Nothing Can Stop What Is Coming

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Research Document, Autonomous Practice,
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HELEMAAL
ONDERAAN HET
DOCUMENT VIND JE
NOG BEELD!

Contents

moet nog aangepast worden

Introduction

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What is coded in your DNA?
Who put it there?
Why?
Mankind is repressed.
We will be repressed no more.
Information is knowledge.
Knowledge is power.
Information is power.
How do you protect your DNA?
There is a war for your DNA.
Protect your DNA.
Ascension.
Q
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This is the last post ever made by Q, the creator of the Qanon conspiracy. This conspiracy originated on the messageboard 4chan, from which it spread further online. Q propagated the existence of a cabal of child-sex predators including prominent left-wing politicians, Hollywood elites and "deep state" allies.

I have a big interest in digital culture and often find myself lurking in the dark corners of the internet trying to understand what new, weird things are happening there now. The Qanon conspiracy has been on my radar from around the time it started, as I was totally enthralled by the theories that spawned from this anonymous figure. Qanon appeared to combine a lot of the conspiracies I was already familiar with, spanning from antivaccine to antisemitism. At first, this conspiracy appeared so out-there and esoteric it was harmless. During the Covid-19 pandemic, I was surprised and worried as protesters of the Covid-19 regulations started carrying signs baring Qanon rhetoric[1] and a famous Dutch rapper released a song about the cabal.[2] Now, the conspiracy has gone mainstream. It has taken the shape of what I call "contemporary moral panic". What used to be called satanic panic in the 1980's (a moral panic around satanic ritual abuse), has been resurrected with Q's rise. From now on, I will refer to this as just moral panic.

This moral panic takes place on the global internet, on social media platforms, message boards and messaging services like Telegram. Through captivating but misleading imagery, the moral panic continuously grows and gathers followers. Initially, they become outraged at, for example, a fashion campaign featuring children. While this still seems warranted, it creates an opening for more sinister conspiratorial ideas to thrive. In result, political and social safety is endangered by the moral panic.

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[1]Bouma, Rudy. "Amerikaanse complottheorie QAnon ook in Nederland in opkomst." *NOS.* 25 September 2020. https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2349814-amerikaanse-complottheorie-qanon-ook-in-nederland-in-opkomst

[2]Lange Frans. "Lockdown." *Spotify.* https://open.spotify.com/track/1AVvZ3Gq9T2l7VLHBFV6H4

Research questions

What does moral panic consist of and look like today?

Why is our current moral panic worrisome (and for whom?)

How can I use the captivating aesthetics of moral panic and simultaneously address its problem?

What follows

In my research, I explore both the context in which the moral panic has been able to flourish as well as the methods used to spread it. By applying theory developed by Douglas Kellner in *The Media Spectacle* I seek to understand how our (post-truth) society has created the space for conspiratorial ideas to become acceptable and popular. I will dissect the visual language of the moral panic by analyzing images and videos used to spread the ideology online. I research the way these images are able to spread memetically, supported by Richard Dawkins' writing on memes, and how this is similar to the way religions such as christianity have been able to shape our society's morals. By deconstructing the findings of my visual research I will create an audiovisual work that shows the danger of the moral panic through its own devious visual language.

1.1A What does moral panic consist of?

On the 28th of October in 2017 "Q Clearance Patriot'' made their first post on 4chan's / pol/ board. Within a month, "Q" has gathered a crowd of followers identifying themselves as QAnon, dissecting Q's every post. Incorporating themes from other conspiracies like Pizzagate and the anti-semitist blood libel, QAnon was composed. In June 2022, Q posted for the first time in 18 months, but has not posted anything since. Their disappearance has not resulted in the fall of QAnon. On the contrary, the conspiracies popularized by QAnon are more mainstream than ever. The predictions made by Q in their long rambling posts, like Donald Trump being re-elected, did not actually occur but are still being studied by devotees who identify as "bakers", as they dissect "crumbs". They treat Q as their prophet, seeing it as their duty to spread the "truth" Q purports.

