Productive Pathologies of Paranoia – Looking for Johan Grimonprez
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I first came into contact with Johan Grimonprez' work when he contacted me because he liked an essay I had written on Alfred Hitchcock where I offered a 'philosophical' explanation of the famous Hitchcock McGuffin: the all-important object that everyone is chasing after, but which, by the time the film is over, everyone seems to have forgotten. I explained the McGuffin with a term from Jacques Derrida, namely "sous rature", "putting something under erasure", meaning that it is there and it is not there at the same time.

Let's have a look at how Hitchcock himself explains the McGuffin in Johan's film *Looking for Alfred*. [***Looking for Alfred - show the sound checks***]

So it is quite possible, indeed plausible, to draw a link also between Derrida's "under erasure" (as a "now-you-see-it-now-you-don't" moment) and the strange sense of seeing and hearing Hitchcock and not seeing and hearing Hitchcock [X], and – at the end – to encounter the most uncanny double of Hitchcock [X]. Grimonprez, who had become famous with a film called Dial HISTORY, first shown at an art exhibition, the documenta in Kassel in 1997, made two film installation using Hitchcock as an emblematic but also enigmatic figure for the 1950s Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union with *Looking for Alfred* [X] and as a figure for playing mind-games in the sequel, called *Double Take* [X]. *Double Take*, as he explained to me, would indeed be another translation of "sous rature", i.e. "bringing under erasure through a double take". What interests me about the notion of the double take is that it is also a description for the mind-game film double take: both in the sense of the "twist" in the narrative, and in the sense of "parallel worlds" which co-exist at the cusp of alternatives which can be understood either way (our mind game films: either classical or post-classical/ puzzle mode; either video game logic or non-linear narrative logic)

Thus, disappearance and reappearance through the double take, the doppelganger and the double are only one part of the thematic cluster under which I want to approach Grimonprez' work. The other part introduces an important optical-philosophical concept: that of the *parallax,* as an idea connected to the peculiarity of human vision, but also drawing attention to seeing from different perspectives, to creating depth through layering, and finally, alluding to the blind-spot, through which vision is 'anchored', insofar as parallax is the invisible condition of vision itself:

> Parallax is a displacement or difference in the apparent position of an object viewed along two different lines of sight, and is measured by the angle of inclination between those two lines. […]
> As the eyes of humans and other animals are in different positions on the head, they present different views simultaneously. This is the basis of stereopsis, the process by which the brain exploits the parallax due to the different views from the eye to gain depth perception and estimate distances to objects. Animals also use motion parallax, in which the animals (or just the head) move to gain different viewpoints. […]
> "The philosophical twist to be added (to parallax), of course, is that the observed distance is not simply subjective, since the same object that exists 'out there' is seen from two different stances, or points of view. It is rather that subject and object are inherently mediated. Or: the subject's gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its 'blind spot', the point from which the object itself returns the gaze. Sure the picture is in my eye, but I am also in the picture." (Slavoj Zizek)

If we accept parallax as the invisibly foundational condition of Grimonprez' 'double take' perspective on the world, then there are five directions that can lead us into and through his work. They are: the essay film, trauma and paranoia, post-colonial reverse perspective, aesthetic journalism, and finally, the post-truth condition we have entered into, of which the spin and double speak of politicians since 9/11, social media, and Donald Trump's "fake news" are perhaps the most visible and egregious symptoms.

1. The "Essay Film"

The essay film is a film form that in recent years has become a subject of academic conferences and a number of book-length monograph studies and collections. The essay film has also emerged as a usefully hybrid medium, situated between documentary and personal diary film, as well as between fact and fantasy, between the staged and the spontaneous, between the rehearsed and the re-enacted.

