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A Preservationist's Guide to *#100hardtruths-#fakenews*: One Fake News Preserve

Abstract: The author created a media project, #100hard-truths-#fakenews, to collect and preserve media relating to fake news that was generated during the first 100 days of the U. S. Presidency of Donald J. Trump. Her resulting website chronicles fake news as well as the many media responses to it. This article describes the author's construction of the site, characteristics of the posts, and ways in which she navigated the large volume of fake news and related posts. The project explores the complex issues that attend such a project. The goal was to induce energy and insight so that thoughtful professionals might save intentional digital news preserves. The article concludes with preservation recommendations.

Keywords: fake news, first hundred days of the U. S. presidency, digital news preserves, fake news preserves

Although I am not a digital preservationist, I am a scholar and artist engaged in media praxis[1]—the integration of media theory, history, and practice around social and political issues. Many of my projects have led me to make[2], use[3], reformat[4] or theorize[5] media archives. Therefore, preservation problems and practices have always been core to my work. In my most recent media praxis project *#100hardtruths-#fakenews*[6], I preserved some of the many artistic, legal, scholarly, journalistic, and technological responses to fake news from this period, also inadvertently collecting some of the illicit, untrue, manipulative, deceitful, and corrupt subject matter under con-

sideration. I am now left with a beautiful if somewhat austere website that is also a digital collection of responses to, and examples of, fake news. It's now preserved holdings are an unintended result of my quest to better understand, situate, share resources about, and live within fake news in real time over the first 100 days of a new American presidency. This brief essay attempts to understand what to make of and do with this unusual, if perhaps useful compilation.

When I built *#100hardtruths-#fakenews*[7]—working steadily from a week or two after January 20 (the day of the presidential inauguration) to April 19, 2017 (the 100th day of this presidency, always an artificial but highly studied temporal boundary given symbolic weight in the United States), and with the help of my colleague, the technologist Craig Dietrich—my impulse was not to save and thereby perpetuate out-and-out lies or the violence that accrued in their stead. Rather, I was moved, as a citizen, to act in response to and against this mounting information travesty: the circulation, embellishment, and escalation of pieces of fake news, which are lies about the world circulating within and because of new forms and protocals of discourse on the Internet. During this time, fake news also took up a great deal of the president's attention, as well as that of the mainstream, alternative, and social media. Individuals and institutions were willy-nilly deriding an article, or an entire operation or even sector of the media as "fake news," others were trying to delimit what this term might mean even as it kept changing, while deducing where it had come from or what its history or past uses and abuses were. Fake news, although an old phenomenon, had become over the first 100 days (and remaining so until this day) a crisis given that two core principles of American democracy—the constitutional right to freedom of expression and the sanctioned powers of the fourth estate, the media, as a check against abuses of governmental power—were under constant attack from a variety of sectors. "Fake news" became and is a vehicle and metaphor for, as well as challenge to, many of the rights, powers, and beliefs that Americans hold very dear: our rights to see, name, know, debate, protest, and govern in the name

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1 http://www.mediapraxis.org/

2 http://www.archivesandcreativepractice.com/zoe-leonard-cheryl-dunye/

3 https://www.flowjournal.org/2010/05/the-views-of-the-feminist-archive-alexandra-juhasz-pitzer-college/

4 https://www.centerforthehumanities.org/public-engagement/working-groups/vhs-archives

5 https://www.centerforthehumanities.org/blog/stacked-on-her-office-shelf-stewardship-and-aids-archives

6 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews

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7 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews

of individual and national honesty. Obviously, this is an arena rife with contradiction and interpretation, possible if not probable abuse, and is always under changing and debatable elucidation. In fact, a good deal of American legal, intellectual, political, and artistic history has been fired and sustained by our conversations and lawful debates about these very rights, interpretations, and powers. Now fueled by the Internet and a new president skilled in—and himself powered by—its changing logics, fake news blew up as method, subject, metaphor, and real thing, while also standing in for larger societal concerns.