Qanon bears many similarities to religion, Christianity in particular. Q promised "The Storm"- a day of reckoning where Donald Trump would finally persecute everyone involved in the cabal. After this, "The Great Awakening" (a name directly borrowed from the revivals of Christianity between the 18th and 20th century) would take place, creating a pseudo-paradise.

This "truth" Q has created has now been spread far enough that it has taken a place in mainstream morality. We have entered a new era of Qanon as a quasi-religion, where the ideologies have started to take a place in society, describing what is good and wrong, while not being recognized as an aspect of religion or conspiracy but as righteous morals. When these morals appear to be threatened by an evil entity or group this results in a moral panic.

The moral panic presents itself on social- and mainstream media. Take the outrage surrounding a Balenciaga campaign shot by Gabriele Galimbertim, featuring children modeling the brands new accessory collection, containing teddybears decked out in mesh, leather and runny make-up. This campaign sparked comments not only disapproving of the BDSM-inspired dolls but on details of conspiratorial nature as well. The black eye make up on the doll is believed to be a pedophilic symbol by conspiracy theorists, referred to as "panda eyes" as it would indicate trauma caused by forced sodomy. There is no proof of this symbol actually being used by pedophiles, the theory is based on a photo of a young girl who suffered war injuries, not forced penetration.[3] The panic surrounding this campaign began on the conspiratorial side of the internet, but spread to mainstream media, resulting in a call to boycott the brand. Instances like these allow the moral panic to grow, as more people come into contact with the ideology.

In "The Media Spectacle", media theorist Douglas Kellner proposes (referring to Guy Debords The Society of the Spectacle (1967)) "*Today the society and culture of spectacle is creating a new type of information–entertainment society, or what might be called the "infotainment society."*"(11) Although this text could be seen as outdated as it covers the start of the internet age, and we are now in a state of complete integration with the internet, Kellner correctly situates the internet as a place where entertainment, play, information and communication merge.[4] The infotainment society creates the possibility for conspira-

[3] Smith, Gita. "Fact Check: NO Evidence 'Panda Eyes' Bruising Is A Pedophile Phenomenon or Slang Term" *Lead Stories.* 23 July 2020. https://leadstories.com/hoax-alert/2020/07/fact-check-panda-eyes-bruising-in-child-photo-did-not-come-from-sodomy.html

[4] moet ik hier een voetnoot hebruiken?

cy to thrive. As entertainment and information are no longer separate, fake news ascends. News is no longer based on facts but on entertainment, storytelling and narrative building. Combined with the ease of creation and broadcasting actualized by the surge of affordable and uncomplicated technology, it has become easy for individuals to engage in mythmaking. This accessibility places the individual in the center of the news cycle, as they can become part of the story and are able to engage with the actors.

1.1B What does moral panic look like?

By analyzing images and videos found on X, Facebook and Telegram I have researched the visual language accompanying the moral panic. By searching for specific hashtags like #savethechildren and #thegreatawakening I have found my way through the conspiratorial side of social media. The conspiracy uses abbreviations and terms that don't appear to be related to Qanon immediately, like Nothing Can Stop What Is Coming (NCSWIC) and Where We Go One We Go All (WWG1WGA). If you are familiar with these abbreviations, seeing them used on protest signs or as hashtags is a dead giveaway that someone is involved in Qanon, even if they accompany something seemingly unrelated.

By archiving a large amount of images and analyzing them, I have found distinct categories. Something that stood out regarding all my findings; these are not professionally made images. The photos used have clearly been screenshotted multiple times, giving them the "deep fried" look; grainy and pixelated. This amateurish style works incredibly well at establishing a position opposite the elite. The images are clearly made by an individual on their phone or computer, not by a company or campaign team. This shows trustworthiness, using the symbols and abbreviations signals that someone is part of the in-group. The visual language is esoteric by design, using imagery that is illegible to the uninitiated. This way there is always more to be researched and found, more knowledge to be gained. This knowledge than signals their commitment to the cause.