This genre – whose best-known, and many times imitated example is Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* from 1983– is not easy to define. Its literary godfathers are Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* and Theodor W Adorno's essay on the literary essay. From these divergent sources – one a series of highly subjective reflections on life, the world and the self; the other an obituary on the literary essay, as the necessarily fragmented and subversive form, which *both* reproduced the broken coherence of the world, *and* subverts the pretensions of such a coherence. From these divergent sources, then, we can extract the following definition: "Essay films are films which reflect their own

representational mode, are more likely to develop an idea than narrate a story, and produce intellectual and philosophical works that are a form of thought. […]."
We can extrapolate further from this, for our purposes, and say that the essay film's hybridity can either formally and thematically bridge the gap between realism and the thought experiment, thanks to its reflexivity and use of a meta-language, or we can say that the essay film derives its popularity from the fact that it serves a dual purpose, of telling you something about the world, but also giving you a strong authorial voice. Making films that can accommodate such dual perspectives, directors can hope to maximize the attention available for their films. By training Grimonprez is a filmmaker, but as mentioned, he became internationally known with *Dial HISTORY* which was partly commissioned by documenta X, curated in 1997 by Catherine David. Subsequently, Dial HISTORY was shown at just about every major museum and gallery space in the world, testimony to Grimonprez' successful transition from filmmaker to installation artist.

Especially after 9/11 in 2001, *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* became retroactively a prescient premonition of disasters to come, since it deals with hijacked planes. An accident in history, as it were, gave the work both unprecedented topicality and the uncanny sense of it being a film made by someone seemingly knowing more than the rest of us: that either that 9/11 was an accident waiting to be happening, or – even more ominous – that it wasn't an accident at all, but the logical consequence of something that started in the 1960s (show a clip).

Dial HISTORY is also now taught in documentary classes, also all over the world, as one of the classics of the essay film. His latest feature-length film *Shadow World,* however, is conceived as a film for theatrical release, but there are parts of it made up of out-takes, such as *Blue Orchids*, that can also play as an installation. It suggests that Grimonprez is successfully navigating these two modalities of the contemporary moving image: the film festival and the gallery installation, and for these distinct spaces the hybrid nature and dual purpose of the essay film seems especially well suited.

2. "Trauma and Paranoia"

I now want to raise another topic, possibly the one most crucial in Grimonprez's work. It concerns the political traumas that the West has inflicted upon itself (and on others), and how to cope with the knowledge that in some strange ways we are both victims and perpetrators. These traumata are no longer the ones from the first half of the 20th century – the World War and the Holocaust – but those from the second half: the Vietnam war and the suppression of the Latin American liberation movements in

the 1960s and 70s, the wars fought in the Middle East first around the unresolved issue of the Palestinians, followed by the oil crisis in the 1970s and the rise of Arab political power through petro-dollars and the arms trade, culminating in 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan between 2001 and 2003. Many of these consequential events from the mid-1960s onwards are in Grimonprez' films traced back or connected to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, which is to say, they emerge as the local conflicts ultimately conducted in the form of proxy wars between Super-powers. *Double Take* is one such "Cold War" film, centered improbably on the figures of Hitchcock, Khrushchev, Castro and Nixon.

To return to *Dial HISTORY*: What is of interest is not only that it is the perfect example of the essay film, but why it is so. One reason I've already given: events that happened four to five years after it was made gave the film this uncanny predictive power. But one could also turn it round and say that viewed after 2001, *Dial HISTORY* located the traumatic origins of 9/11 - across the history and genealogy of aircraft hijacks as political acts – but it did so in a manner where one was not quite sure whether it reinforced the trauma of our sudden total vulnerability or whether its genealogical approach helped to inoculate us by creating an atmosphere that constantly changed from the jocular absurdist to the ominously horrific and back.

But what emerges from these shifts in tone and register is something even more surprising: the way to deal with these historical traumas, it would seem, is neither to disavow them (by treating them as local aberrations, blips on the radar of an otherwise steadily progressing world order, where liberal democracy will eventually prevail and we will have "the end of history", in Francis Fukuyama's infamous phrase), nor should we give in to a politics of fear, and let the politicians start a "war on terror". Instead, as artist or filmmaker, one can respond with what the novelist Thomas Pynchon has called "creative paranoia". Pynchon's insight is that "paranoia is the leading edge of the discovery that everything is connected" suggesting that creativity and innovation reside in the network effects that this "everything is connected" of the world necessarily produces. Connectivity, of course, is another word for "ecology": the interdependence of human activity and needs, with natural processes and cycles – but also the interdependence of good and bad, of desired goals and unintended consequences. As Katherine Hayles describes Pynchon's method in his most famous book, *Gravity's Rainbow*:

