

Conflict in My Outlook

9 July 2020 | *Melissa Pesa*

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Technology is paramount in assessing the human condition. The growing popularity of social networks has had a significant impact on personal and professional relationships, changing how we interact, process and access information; but at what cost?

'What will become of our privacy in the context of data mining, AI and weapons-grade surveillance capitalism?
Are data rights human rights?
How can I disappear?'

These are some of the questions asked in 'Conflict in My Outlook', a project exploring how the Internet mediates and sculpts social relations and ideas; unfolding in two parts, 'We Met Online' and 'Don't Be Evil', both online and offline, respectively, across 2020 to early 2022. Curated by Anna Briers, the two shows, featuring Australian and international artists through a series of new commissions and existing work, will reveal the breaking down of barriers between URL and IRL, public and private.



Kate Geck, Schema.jpg, 2020, digital image, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artists and UQ Art Museum, Queensland

While early Internet culture held a utopian perspective of connectivity, leisure and convenience, today, we are faced with the realities of the medium's effects. 'Conflict in My Outlook' focuses on the dystopian standpoint, examining the dynamics of power and control; and the decay of democracy as the social fabric of society becomes fragmented, and although tethered by cyber networks, we disconnect and become more isolated from one another. And, there is an increase of anomie among us.

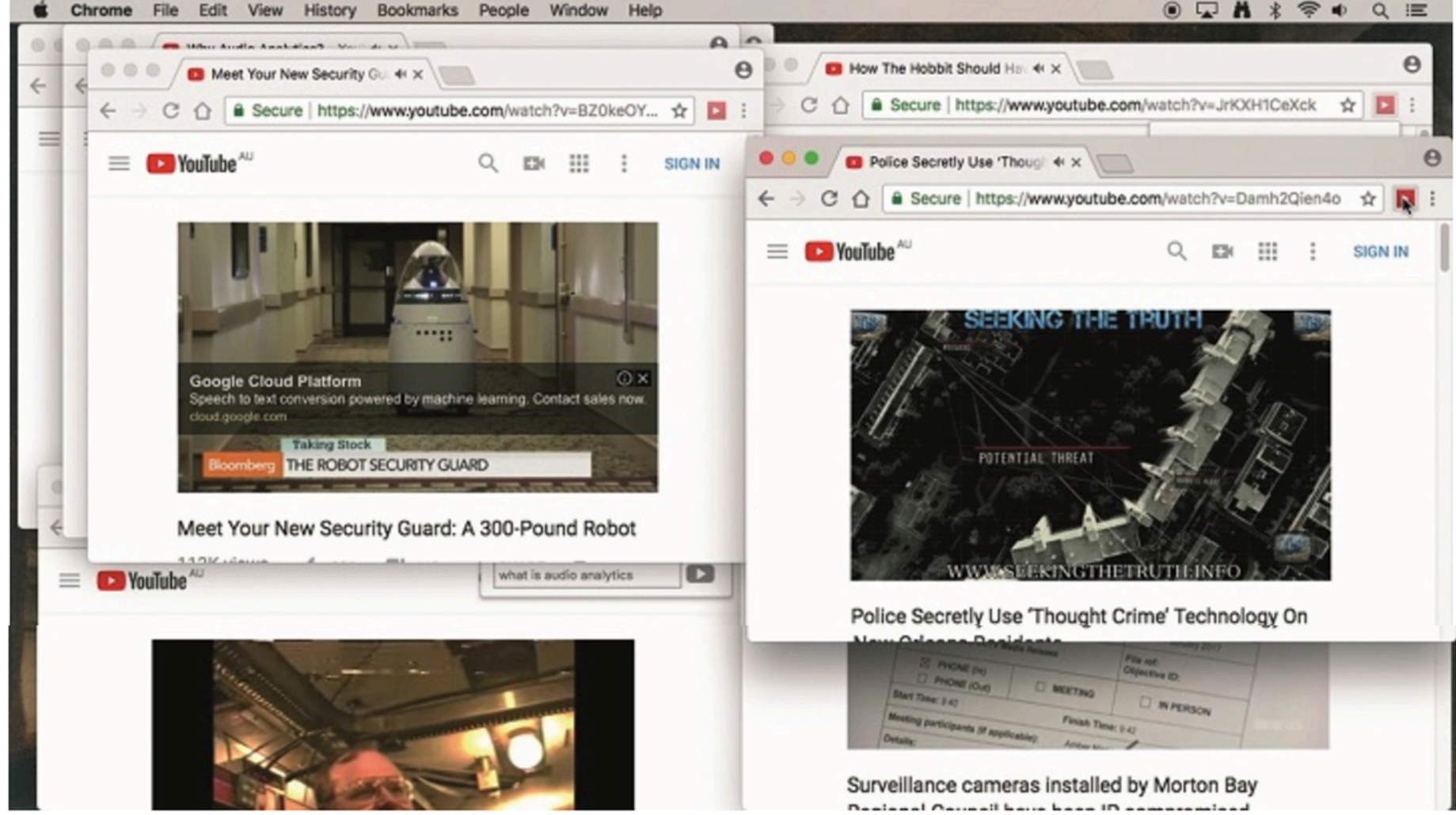
Therein lies the conflict; the glitch, the error or failure to link and synchronise data – a 'conflict in my outlook; a term derived from the software suite Microsoft Office's communication default, and the title of this exhibition. In their exploration of the cause and effect of online data, artists adopt and mashup user-generated content sourced from social networking sites such as Facebook and Youtube, or video blogs. They employ geo-location technologies and explore Augmented Reality filters, Virtual Reality environments, and data visualisation. Images of world leaders, cats, emojis, screenshots of YouTube searches, a copy-and-paste of PDF documents or 'utopian_plagiarism', raunchy digital collages and BuzzFeed quizzes, a resurrection of Microsoft's AI chatbot Tay; all form part of the first iteration of this project, 'Conflict in My Outlook: We Met Online'.