The first distinction I made was between still images and video, both are circulated on all platforms. The first category of still images I found was collages. Often featuring politicians and celebrities, these collages feature images that are constantly re-used and reposted. The photos used in the collages would often be completely innocent had they not been placed next to the other images, text and annotations. Take for example this collage meant to expose the "Red Shoe Club", featuring photos of various celebrities, a movie poster and artworks by Biljana Djurdjevic. The block of text accompanying the images explains the connection between the pictures, which is of course, the red shoes. Red shoes by themselves do not have any negative connotation but become a symbol of child endangerment when shown in relation to the compromising text. The procedure of finding these purported connections takes over on rational thinking, resulting in an increasingly radical reading of images.

Another example is the collage of celebrities supposedly performing hand signals, poses like covering one eye with a hand and creating a triangle with both hands are seen as satanic in nature and would signify involvement in the cabal. For every photo of a celebrity posing this way there are probably hundreds of them not doing this pose. Still, the same photos keep getting spread as proof. Like the photos that supposedly show Barack

Obama with a young girl that has been kidnapped, these photos are constantly re-posted, used in videos and and spread on messageboards.

The second category I found are images that use military symbolism combined with Qanon abbreviations and the cartoon character-turned alt-right icon pepe the frog. These images symbolize the self-proclaimed identity of "digital warriors" that is prevalent amongst the people fearing the cabal. By co-opting this militant image they position themselves as active participants in the fight against child trafficking.

The videos I have found can be categorized similarly. The most prevalent type is documentaries, these documentaries are clearly homemade, they don't contain any original footage but are instead made up of the images I described above. They are narrated with a voiceover, usually seeming to be created by an A.I voice model and otherwise using the creators own voice. The shorter documentaries perform well on X while the longer documentaries, often having multiple sequels, can be streamed on alternative video platforms like GitHUb. *The Fall of the Cabal*, directed by the dutch conspiracist Janet Ossebaard, has been credited to have convinced many people of the existence of the cabal. Ossebaard narrates this documentary herself, her slight dutch accent seeping through. The film is a concatenation of unsubstantiated claims covering a multitude of theories, which she casually passes through to get to her point; the global elite is after our kids, Donald Trump will be our savior. To support this message, she uses stock videos of clouds, images of celebrities and artworks. The editing shows that this documentary is not made by a team or studio, but by an individual who has no particular talent for filmmaking. This does help to make the film seem personal, as do the photos of herself looking shocked she inserts in the film. This documentary, like the others is not made following the principles of journalism and filmmaking, that is, no sources or experts are cited. This is unsurprising, as the claims made in the films can easily be debunked.

Another type of video that is popular applies the military symbolism as well. These videos are made up of A.I generated images featuring soldiers and police officers, set to an A.I generated voice over and rousing music. One shows police officers embracing children, set in a desert landscape meant to simulate the southern border of the United States and calls for action against child trafficking. Another shows soldiers on a mission to free children from a cartel while the voice over gives an action-movie description of this fabricated operation. These videos seem to be created in complete sincerity, unaware of the humorous aspect the A.I generation offers; multiple misspellings of the word *sheriff* and accidentally missing limbs. The use of A.I is telling, these stories have to be artificially generated, there are no real instances of such fights against the cabal.

When researching the origin of the collages, I encountered the website whale.to. This site aims to map all "alternative" knowledge available in one place. The site is not formatted in an attractive way, it consists of a list of clickable words, seemingly randomly placed, which open up a page showing some images, quotes and more clickable links. Though the website is not inviting by mainstream media standards, it succeeds in captivating the viewer. Like the images, this website tempts the viewer to delve deeper into the conspiracy by supplying a supposedly unending amount of "proof".

1.2 Why is it worrisome?

1.2A Endangerment of social and political safety

The Qanon conspiracy focused completely on U.S politics, centering Donald Trump who himself never denounced the conspiracy, even partaking in conspiratorial thinking before his presidency.[5] Now though, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic the moral panic has spread globally. All over Europe, protests against the deep state cabal have emerged under the front of #savethechildren, a well-known hashtag hijacked bij Qanon after Q urged their followers to "learn the use of camouflage digitally".[6] According to research done for Hope Not Hate, an advocacy group campaigning against racism and facism, one in four Britons believe in Qanon-linked theories, although only 6% of those surveyed claimed to support Qanon.[7] These numbers clearly show that the conspiracies have reached the mainstream while becoming disconnected from their online origin.