> Pynchon's response to this dilemma is to create a text that at once invited and resists our attempts to organize it into a unified field of meaning. Gravity's Rainbow is notoriously difficult to read because its complex and recurring allusions constantly tempt the reader to search for, and to recognize extensive

> patterns of interlocking images to which the text owes its remarkable coherence and density, while at the same time frustrating this attempt by a variety of techniques that tend to obliterate or contradict the emerging patterns.

It is this version of creative – or as I shall call it, productive – paranoia that Grimonprez has made his own: both explicitly, in quoting Don DeLillo: another novelist who is a vivid proponent of conspiracy thinking and who figures prominently in *Dial HISTORY*. Implicitly, Grimonprez is a Pynchonite, thanks to creating a unique version of the essay film genre that emulates this key feature of Pynchon's paranoia at the formal and structural level, namely: that it is wise to assume that at some level everything ***is*** connected with everything else, either in a rhizomatic web of inter-relations, or as the more stochastic and contiguous 'six-degrees-of-separation'. But then – as Hayles implies – you want to cross-hatch this sense of emerging patterns with opaque or obscure allusions.

The assumption that everything connects even before it makes sense acts, first of all, as a kind of antidote to the apparently inexplicable, to the violent and the unexpectedly sudden, to the random and the arbitrary – all aspects of what we understand by trauma. Paranoia counters trauma with the belief that there must be at least the possibility of meaning, even if this meaning presently still eludes us. *Perhaps the disorder that we encounter in the world today is merely the order whose pattern we have yet to discover.* Whether this is a "new world order" or a more ancient, quasi-magical or mythical, atavistic one that reasserts itself, is of course an open question.

On the other hand, it could be that what we call *disorder is more fundamental to the workings of the world* (and of ourselves), so that the little bit of order we manage to establish is only the proverbial tip of the iceberg? As Slavoj Zizek has frequently pointed out, our idea that nature is beneficial, regulated and ordered is a total romantic fantasy. Just consider the unimaginable violence of the meteor smashing into earth that pushed evolution in the direction of smaller mammals, to which we owe our existence. Or think of the forces necessary to produce the kind of pressure to which we owe fossil fuels, such as oil?

Paranoia, in this respect, keeps both options in play: that disorder is merely the order that we are as yet unable to comprehend, and the possibility that the world is fundamentally a violent and disordered place, from which we wrest moments of stability and equilibrium: usually at the expense of someone else. However, pathological paranoia – as opposed to productive paranoia – adds to this connectivity the question of agency, and this is where it gets more complicated. Because

conspiracy theories tend to assume not only that everything may be connected to everything else – confirming, incidentally, that the forces underlying globalization have made the world more interdependent, and perhaps a little less asymmetrical, compared to the earlier phase of globalization better known as colonialism. Conspiracy theories also assume that an unseen power, or more likely, a hidden network of powerful agents holds all the strings of the network, drawing an ever tighter noose around our way of life because it is determined to destroy us. In other words, that the source of agency is singular and malevolent, and that the target is both singular ("me") and out to make me a victim. That way lies madness and it opens the door to the politics of fear – one that increasingly has taken hold of the Western World, and may well become a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

This would be one version, where paranoia reinforces one of the main effects of trauma, namely to induce a sense of powerlessness and paralysis. But productive paranoia turns this round, by accepting first of all, that the world does indeed depend on feedback loops and different kinds of connections, which creates these improbable, unforeseen and often unintended consequences, and that second, yes there are forces at work that we do not control and which still determine our lives. This other version of paranoia would not be the consequence of trauma, or a side effect of trauma, but a kind of effort at dissolving trauma, allowing one to regain agency by way of appropriating – and flipping – the negative agency inherent in paranoia.

