Zero Sum” the exhibition visitors are invited to assume various different roles in a classical play-theory dilemma (the “volunteer’s dilemma” or the “free-rider problem”) and to replay four possibilities of a dilemma, through which they are guided by a virtual moderator. Rod Dickinson shows how, disguised as a gain in freedom, automated work systems limit and control individual freedom of action.

HARD-CORE deals with robotic curating and has developed the Asahi 4.0 software, with which exhibitions can be curated automatically. Asahi 4.0 selects works of art via a random generator, de-subjectifies and collectivises decision-making processes. In the video “The Universal Blob (2”) five personalised entities reflect on a collective self and on curatorial practices that can be de-hierarchised, detached from aesthetic experiences and decisions. Or is Asahi 4.0 also dominant in its random decisions, not really collaborative?

In their video “Life Is Good For Now” **Bernd Hopfengärtner** and **Ludwig Zeller** stage a speculative view of a Switzerland that has decided to fully implement the right to informational self-determination. Mont Data, a cooperative, coordinates the mountain of scientific and commercial data, which confronts citizens with new decision-making possibilities and tasks. The two artists present fictitious accounts of their experiences in the fields of medicine, culture and everyday life in which possibilities for action against digital control and exploitation are presented and anticipated by retaining power over one’s own data.

Liz Magic Laser stages a therapeutic situation with actors in which a therapist invited the participants to bring together formative personal experiences and current political frustrations. Based on the method of primary therapy, the negative effects of traumatic experiences are to be reduced by re-experiencing them. In her installation “Primal Speech” Liz Magic Laser adapts the method of primary

therapy as a political form of therapy. The coping with personal and political traumas is trained in order to defend oneself against the feeling of powerlessness as well as against authoritarian father, educational and political figures, against outside influence. The work can be understood as a commentary on the US election campaign and on Brexit in 2016.

In „Déploiements (Deployments)“, **Stéphanie Lagarde** presents stagings of state control systems in public space in the form of two simulation processes that, from a potential future, play out engagements in the here and now. On show are French Air Force pilots rehearsing an aerobatic mission for the French national holiday. With gestures, hand movements and coded language they simulate the choreography of the upcoming air show. These images are combined with police training software used for monitoring demonstrations and crowds. On the one hand, motion sequences and procedures are automated according to certain patterns, on the other hand, future behaviour is both informed and controlled by pattern recognition in order to directly and indirectly restrict decision-making and the room for action.

In her work **Daniela Ortiz** explores concepts of nationality, class, race, equality and civil rights politics. She examines how the European system of immigration control and colonial racism are based on patterns of exclusion. In “The ABC of Racist Europe”, conceived as a picture book, Daniela Ortiz contrasts Eurocentric narratives with narratives from anticolonial and anti-racist perspectives. The authoritarian rejection of immigration manifests itself as a demand for cultural/societal decision-making power of a white middle class that seems to be losing its control of political decision-making. Daniela Ortiz deconstructs hegemonic narratives and practices and radically demands equality.

Olivia Plender’s “Set Sail for the Levant” is based on a 16th-century board game called The Game of the Goose, which can be seen as a precursor to Monopoly. Only players who steal money from the other participants and flee to the Middle East to escape punishment can win. Olivia Plender satirises ideological narratives like Monopoly’s, which teaches people how to behave in a capitalist system. Increasingly, promises of neoliberalism such as self-realisation, success and freedom of choice are being combined with traditional narratives, national mythologies or cultural identity. Olivia Plender examines how official, historical and contemporary narratives are constructed and what hierarchies lie behind the “voice of authority”.

In “Kitty AI: Artificial Intelligence for Governance” **Pinar Yoldas** imagines an artificial intelligence (AI) that has assumed world domination. In the video, a 3D-animated cat talks about herself and her tasks as the ruler of a megalopolis set in 2039. Kitty AI acts as an emotional representative of an all-embracing AI regime in which “cat love” and technology are to replace politicians. Do AI systems make better decisions because they can collect and evaluate more data? The promises of technical solution competences of AI are great, the associated control functions as well as the loss of freedom of decision are often concealed. Kitty AI presents herself as an agent for optimised governance in the form of emotional care.

Artists:

Rod Dickinson (GBR)*, inci Eviner (TUR), HARD-CORE (NLD, FRA, ISL)*, Minna Henriksson (FIN)*, Bernd Hopfengärtner* und Ludwig Zeller (GER), Vlada Joler (SHARE Lab) (SRB), Isabella Kohlhuber (AUT), Stéphanie Lagarde (FRA), Liz Magic Laser (USA), Daniela Ortiz (PER/ESP), Olivia Plender (GBR), Sebastian Schmieg (GER), Stefanie Schroeder (GER)*, Superflux (IND/GBR, GBR), Nick Thurston und Steven Zultanski (GBR, USA), Pinar Yoldas (TUR/USA)

*Artist-in-Residence Q21/MQ

Curator: Sabine Winkler

“Under Pressure” was organised in cooperation with the Ministry for Europe, Integration and External Affairs.

Under Pressure

On Forms of Authority and Decision-Making Power

Duration: Sep 28 to Nov 25, Tue to Sun 13:00–20:00, admission free

Opening: Thu, Sep 27, 19:00

Press tour: Tue, Sep 25, 10:00

Venue: frei_raum Q21 exhibition space/MuseumsQuartier Wien

www.Q21.at

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