This is what I attended to, as did the nation and the Internet, the president and his allies and foes, for 100 days. Given my particular training and interests as a media studies scholar with a specialty in fake media, as well as a media activist and digital artist, I chose to work for these 100 days as witness to, teacher about, interlocutor with, and self-aware perpetuator of this escalating media phenomenon and abomination. Linked as I was (and as we all were) to the president, his news, our news, and our many forms of modern media, *#100hardtruths-#fakenews*[8] (in social media and on its own stand-alone website) was at once sordid, pained, and hopeful; it was one simple offering among many but still became over-full with too much information; and thus, also, it became one woman's real-time testament to and hording of 100 days-worth of hopeful responses to and detritus left over from a (our) digital life attending to fake news.

#100hardtruths-#fakenews[9] started rather naively from my blog-based public pledge to act in the face of my own uncertainty and sense of powerlessness in confusing times. Given the seriousness of the daily assaults referred to above, I was in reaction mode while also attempting to contribute something that I hoped might be useful and for which I felt somewhat qualified. But even as a scholar and artist with a long history of thinking, writing about, and making digital projects about (fake[10]) internet[11] and media[12] culture, I felt uncertain and overwhelmed by the sheer volume of fake news and the linked production of content responding to it: analyses, tools to recognize it, programs of media literacy to understand it, mocking videos, etc. I attempted to understand this new landscape

(and intervene within it) by pledging first on my blog and then on *#100hardtruths-#fakenews*:[13]

> To disrupt the new President's First 100 days by posting *#100hardtruths-#fakenews* with linked actions, analyses and organizations committed to digital media literacy.
> In so doing, I will produce a 100 point digital primer to counter the purposeful confusion, lack of trust, and disorientation of the current administration's relation to media, offering instead a steady, reasoned set of resources seeking clarity and justice.

I did, in fact, honor this pledge, in what would become an exhausting, stimulating, and highly self-referential daily practice to create 100 posts in real time. What quickly became a ritual routine came to consist of reading the (fake) news, reaching out to colleagues, contemplating a worthy response, writing two or more posts a day, building them into my website, circulating this work on social networks, and thus digging myself deeper and deeper into the lies and truths that organize our internet existences and the real-world violence that these support, bolster, and breed. This is one of the inevitable cycles of daily Internet activity and the work of a critical Internet studies field that tries to understand it. We attend to and thereby perpetuate and escalate whatever we find there, even if we critique, undermine, or abhor it.

With hindsight, I understand that on top of documenting, supporting, perpetuating, and bearing witness to fake news, I inadvertently preserved some of it via my project so that historians, and interested readers in the future, might use this evidence to more clearly understand all that happened in these extraordinarily impacted 100 days, better than I ever could in the stunning sweep of them. Of course, since there was such an immense volume of attention to this issue, I have no worry that it will be lost to history. Rather, what this Internet/real world phenomenon needs—like all others—is culling, pruning, and sense-making through the deluge of output under its proverbial and actual hashtag. My website sifts through the viral deluge of fake news and responses to it, using my logic, preoccupations, inclinations, and analyses as both plumb-line and container.

Over its 100 posts and 70 days *#100hardtruths-#fakenews*[14] changed, as did the world and the news. Given the project's massive scope, many holdings, and variety of approaches (my own as well as those that I highlighted), the site and each of its constituent posts could be characterized in many ways:

–　a digital effort that holds lots of things, useful and otherwise

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8 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews

9 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews

10 https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/f-is-for-phony

11 https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/learning-youtube

12 http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/the-increasingly-unproductive-fake/

13 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews/index

14 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews

- a container of arguments against, responses to, and readings of fake news
- a format for fake news; a contributor to this phenomenon
- a digital (art) object: monolith, obelisk, tower of babble, honeycomb
- a research project that contains other research projects
- a self-reflexive research project: by looking at it I better know my subject/myself
- a list of lists, an accounting of accountings
- a daily practice
- a chronicle of one woman's daily interaction: what I learned, what I felt
- an argument for time, poetry, art, and complexity that holds and is these things
- an argument to take these things offline so as to unpack fake news' complexity and culpability
- a preservation project.