At this point it is the artists and filmmakers who have special resources in order to make paranoia productive: for instance by the poetic means of association, metaphor, parallel, symmetry and allusion, in short, the double and the parallax. In the case of the cinema, these means and methods would be those of montage, juxtaposition and counterpoint, and the materials would be, images from archives, from advertising films, medical films, from surveillance videos, including out-takes from television, and other items from the treasure troves or discarded detritus of found footage. Found footage duly selected and edited, further made strange by a sound track that is often as elusive as it is haunting, are Johan Grimonprez' primary resources, as an artist of productive paranoia and critic of political paranoia.

In light of what I have been saying about scaling up to geological time, the "ecologies of disorder" teach us not romanticize nature as self-regulating and instead, we must include her in the cycles of violent disruption. This is highlighted by one important feature of Grimonprez' films in that they combine three kinds of phenomena, and treat them as equal: human acts of violence and disaster, such as hijacks, bombs and warfare; natural disasters such as hurricanes and tsunamis, and, third, the simulation of disasters, such as stress tests of large objects, for instance cars and planes, and

emergency drills of evacuations and other rehearsals of disasters. Perhaps it is this way of generating a radical form of equivalence that lies at the heart of productive paranoia, for it does persuade us to think of the world's connectedness as an encouraging sign: it puts contingency or the accidental, and our efforts to anticipate contingency and calculate risk on the same level, and it puts human intentionality – whether for good or evil – on the same level as nature's indifference to us humans as a species. Truth be told, the earth doesn't even care about global warming, it has been there before. So whatever we do, we do it for us, not for nature. And this, it seems to me, is a very humanist stance, which puts the responsibility even more firmly on us, and in this sense, it also contains a very positive, enabling and ethical message that we can take from Johan's paranoia films. Against the indifference of the universe, all our efforts have something heroic – even if it is ultimately a "pathetic heroism", i.e. the dual knowledge of our importance and our irrelevance.

3. Aesthetic Journalism

Shadow Worlds is a good case for further refining the notion of the essay film, and ask why it is considered to be more 'personal' and more 'subjective' than the documentary. We might say that its basis in fact or its relation to the evidentiary ground of documentary film is looser, more speculative and more suggestive. As a consequence, its claim to veracity and verifiability (i.e., truth-seeking) is also more ambiguous, and its declarative tone is at once ironic, self-deprecating and can even be deliberately deceptive.

Which brings me to another characteristic of Johan's essay films and how they differ from both documentaries and the feature films. The essay film quite generally is less beholden to, or dependent on, 'narrative'. Hence the often stated maxim that in the essay film 'theme substitutes for plot', and that *argument* and *association* prevail over *anticipation* and *narrative momentum*. Hence also the possibility of the essay film being more "dialogical", containing but also contrasting different "voices" – literally, when we think of *Shadow Worlds* where the interviews (treated as monologues) of the two witnesses – the journalist Chris Hedges and the arms dealer Riccardo Privitera at first seem to come at the topic of corruption and the international arms trade from quite different walks of life and diametrically opposed moral stances – one dedicated to fighting the arms trade, the other engaged in it, and with relish and gusto. Yet gradually the two voices interweave, they dovetail and in the end respond and correspond to each other, especially when they speak of the psychic wounds and the emotional cost of the war on the soldiers or perpetrators: one use the word "beasts", the other says "animals". It proves that essay films are driven by subtle movements of thought: however apparently hidden or at first glance imperceptible such thought-

processes may be. It is also an exceptionally subtle and moving example of Grimonprez' parallax method in action.

Another attempt to capture both the hybridity of the essay film and its play with contrasting or even contradictory registers of reference is the idea of *Aesthetic Journalism*. It is the label given to works that have their place in Contemporary Art Museums, at biannuals and other international exhibitions or group shows, where a certain form of political activism has migrated from the news-media, street protests and democratic politics, to film festivals and to art spaces – as if to reclaim galleries and festivals as the last public sphere of protest and dissent.