Matthew Griffin, The Outernet, 2018, image still from two-channel HD digital video, 33:34 mins. Courtesy the artists and UQ Art Museum, Queensland

In early May 2020, this web-based exhibition began with Matthew Griffin's *COVID-19 Response Commission*, an eight-week project that can be viewed on Instagram via the handle @uqartmuseum. A new, highly political, digital collage by the artist was shared weekly, reflecting the absurd entropy of the global political landscape and the information overload of our hyper-connected age (thanks, Broadband). Griffin's 'punk aesthetic' and anarchist-like compositions at first read as attention-seeking humorous memes, yet they address the unnerving realities of our times. Our recent existence has been lived out almost entirely online; caught in the web of endless (mis)information. Griffin's scrapings of the Internet and the 24-hour news cycle include footage of Trump and ScoMo press conferences juxtaposed with videos of crystal ball readings, clay making, and break dancing scenes. These split-screens highlight the untrustworthy nature of online content in the context of fake news and post-truth politics.

Griffin's work, as well as new commissions and recent digital artworks and texts, live events and timed 'happenings', short 'provocations' in the form of commissioned writing, as well as talks, podcasts and interviews by others; Zach Blas, Natalie Bookchin, Chicks on Speed, Xanthe Dobbie, Sean Dockray, Kate Geck, Elisa Giardina Papa, Matthew Griffin, Daniel Mckewen, Jon Rafman and Jemima Wyman, will launch online from 21 August 2020.



Sean Dockray, Learning from YouTube, 2018, single-channel screen-capture video, 11:32 mins. Courtesy the artists and UQ Art Museum, Queensland

Part Two; the physical component, 'Conflict in My Outlook: Don't Be Evil' will open in 2021 featuring immersive installations that connect to key chapters in the online exhibition: *Utopia to Dystopia – Failed Metaphors and Invisible Power Structures; Digital Intimacy – The Public Private; Disinformation Architects – Fake News and the Weaponisation of Social Media; All Data to the People! – Surveillance in the Age of the Big Other; and, Click Escape – Network Overload and Strategies for Survival*. No doubt, these themes and ideas are more acute today than in previous years. Still, in a world of iPads, smartphones, Apple watches and a cultural lag between the diffusion of the Internet across society and its adoption of technology, we are stuck in a frozen program of electronic addiction.

'The Internet has been described as a cloud, a network, an archive, an information superhighway, a urinal, a supermarket, and a brothel. All are at once fitting and failed analogies,' says Briers. 'Within our hyper-mediated world we are drowning in an ocean of images, data has been classified as the new oil, and the consequences of our technologically networked existence have surpassed anything that has gone before.'

If we can't press down on Ctrl, Alt, and Delete or ESC, then 'Conflict in My Outlook' attempts to resolve the problem by inviting us to look at the world with fresh eyes. To search beyond Internet algorithms, pop-up ads, hashtags and social media trends, cultural and political strongholds, and overall moral complexities of metaverses, and reconnect with reality, or at least save it safely in a folder on an external hard drive.

UQ Art Museum
21 August, 2020 to 1 March, 2022
Queensland

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