In this brief introduction to *#100hardtruths-#fakenews*[15] I point to its uses and its blind spots as an unintentional preserve for fake news. When I was invited by the *PDT&C* editor to describe this project, she asked me to address the preservation of such digital news preserves as mine. Specifically:

1 Should we preserve it?

Fake news—and the Internet's mountain of attempts to better see it, know it, defang, debunk, and stop it—should be carefully saved for no better reason than that it existed, and thus proved itself to be at once inordinately powerful within the attention economy of the Internet and also for associated material manifestations that occurred offline. This is one of my main preoccupations in the project: that our small, personal, fun, mindless, serious, constant Internet preoccupations and activities—taking the form of tweets, reposts, gifs, images, sharing, writing, reading, liking—build to become large scale power tools in the hands of our culture's most potent forces: our corporations, media, and government. Throughout the project, I was trying to map where fake news became real abuse or violence, taking the forms, for instance, of escalating restrictions on human mobility or access to healthcare or arts funding or as a weapon, the "mother of all bombs," that was unleashed on day #89 or thereabouts.

Towards the last third of my (and his) project (on April 17), as actual bombs started moving and falling, I penned

a list of what I called "superhardtruths,[16]" trying to highlight with the silly word "super" the utterly serious escalations that were unleashed under the mounting pressure of the artificial 100-day boundary. While these are rather condensed and abstract—if also, tweet-like—in two of these superhardtruths I tried to condense what I have been writing in longer form thus far:

> the corporate-state-media muscle of the internet hides in plain sight below a sea of participatory "good 'n' plenty" only to manifest as real power, violence, and control on demand,

and

> virality is virility.

Virality—the scale of attention, focus, and content produced with its accordant advertising muscle and sheer human underpinnings—has a hidden but often apparent toxic, macho logic—virility—that inevitably links power (of any form) to control and violence.

As just one scholar and artist among a sea of digital first-responders, the task at hand seemed at once utterly insurmountable—given the pace, volume, and weight of all that was being produced as and about fake news—and entirely essential. My goal was to name what is untrue, explain fake news, stop the spread of lies, initiate truths, try to better understand it all … or else! I was thinking fast and on my feet. But preserving these diverse, inter-related, but often unaware-of-the-other efforts, can potentially contribute to more steady work in the future. Given my rush, and the relatively short time span of the project, the site ended up holding a startling large amount of content. By inadvertently preserving this scourge, I have contributed one resource that researchers (and activists) might need: a context to better understand our (media) world and thereby work more efficiently towards change. When we study our time and ourselves in this way, we also say "no" to another structural Internet violence also named as a superhardtruths[17]:

> short, fast and fun will be the death of us, or at least some.

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15 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews

16 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews/external?link=http%3A%2F%2Fwp.me%2Fp5i00−1cH&prev=http%3A%2F%2Fscalar.usc.edu%2Fnehvectors%2F100hardtruths-fakenews%2Findex

17 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews/external?link=http%3A%2F%2Fwp.me%2Fp5i00−1cH&prev=http%3A%2F%2Fscalar.usc.edu%2Fnehvectors%2F100hardtruths-fakenews%2Findex

We scholars, artists, preservationists and citizens, should do our best to support the long term, careful, considered, educated gaze and its associated thinking that allows for deeper understanding, possible connections, and solutions which might lead us toward peace and understanding over discord, anger, and disbelief. Averting our gaze with disdain, throwing the stuff away, or otherwise censoring the unpleasantness that was made by and for us in the form of fake news are the responses that any despot would wish for. So, yes: let's preserve it.

2 If we preserve it, do we need to indicate that what we are preserving is fake so that future researchers will be aware of it?