[X] The term was first introduced by the Italian art critic and curator Alfredo Cramerotti, who diagnosed "Aesthetic journalism" as an investigative tendency in contemporary art and video work which incorporates interviews, fieldwork, reportage, primary research, forensic analysis of documents, graphic mapping and other forms of factual information into the art work. Among the artists practicing these strategies are Hans Haacke, Martha Rosler, Alfredo Jaar, Walid Raad and many others.
Laura Poitras' – best know for her film about Edward Snowdon, *Citizenfour* – Laura Poitras' exhibition, *Astro Noise*, [X] at the Whitney Museum in New York early in 2016, would be a case in point. This is how the museum advertised it: "*Astro Noise* expands on Poitras' project to document post–9/11 America, engaging visitors in formats outside her non-fiction filmmaking. Instead she has created immersive environments that incorporate documentary footage, architectural interventions, primary documents, and narrative structures to invite visitors to interact with the material in strikingly intimate and direct ways."

Astro Noise documents the pervasiveness of surveillance, the threat of drone strikes and the ubiquity of the security state apparatus, by making you observe the observers of disaster]X], by exoticising the presence of drones and surveillance satellites [X] and by re-enacting electronic tracking within the exhibition itself [X]. These would be some of the typical strategies of Aesthetic Journalism. It not only implies the critical use of documentary techniques and journalistic methods, but also a reflexiveness and critique of the medium itself: for instance, we are presented news footage from television via tiny peephole cut-outs located at different heights on a wall [X].

The reason Cramerotti uses the word "aesthetic" is because aesthetics involve "processes in which we open up our sensibility to the diversity of the forms of nature and of the manmade environment" and the reason he calls it journalism is that it exposes the "mechanisms of art and media to the ethics of representation. In doing so,

Aesthetic Journalism renders productive critical readings of information, fact, fiction and objectivity." In effect, aesthetic journalism is a two way process: from the perspective of art, it brings into the work the urgency, topicality and evidentiary density of journalism. And from the perspective of journalism it opens up facts and evidence to the richness and diversity of artistic form – including those available to practitioners of the essay film.

But aesthetic journalism is also the name one might give to certain films made by and for television, films which have a very personal signature while dealing with socially and politically controversial topics from a polemical or activist perspective. The director who comes to mind is Adam Curtis, who over the past two decades, has made a series of films for the BBC, where he diagnoses what he calls "power, and how it works in society today". He has analysed the politics of fear since 9/11 in "The Power of Nightmares" (X), where he sees parallels between the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and neo-conservative ideology. He has had a very special take on the use of Freud and psychoanalysis as a tool for disinformation in [X] "The Century of the Self". And in "All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace", [X] Curtis argues that computers have failed to liberate humanity, and have instead "distorted and simplified our view of the world around us" – a theme that he has continued with [X] "Hypernormalization", where he analyzes the stasis and paralysis of Western democracies in the face of global problems, with citizens trapped in the echo-chambers of social media, with anger the only political affect apart from despair, and with politicians as clueless about the world as anyone else.

Johan Grimonprez's *Shadow World* [X] at first glance belongs to the same school of Aesthetic Journalism as Adam Curtis, and could also be considered an exceptionally appropriate example of this genre, since it is based on a book of hard-core investigative journalism, Andrew Feinstein's *The Shadow World* [X] about the international arms trade. But Grimonprez' *Shadow World* also works in illuminatingly different ways from Curtis' method, even though both use found footage, and both have an extraordinary eye for what the French call "l'insolite", that is, for images that are unexpected, bizarre, out of context and therefore both elusive and highly suggestive, but in indeterminate ways. Whereas Curtis is always there, with his strong authorial voice, addressing "you" from the outside, from a kind of superior, all-knowing distance – the classic "voice of God" voice-over commentary, typical of documentaries in the 1940s and 1950s – Johan is more like James Joyce's God: "nowhere to be seen but everywhere felt". His is a much more oblique and indirect way of making his points. With Grimonprez, aesthetic journalism has taken a more poetic, elusive, humorous turn, but it has also become more mysterious and – dare I say – more ominous and more uncanny.

5. The Post-Truth Condition

What is ominous about it, for me at least, is that it gives us a glimpse of this fourth direction of approach I am taking to Grimonprez' work, namely the *post-truth condition* we seem to have slipped into. However, at the same time as he demonstrates its worrying effectiveness, he is already at work towards a counter-strategy.