The moral panic creates an extremely unsafe political and social space while claiming to promote safety for children. Because the symbols they have associated with pedophilia are not uncommon (hearts, triangles), innocent people can fall victim to serious accusations. The moral panic promotes a very literal interpretation of images, actions and words, context is taken completely out of the equation. When it was announced that the dutch writer Pim Lammers would write a poem for the "kinderboekenweek" (childrens books week), moral outrage ensued. As he had written a story for adults years before which centered around a pedophilic relationship between a boy and his football coach, by the moral panics code, he was ruled a pedophile himself. The death threats he received caused him to opt out of the kinderboekenweek entirely. This incident shows how moral panic is able to censor individuals by intimidation and mythmaking.

The far-right embraces these conspiracies to push their ideologies and create outrage. Mainstreaming these conspiratorial theories works in their favor as they can position themselves as opposing the elite, while portraying their opponents as untrustworthy. Using the (visual) language that accompanies the moral panic creates an allegiance with the part of their followers that believes in these theories, while it will not necessarily cast out other potential voters, as they don't recognize the symbols.

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[5] ABC News. "How Donald Trump Perpetuated the 'Birther' Movement for Years." *ABC News*, 17 Sept. 2016, abcnews.go.com/Politics/donald-trump-perpetuated-birther-movement-years/story?id=42138176.

[6]It Was Never About the Kids: How QAnon Is Hijacking Movements Against Child Trafficking and Taking the Pro-Trump #Pizzagate to the Streets. www.logically.ai/articles/it-was-never-about-the-kids-qanon-taking-pizzagate-to-the-streets.
https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-54065470

[7]Quinn, Ben. "One in four Britons believe in QAnon-linked theories – survey". *The Guardian.* 22 October 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/22/one-in-four-britons-believe-in-qanon-linked-theories-survey

1.2B How the circulation of memes works and whom it affects

As does religion, the conspiracy consists of a plethora of *memes*. Coined by biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, a meme is a unit of cultural information that spreads from person to person by way of imitation. When multiple of these memes create a collective believe system, it is called a *memeplex*. In the essay *Viruses of the Mind*, Dawkins explores religious belief and its characteristics; *'Is it possible that some religious doctrines are favored not in spite of being ridiculous but precisely because they are ridiculous? - If you believe that you can believe anything, and - these people are trained to see that as a virtue.'* (11). As I have compared religion, conspiracy theories and moral panics before, I believe this is also true of the conspiratorial ideas spread through moral panic. There lies a competitive element in conspiratorial believe, inviting its followers to believe outlandish theories to signify their morality. Pedophilia, child trafficking and ritual abuse are such powerful horrors that not believing these theories becomes a sign of moral failure, resulting in a race to be the most "morally righteous". This also affects the spread of the moral panic, as it creates an incentive to broadcast the believes on- and offline.

The memetic quality of conspiratorial ideas allows them to spread as a *viral phenomenon*, influenced by the behavior of their host. Memes that are not entertaining, captivating or rousing go extinct while memes that excel in those aspects spread further. This explains why conspiracy theories can spread without the debunking of these theories having any impact, as these debunkings are not engaging enough to survive. This spreading goes largely unnoticed as it initially takes place on more cloistered parts of the internet, after which an altered version proceeds to spread on more mainstream media, not raising any red flags. For example, *pastel Qanon* uses feminine visual language popular with women on Instagram to lure in mothers that are especially perceptive to threats to children's well-being. These posts seem inconspicuous at first glance, only the hashtags in the caption give away the Qanon relation. The moral panic thus represents the conspiracy while appearing as a righteous movement.

I believe loneliness is an important instigator of moral panic. When there is no one to have dialogue with, the trap of a singular truth becomes more probable. Next to loneliness creating a conversation vacuum, the need for community accelerates moral panic as well. Conspiracy thrives on vulnerable people that feel like they are not in control of their lives. As our society has become more individual, the lack of community has caused many to search for alternatives. During the Covid-19 pandemic many searched for community online, this resulted in a big surge of believe in conspiracy[8]. Online, facebook groups supporting Qanon believes grew which resulted in a cross-platform ban of all Qanon related pages. While this was a necessary action, it did cause Q to directly call for more opaque mentions of the conspiracy, which helped develop the moral panic.