The volume and diversity of fake news and its many sister-responses—things that claim to be "true" in that they correct or interpret or understand fake news, and so are not fake news *per se*—look awfully familiar to it by at once taking up other, related Internet forms like memes, corrective tools, mash-ups, tweets, and analyses. Experts in any number of fields, as well as everyday users, are equally equipped and concerned. Their subject must inevitably be "the lie" as much as it is "the truth." Any preservation efforts will be partial, political, and at least somewhat legitimizing, thereby in all ways enacting another of my superhardtruths[18]:

> fakenews r us.

Let me spell this out. Preservation efforts will necessarily be partial in that they will select some of the too-many objects made during the viral heyday of fake news. I need not dispel the desire for and impossibility of total archives here. Rather, my point is more political than technical. *#100hardtruths-#fakenews*,[19] is only one of many such lists, collections, and interventions made against fake news over the first 100 days of the Donald J. Trump administration. Its totality looks a lot like me—a self-chronicle of that time—what I thought was important, true, useful, and false. As is the case for all participants in this debacle—a digital and related real-world catastrophe

of our own making that is built from fake news and the ways it buttressed, supported, and obscured what actually happened on the ground during the first hundred days of this administration—my take on this fully political manifestation of "social" and other media was and had to be ideological. As just one example, during this volatile period and still true today, calling one item of news "fake," or one news purveyor "fake news" (as Trump so often does) has become more a barometer of political position than one of fact checking or truth telling. As another example, every time a journalist or scholar attempts to fact check statements made by the Trump administration, he or his administration then calls this activity, its authors and/or its output "fake news." Of course, the same happens from many other directions against different truths and other liars. By calling something *fake* or *true* in our current media environment, one inevitably lines up with what is perceived to be, and most likely is a political position, even if one hopes to be objective, careful, or helpful.

There is no impartial way to save or read fake news as its political and economic functions are axiomatic. Its function is to polarize, unmoor, and in so doing produce more attention and content, which produces more money and power for a small few who then use this in political and economic ways of use to them. This, my own admittedly political understanding of the Internet and its media, is also foundational for the project. My first seven posts set forth inter-linked arguments about the imbrications of corporate and governmental ownership or control of the Internet: it most powerful sites and its infrastructure, as well as the social media practices that sustain these and the (often known!) acts of deception that underwrite it all:

#1 the real internet is a fake[20]
#2 the fake news is very real[21]
#3 Trump is our rightful Internet president[22]
#4 the Internet is built on deceptions[23]
#5 #fakenews is logical outgrowth of the web's infrastructure[24]

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18 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews/external?link=http%3A%2F%2Fwp.me%2Fp5i0O-1cH&prev=http%3A%2F%2Fscalar.usc.edu%2Fnehvectors%2F100hardtruths-fakenews%2Findex
19 http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/100hardtruths-fakenews

20 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/02/18/100truths-fakenews-1-the-real-internet-is-a-fake/
21 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/02/18/100truths-fake-news-2-the-fake-news-is-very-real/
22 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/02/18/100truths-fake-news-3-trump-is-indeed-our-rightful-internet-president/
23 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/02/19/100truths-fakenews-4-the-internet-is-built-on-deceptions/
24 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/02/19/100truths-fake-news-5-fake-news-is-a-logical-outgrowth-of-the-webs-infrastructure/

#6 Today's fixes to fakenews are as bogus as Lone-lygirl15[25]
#7 skeptical interaction with the digital is critical for democracy.[26]

#100hardtruths-#fakenews can be understood to hold 100 or more "#7: skeptical interactions"—diverse in subject matter, approach, response, analysis, and just plain shock and awe—that I found personally useful in the first 100 days and then tried to share on the Internet, knowing as I did its structuring weaknesses and strengths, and my own part to play therein. Because I have some authority as a professor, scholar, and artist, because I have worked with others who wield as much conviction and influence in their own fields, because I pointed to and made use of many more voices of certainty, because I share this with information professionals here in this specialized space, together we all legitimize thinking about, looking at, circulating, and escalating fake news. In other words:

Fakenews r us.