Post-truth, as you may remember was the Oxford English Dictionary's international word of the year 2016. Its official definition is as follows: "post-truth" "relates to or denotes circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." The post-truth condition, in fact, may have several aspects. For instance, post-truth calls to mind another (2006) word of the year for some dictionaries: "truthiness." The comedian Stephen Colbert is popularly credited with coining that term, deploying it repeatedly when talking about the Bush administration's military operation in Iraq and the deception around Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. But post-truth takes truthiness to another level: Katherine Connor Martin, at Oxford University Press, describes the difference: "Truthiness is a humorous way of discussing a quality of specific claims. Post-truth is an adjective that is describing a much bigger thing. It's saying that the truth is being regarded as mostly irrelevant."

One way of accounting for the recent rise in popularity of the term – after post-modernism and post-history, is that it gives expression to people's bafflement at the lack of resistance to publicly told lies, and the apparent political consternation that politicians are getting away with it – and that lie tellers and the fact checkers are like two teams merely competing with each other about who scores best with the public.

But there may be another way of coping with the sense that we are in a post-truth world, where uncovering lies is merely a sport, rather than an ethical responsibility. I've already hinted at Johan Grimonprez' films – in line with the essay film quite generally – makes us both comfortable and uncomfortable with ambiguity. As an aesthetic, as opposed to political strategy, post-truth fits Johan's films quite well, because not only are they highly ironic and self-deprecating, they also like to move easily between investigating the sheer improbability of our contemporary reality (that is, a reality more fantastic than anything we could imagine) but also telling us with the most dead-pan poker face something that cannot possibly be true – and we shall never know, or at least not until Johan tells us so, whether he is having us on, or not.

This puts Johan's films in the vicinity of another master of the essay film, or at least of one essay film masterpiece, namely Orson Welles' *F-For Fake* (1974), which investigates the post-truth condition decades before the term was invented. Consider,

for instance, the last part of *F- For Fake*, where Welles re-enacts with his then companion, Oja Kodar, a story from her childhood, when she and her grandfather lived near Pablo Picasso's home, and Picasso used her as a model. Welles then reminds the audience that he had promised that everything in the "next hour" was true, and that this hour had already passed 17 minutes ago, so that the entire story of Kodar, of her grandfather and of Picasso was made up. Welles then apologizes, and quotes Picasso who apparently once said that "art is the lie that makes us see the truth." Does this not recall Krzysztof Kieslowski, who switched from documentary to feature films, saying "*fiction* can tell the *truth more* sincerely *than documentary*."

Compare Welles' strategy with the ending of *Blue Orchids* (the companion piece to *Shadow World*) where we suddenly see Riccardo Privitera [X], one of the whistle-blowers of the arms trade, whose engrossing narrative we've been following throughout, turn up behind bars in a Portuguese prison [X], claiming that he has a doppelgänger, and that he is falsely convicted of money laundering and forging official documents, while his ex-wife says, she no longer knows which man she was actually married to [X]. So, once more, the look-alike, the doppelgänger, the fake, the impersonator and the imposter are not just key characters in Johan's films – as in *Looking for Alfred* and *Double Take*, but the very conditions of Johan being able to examine and explore our everyday reality, so saturated by media and media images that only a post-truth ontology of the double take can hope to present at least a semblance of truth.

Let's take another quick look at Johan's genealogy of the post-truth condition, before coming to *Shadow World*. For instance, we can now also read Dial HISTORY as the pre-history of the post-truth condition. The film seems to cast a mocking and irreverent eye on the connections between high-jacked planes and high-heeled boots, between PLO freedom fighters in keffiyes and TWA stewardesses in miniskirts. A similarly sardonic spirit of unlikely but revealing parallels we already noted in *Double Take*, another venture into the political macabre, considering its political subtext, the Cold War, the Atom bomb, and US-Russian rivalry, three topics that are becoming less than less retrospective and more and more topical by the day, when we think of North Korea's or Iran's nuclear plans in order to deter the US from trying regime change, and of the US and Russia conducting a kind of proxy war in Syria. Even the scene with Fidel Castro visiting Nikita Khrushchev's *dacha* that actually looks like the Bates Motel out of *Psycho* has echoes with the improbable encounter between Castro's brother Raoul and Barack Obama.