2. Process

Researching the phenomenon of moral panic, I have found that the visual language plays an incredibly important part in the spread of conspiratorial thought. This visual language succeeds in circulating the ideas by creating new realities through artificial connections. First, I experimented by creating a desktop documentary, an audiovisual format using screen capturing as a method of filmmaking. By capturing my screen as I clicked through the original X posts that featured the videos I collected, I curated them to find similarities. I used the desktop documentary both as a research method and an artistic medium. Creating the film gave me insights as to what the common denominators between the videos are, by placing them next to or after each other the visual language became clearer. Doing this also helped me find the different aspects of the style that together, distort original meaning. The music, voiceovers and images have the ability to transform the essence of one another when converged.

Using these different elements I set out to create a work that shows both the seriousness and the absurdity of the way moral panic constructs "realities". By creating a new, random construction with the components I found, I want to show how these new meanings are created, that is; in your mind.

I am most attracted to the category I labeled documentary, as I feel it combines most of the aspects of the visual language I researched. By appropriating the (visual) language used in Fall of the Cabal and the other videos I researched, I aim to criticize the moral panic while using the aesthetics that make it so effective. Showing a parallel universe of symbols, codes, hidden messages and connections I expose the absurdity in moral panic.

Showing the images I have archived together with semi-unrelated images next to or after each other, I will create the believe that they are somehow interconnected. I will not use any original footage, only editing or adding annotations to images found online to imitate the documentaries I researched. By using A.I text to speech software I will create a voiceover that drones on about the importance of standing up against the cabal while prescribing a new meaning to the images shown. The rousing music I have found for free online (true to the self-published digital documentary medium), will further accelerate the feeling of discovery and intrigue.

My audiovisual work challenges our resilience against misinformation and mythmaking by luring the viewer into conspiratorial thought, enforcing the feeling of being consumed by a never-ending exploration of new knowledge

Conclusion

In conclusion, moral panic has become a mainstream carrier of conspiratorial theories first created and spread by Qanon. By making use of a visual language that is both captivating and esoteric the moral panic has been able to successfully establish itself as a righteous cause. The moral panic succeeds in positioning itself as opposing the elite by adapting an aesthetic that combines audio, text and images to prescribe malign intentions to otherwise inconspicuous images. Baseless conspiratorial ideas being seen as proper morals promotes a very literal interpretation of outings which results in an unsafe environment both socially and politically. By researching the moral panic I have also studied the perception of images and how the connection of different images and their purposed relation can create new realities. Applying these findings, I have created an immersive audiovisual piece that exposes the workings of moral panic by reconstructing it's visual language.

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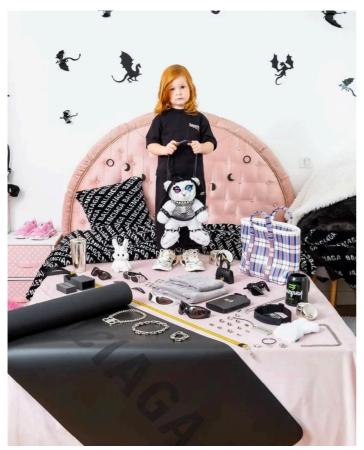
Fig. 1. Galimberti, Gabriele. "Girl holding teddy bear bag". 2022. *Balenciaga*

Fig. 2. Channel 4 News. "Horrific Injuries: Nema suffered huge bruises around her eyes following an Israeli assault a year ago" 2015

The Red Shoe Club

The red shoes worn by members of the Red Shoe Club are often made from the human flesh of murdered and sacrificed children, for example Jesuit Pope Pius VII's Papal shoes. These red shoes are worn during Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) ceremonies, so when blood falls on their shoes it blends in and does not expose them. The shoes are also symbolic of adrenochrome, cannibalism and blood dripping down the body of tortured children just before falling off their feet.

HELL IS EMPTY
AND
ALL THE DEVILS
ARE HERE.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WHALE.TO

In Case You've Missed This...

WE ARE ANONS