

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

The Queer Deep Web of Zach Blas

Artist and writer Zach Blas wants a new internet, now.

Zachary Small | November 30, 2017

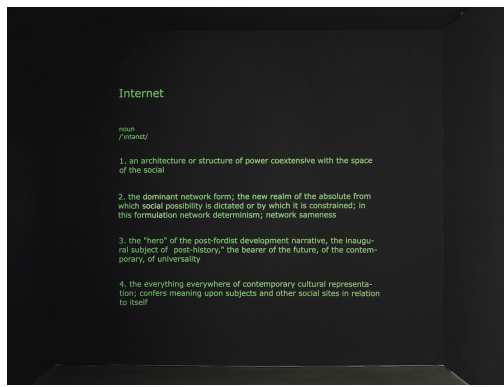


Zach Blas, “Contra-Internet” (2017), installation view (commissioned by Gasworks; Art in General, New York; and MU, Eindhoven, image courtesy the artist, photo by Andy Keate)

LONDON — Totalitarianism in the digital age need not manifest in the actions of dictators and hawk-eyed fascists. Today, such bullying ideologies have permeated the invisible economic infrastructures of Silicon Valley. Companies like Google, Amazon, and Apple compete to be our only resource, our confidante. Through the internet, such companies subtly choreograph our knowledge and how we discover that knowledge.

Unspooling the tangled, hegemonic influence of the World Wide Web is difficult, requiring a grasp on the physical and ethereal architectures of the internet. But what if we just scrapped the entire thing? What if we started the internet anew and erased Silicon Valley? What if we renewed the internet’s commitment to neutrality, individuality, and freedom?

Artist and writer [Zach Blas](#) wants a new internet, now. His solo exhibition at South London’s Gasworks Gallery, [Contra-Internet](#), begins by attacking the internet as a function of totalizing capitalism and ends with the utopian possibilities that the internet once held in the 1980s and ’90s. Although theoretically dense, Blas’s exhibition balances serious insights with some much-needed comedic irony.



Zach Blas, "Totality Study #1: Internet, a definition" (2015), photo luminescent vinyl (image courtesy the artist, photo by Andy Keate)

In a cleverly plagiarized manifesto titled *The End of the Internet (As We Knew It)*, Blas lifts text from queer and radical economic theorists like [Beatriz Preciado](#), [Fredric Jameson](#), and the [Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos](#). A nearby video installation demonstrates how Blas composed the manifesto. It begins with him searching through publicly available online articles written by his targeted authors. When he finds a key excerpt related to his subject, he copies and pastes it into a document. Gradually, Blas

works through the text, replacing all mentions of "capitalism" with "internet," "economy" with "network," and so on. He repurposes texts that initially argued against economic and sexual hegemonies for his battle against the internet.

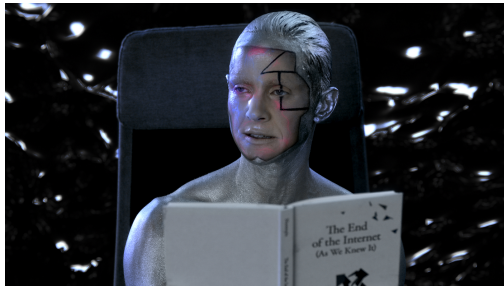
Through his sly sleight of hand, Blas exposes how the internet virtually annihilates the distance between things. His mixing and melding of theories highlights how easily the distinctions between philosophies collapse.



Zach Blas, "Contra-Internet" (2017), installation view (commissioned by Gasworks; Art in General, New York; and MU, Eindhoven, image courtesy the artist, photo by Andy Keate)

Blas offers a utopian alternative to today's corporate-run digital forum with the "contra-internet." He hints at what this digital paradise could be in his film *Jubilee 2033*, the obvious crown jewel of the show. In it, the writer [Ayn Rand](#) (played by Susanne Sachße) sits in her bleak living room, fashionably smoking her long cigarette while former Chairman of the Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan (played by Dany Naierman) and his wife, Joan Mitchell (played by Lindsay Hicks), sit in attendance. After some

stultifying objectivist banter, a holographic Japanese AI robot inexplicably appears from a cruciform cloud of electrical dust, telling Rand that it will serve her bidding. It's an extremely strange, funny moment that helps the film segue toward its fantastical second setting in the near future: a cybernetic "anti-campus" run by [Nootropix](#), a genderqueer techno-prophet, warmly played by performance artist [Cassils](#).



Zach Blas, *Jubilee 2033*, film still (2017)
(commissioned by Gasworks; Art in General,
New York; and MU, Eindhoven, image courtesy
the artist)

It is through Nootropix that Blas imagines what freedom will look like in the contra-internet. Nootropix lectures their students on how Silicon Valley (now called the Silicon Zone) collapsed alongside the entirety of the internet. Nootropix becomes a symbol of electro-queer enlightenment: an android who acts in opposition to sexual, economic, political, and philosophical hegemonies. The most evocative image from *Jubilee 2033* is one

of Nootropix dancing around a neon pink grid system while occasionally posing in the style of Classical Greek sculpture and mythology — think the Discobolus of Myron or Artemis holding her bow — while Andrea Bocelli sings *To Say Goodbye (Con Te Partiro)* in the background. Here, we see that the contra-internet will be playful and tantalizing, an archipelago of parties that emancipates us from technological domination.

Zach Blas: Contra-Internet *continues at Gasworks Gallery (155 Vauxhall St, London) through December 10.*

Correction: *A previous version of this article stated Alan Greenspan was married to the artist Joan Mitchell. This is incorrect; he was married to a different woman of the same name. This has been fixed.*