6. Shadow World

However, the most scandalous (some thought it merely frivolous) double take also in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, are hijackers and media-hounds not only dependent on, but in a real sense "creating" each other. Journalism as the "oxygen" of suicide bombers and the atrocities committed by the Islamic State became a commonplace of the same mutual interdependence of nominally antagonistic entities. How such antagonistic forces collude and create each other in their mirror image is also one of the key themes of *Shadow World*. Here, the "creation" is that of an enemy, not so much to combat him – never mind defeat him, but to use the fear that he instills, first, in order to control your own population and to crush internal dissent, but in a second move, to draw enormous financial gains and personal profits from doing so. The war on terror, Al Qaida, Afghanistan are explicitly cited, and so is the terrible equation that resulted from it. For as Chris Hedges puts it: "In moral terms, what is the difference between an improvised explosive device and a drone strike, or a suicide bomb and a cruise missile attack on a village in Afghanistan?" To put it perhaps in equally stark, but more general terms: peace talks –whether over Syria or Palestine, whether over the Congo, in Nigeria, or with North Korea – are in fact talks about how to continue and to perpetuate war, because too many individuals, too many corporations and therefore also too many governments profit from war, regardless of whether these wars are won or lost. War and peace, in other words, are not opposites, but each other's doubles.

Shadow World draws from this frightening realization its own consequences, but also its method of analysis and presentation. The consequences are in line with Johan's earlier investigations into the various asymmetrical tit-for-tats, quid-pro-quo that characterized the Cold War in the 1950s and 60s, where deterrence through mutually assured destruction, that is, the atomic weapons arsenal on the one hand, and on the other hand, technological competition, via the arms race and household appliances, were the recto and verso of each other, already preparing for this mutual co-dependence of antagonistic forces that we see in *Shadow World* – another indication that the post-truth condition has been with us for a long time, and someone like Donald Trump has merely taken the lid off it, by not bothering to give it a cover.

7. The Certified Conspiracy Theorist

By way of conclusion, I want to just briefly touch on why I think Johan may already be working on a counter strategy or on a form of self-inoculation and auto-immunisation – that is fight the post-truth condition with his own version of post-truth. This is already implied in what I said about trauma and paranoia, and why I explained their correlation and coexistence by arguing that Grimonprez' films "present our present-day reality as a globally networked rhizomatic mind-game, where everyone is inside someone else's game (and mind), at once manipulator and

manipulated, sinner and sinned against". The term I used for this is" antagonistic mutuality", but there may be an even better way of putting it which I came across in a review of *Shadow World*, to be found on-line:

> "Shadow World" left me feeling like a certified conspiracy theorist and more helpless and despondent than a film has ever caused me to feel. I was beyond angry. […]
> I sobbed after the film was over. I thought of my lucky life and wondered how many people died so that I might have this life – people I never wished to die. I desperately want this horror to end. But what can I do other than write this piece or try to vote responsibly? I honestly don't know."

It's a moving tribute to Johan and his film, but it is also a cry we may have to take to heart. Having spoken to Johan and also to Andrew Feinstein, I know that they are planning or already running an on-line Action Platform. What interests me here is a more media specific issue, which relates to what mentioned at the beginning about the genre of the essay film. In particular, the version I derived from Adorno's essay on the literary essay, as the form that embodies the lack of and at the same time reclaims coherence and totality, and which we might call "the big picture".

