Eric Patrick
Numbers Don't Lie: Animated Infographics Marketing and Propaganda

As Post Modernism's complex views on reality have become popularized, media renderings of reality have become increasingly illusory. Society consequently conceptualizes reality in pathological ways, unable to distinguish scientific consensus from commentary, or institutional analysis from conspiracy theory. The age of big data adds to this confusion with the promise of an absolute reality akin to a modern day Sybil. Just as photographs carry an indexical relationship to visual reality, big data creates meaning systems through the immutable presence of numbers.

Film itself has always been preoccupied with the rendering of reality, from Kino Pravda, Cinema Verité, Italian Neorealism, and various other aesthetic and cultural approaches to the portrayal of life. Most recently, Information Design and Visualization have begun to use animation as a vehicle to tell the stories of big data. In this paper, I position these contemporary animated infographics in the lineage of cinematic articulations of reality. While these modern pieces hold great potential as an educational and information medium, they are increasingly used within the confines of marketing to sell products, and in areas that border on propaganda, by selling ideologies through their construction of numbers and iconic motion graphics.

After first introducing readers to the Gestalt grouping principles and architecture of information design, I will utilize these concepts to critique and review several recent examples of animated infographics to illustrate how these constructs of reality are engineered preemptively to come to a specific result, regardless of data. My conclusions are based on the promise and the peril of these forms as a form of political communication in the contemporary media landscape.

Biography

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With over twenty-five years of experience in the entertainment industry, Eric Patrick's commercial and independent experimental works have received a Peabody Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, over 100 grants, fellowships, and awards at international film festivals, and several Emmy nominations. His additional works in animated visualizations and info-graphics about reproductive health, astrophysics and political advocacy have received grants from the National Institute of Health and the Chicago Digital Media Production Fund. He has screened extensively both domestically and internationally at festivals, museums and on television, including screenings at the Rotterdam Film Festival, The Museum of Modern Art, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and the South by Southwest Film Festival. He was an animator for the seminal Nickelodeon program "Blues

Clues," and has written several articles about independent animation. He is currently an associate professor at Northwestern University.