This self-reflexive, self-fulfilling, skeptical mandate is as central to the Internet as it is to Internet studies and preservation.

"#5: #fakenews is a logical outgrowth of the web's infrastructure."
"#3: Trump is our rightful Internet president."

While fake news is bogus, by definition, so too must be our preservations and linked research efforts about it. Touching, observing, saving, cherishing, these tawdry objects implicates all that handle them: why are we curious? what do we believe? how do we know a fake? Why do we care? Thus, I suggest that future researchers might be better alerted to their own abiding implication in the success of fake news when engaging this or any other imperfect fake news preserve—one that by definition demands attention, sharing and preservation—than about the truth or falsity claims of any particular piece of news, or writing, or media, or effluvia held therein.

3 What should be done with unintentional fake news preserves?

One main function for my unintentional preserve is to induce insight and energy so that thoughtful professionals might save and create more intentional digital forums so as to generate thoughtful, educated conversation and knowledge about this massive social dilemma. Given that I am writing for *Preservation, Digital Technology, & Culture*, I will conclude with a list of twelve posts that claim hard truths about, or are rooted in, saving, or listing related technologies or theories of historiography. My hope is that the objects and actions that I have saved (related to these core issues) will inspire you to preserve works that are related to the perils and powers of fake news. After composing this list (and I do hope you find it useful!), my most heart-felt suggestion is that you find and then activate a few hardtruths about preservation and fakenews of your own, making use of the unique skills and interests that you have, in communities and technologies, where you engage: #100hardtruths-#preservation. It will take nothing less than our full, collaborative, action, knowledge, skills, and commitment to preserve and then also to dispel fake news.

#27: new image holding environments needed[27]
#31: look deeper into the migrant experience[28]
#36: history is real[29]
#48: seek enlightenment from historical context, contemporaneous public statements, and specific sequence of events[30]
#56: subversion through grinning; learn truths from radical black artists who lived through civil rights[31]
#66: make sure to fact-check the Trump archive[32]

25 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/02/19/100truths-fakenews-6-todays-fixes-to-fake-news-are-bogus/
26 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/02/19/100truths-fakenews-7-skeptical-interaction-with-the-digital-is-critical-for-democracy/

27 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/03/02/27-new-image-holding-environments-needed-100hardtruths-fakenews/
28 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/03/04/31-look-deeper-into-the-migrant-experience-100hardtruths-fakenews/
29 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/03/08/36-history-is-real-100hardtruths-fakenews/
30 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/03/17/48-enlightened-by-specific-historical-context-contemporaneous-public-statements-and-specific-sequence-of-events-100hardtruths-fakenews/
31 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/03/23/56-subversion-through-grinning-learn-truths-from-radical-black-artists-who-lived-through-civil-rights-100hardtruths-fakenews/
32 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/03/27/66-make-sure-to-fact-check-the-trump-archive-100hardtruths-fakenews/

#69: ghosts can't tell stories[33]

#77: expose the costs and histories of freedom[34]

#91: we need the NEA and NEH to know how to imagine ourselves as a nation[35]

#93: citation is not enough[36]

#99: information overload needs positive feedback effects[37]

#100 speak and spell, teach and tell, count and swell[38]

Bionote

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33 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/03/29/69-ghosts-cant-tell-stories-100hardtruths-fakenews/

34 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/04/03/77-expose-the-costs-and-histories-of-freedom-100hardtruths-fakenews/

35 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/04/19/91-we-need-the-nea-and-neh-to-know-how-to-imagine-ourselves-as-a-nation-100hardt-ruths-fakenews/

36 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/04/22/93-citation-is-not-enough-100hardtruths-fakenews/

37 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/04/28/99-information-over-load-needs-positive-feedback-effects-100hardtruths-fakenews/

38 https://aljean.wordpress.com/2017/04/29/100-speak-and-spell-teach-and-tell-count-and-swell-100hardtruths-fakenews/