With *Shadow World* Grimonprez has become something like the anti-ethnographic ethnographer of globalization. He is observing as precisely as he can – and in slow motion - "the slow progress of human disasters", or, perhaps, the "natural history of global destruction", and he does so without taking a polemical stance or promoting a particular political line, other than by means of association, analogy, fragment, constellation, topology, hybridity and deconstruction, that is, the recognized stylistic tools of Aesthetic Journalism and the rhetorical tropes of the essay film. And the direcgtor does so partly for the reason that Chris Hedges gives in his quote from St Augustine: "hope has two beautiful daughters – anger and courage", but partly also for the reason the on-line reviewer has given: namely a feeling beyond angry, paired with the awareness that "many people died so that I might have this life – people I never wished to die" – which is to say, an awareness that we are too deeply involved and too directly the beneficiaries for us to have outright outrage. In other words, we cannot stand outside or above of what is being done, and therefore we need to find a way to acknowledge that we are ourselves implicated, and at the same time, we must not retreat into poorly managed guilt feelings, which is the mirror-equivalent of criticising from a holier than though position outside.

Instead, the essay film must find ways to let us glimpse or intuit the overall context, and as the on-line reviewer recognizes, that overall context in which everything connects makes you "a certified conspiracy theorist", or rather, it means you have to make paranoia productive.

However, now arguing from the post-truth position, *Shadow World* offers another strategy, and this is embodied in Ricardo Privitera. First of all, *Shadow World* is mostly about corruption, and the kind of trade offs, deal making, and affectively charged modes of exchange the arms trade, as deal making with death, entails. For instance, the film hints at the possibility that the arms trade is the diabolical version of sustainability and renewability, because of the destruction the weapons cause, there is the need for rebuilding, which brings on the scene another highly corrupt global cartel and mafia like organization, namely the construction industry. On the other hand the global arms trade is also like food in the grocery store, because bullets and weapons have date stamps on them, meaning even if you don't use them, you have to discard them and restock.

This is why we also have Michael Hardt, who is offering a very different kind of exchange, by talking about love as the first move in any encounter. Hardt's discourse, inspired by Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, offer a radically different version of antagonistic mutuality, but it is Ricardo Privitera who interests me most. On the one hand, as indicated, he and Chris Hedges are like the two sides of the stances we can take, the Janus-face of the arms trade if you like. But Privitera is our post-truth dealer par excellence, for he is the living embodiment of an old philosophical conundrum and epistemological puzzle, namely Epimenides' famous liar's paradox: "'all Cretans are liars', says the Cretan." How do we get out of this double bind? Either we believe the utterance and then we disregard the utterer, or we believe the utterer and have to disregard the utterance. This is the position that the revelation puts us in, when we realize that Privitera may be a con-man, but what he says has very much the ring of truth to it.

8. Performative Self-Contradiction

Here I would introduce the term *performative self-contradiction* taken from the philosopher Karl Otto Apel, who defines it as an assertion which, made by a speaker, puts the speaker in contradiction with the meaning of the utterance: "Ein performativer Widerspruch ist ein Widerspruch, der durch Sprechakte hervorgebracht wird, deren Inhalt zumindest formal, als wahr angenommen werden (muss). Charles Baudelaire, for instance, once said: "it is a shame that among the human rights one has forgotten to include the right to contradict oneself." An example of performative

self-contradiction would also be the phrase: “I am speechless”, because the content of the proposition contradicts the conditions of its existence, i.e. there is a contradiction between the content of an utterance and the speech act which is being constituted by this utterance. It is now my contention that one way of pulling oneself up by one’s own bootstraps from the morass of paranoia, fear and the post-truth condition is through performative self-contradiction.

Don DeLilo – dear to Johan, and richly quoted in *Dial HISTORY* – defines paranoia as follows: “There is no place or time out-there, or in-here. There are only connections. Everything is connected. … feel the grip of systems… sense the paranoia of the web.” (Underworld, 825). However, one must in turn “grip the grip of the systems”, which means you need to do a double take, and see that things connect not just through networks and nodes, but in mutual antagonisms, as parasite and host, in reciprocal asymmetry, which is what the associative-disjunctive montage of the essay film is especially suited for. But you can also fully assume the position of performative self-contradiction, as Donald Trump has done, and as Ricado Privitera does in *Shadow Worlds*. In other words, it requires the power of paranoia as a filmic method and as a mode of address to keep track of the big picture, and that is exactly what Johan Grimonprez’ cinema excels in, because in his films “productive paranoia” and “performative self-contradiction” may be hope’s other beautiful daughters.