

# SOFT FACTS

DIRECTED BY PAUL COPELAND  
PRODUCED BY JACK THOMAS-O'BRIEN  
WRITTEN BY PETER POMERANTSEV  
& PAUL COPELAND

 NETWORK

*Sixteen* FILMS



When Danny McCarthy receives a mysterious social media message from his aid worker wife Maia - after she's supposedly been killed in the Middle East - he launches a digital investigation to find her, through an online world where nothing is as it seems.

Grappling with rampant disinformation, automated trolls, and deep fakes, he starts to question every aspect of their relationship, as he goes deeper and deeper into... **SOFT FACTS.**

```
cAnimal=setclass("Animal")

function
cAnimal.methods:init(cuten
cutename)
self.superaction = actio
self.supercutename = cuten
end

=====

cTiger=setclass("Tiger"
cAnimal)

function
Tiger.methods:init(cuten
self:init_super("HUNGRY
Tiger)", "Zoo Animal (Tig
self.action = "ROAR FOR
self.cutename = cuten
end

=====

Tiger1 = cAnimal:new("HUNGRY
"Zoo Animal")
Tiger2 = cTiger:new("HUNGRY
Grumpy")
Tiger3 = cTiger:new("HUNGRY
Hungry")

print("CLASSNAME FOR TIGER1")
print("Tiger1:classname()")
print("CLASSNAME FOR TIGER2")
print("Tiger2:classname()")
print("CLASSNAME FOR TIGER3")
print("Tiger3:classname()")
print("=====")
print("SUPER
ACTION",Tiger1.superaction)
print("SUPER
CUTENAME",Tiger1.supercutename)
print("ACTION",Tiger1.action)
print("CUTENAME",Tiger1.cutename)
print("=====")
print("SUPER
ACTION",Tiger2.superaction)
print("SUPER
CUTENAME",Tiger2.supercutename)
```



# TREATMENT

We begin encased inside an online reality - with an audio chat message from Maia McCarthy saying goodbye to her husband Danny, apparently recorded just before her death in an airstrike during an unauthorised trip to the Middle East. In the darkness of his flat Danny plays it over and over to himself - knowing enough only to be sure that things aren't often what they seem any more.

Danny watches the apparent kidnap alone in the darkness of his home - knowing enough only to be sure that things aren't often what they seem any more.

With reports of Maia's disappearance playing on the news, we are with Danny as he follows her digital trail, aided by an online cypher going by the name of Viper66. Together they tap through copies of her chat messages with doctors in war-torn Syria, the hacked contents of her work laptop, and pages of the online abuse she's received. As we cut between Danny's reality and the world inside the screen, we learn of Maia's work as a humanitarian aid worker losing hope in a sea of fake news and falsehoods. Presentations to Parliament, online campaigns, reports on human rights abuses - is any of it actually doing anything?







The trolls certainly think not, and the abuse she is sent gets more vicious by the day - though even that is uncertain, as Viper thinks they're automated bots.

Danny wanders in and out of memories of Maia as he goes deeper and deeper into her digital existence - without ever leaving the confines of his apartment. Grief and loss marked their relationship – was it Danny who pushed her away or was she really just looking for some deeper fulfilment?

Waking up from another memory Danny finds Viper66 has finally got something solid – solid in a way that challenges our perceptions of everything solid. A fake. No kidnap. Fake news and soft facts – and all delivered direct to her husband's phone – a deep lie? Maia's kidnap has raised the profile of the humanitarian crisis she's working on more than anything else she could have done, so why not? And Danny thinks he detects a more personal motive too...



Danny won't let it be. As we see Maia reading his reply, safely speeding through the desert in her jeep, we know that his only option is to try and get her back.



# DIRECTOR'S NOTE



*Paul Copeland is a both an award winning director in documentary and drama, whose work across multiple genres has garnered a Banff Rockie Award, a BAFTA Nomination, and multiple RTS Nominations and Soap Awards. He is also a researcher, author, and strategy consultant in the field of counter disinformation and international media literacy. On this project he writes:*

Soft Facts is a response to the zeitgeist - the crisis of 'disinformation' and 'fake news' - but turns the focus onto its human costs, both on the grand scale of real-world conflict, and within one blighted marriage. It seeks to use the sense of dislocation and uncertainty that social media has unleashed in all of us to drive a gripping investigation narrative, which ends with everything we think we know turned on its head. As well as making a powerful short in its own right, our goal is to achieve a proof of concept for a feature film proposition.

I'm fascinated by the way the information revolution has changed the way we relate to imagery and storytelling: in this short, the big screen should reflect the way our experience has been changed by the smartphone in our pocket. My years working on the cusp of factual and drama television (including developing and making an award-winning, experimental drama-documentary strand), has given me a powerful sense of the filmic potential of weaving together different kinds of visual media - as well as balancing and integrating drama and factual footage.







I believe in film's unique ability - unchanged by the advent of new media - to unleash a powerful emotional response and engage an audience in a complex human story as nothing else can.

My interest in the subject matter has been informed by my extensive work at NGOs working in the counter disinformation field, and my authoring of think-tank papers exploring how people can hope to navigate the so-called 'post truth' age. This short is based on my close friend Peter Pomerantsev's new book which I edited for him, as I did his award-winning *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*. Peter has worked with me and Producer Jack Thomas-O'Brien on the treatment and script for a film which would have a unique insight and resonance.

Beyond all else, I believe our goal should be to move the audience as much as possible, whilst remaining grounded in reality - something for which Sixteen Films have of course an unparalleled track record. So working with Jack gives a remarkable opportunity to explore this subject area through a powerful human story, making the audience confront one of the questions of our age: how can you love someone, and how can you hope to do the right thing, if you don't know what's true any more?



# WRITER'S NOTE



*Peter Pomerantsev is an award-winning and internationally recognised author, former TV Producer, and world-leading expert on disinformation, fake news, and the political impact of the information revolution. He is a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Global Affairs at the London School of Economics. He has co-developed SOFT FACTS based on his latest non-fiction work This is NOT Propaganda. On it he writes:*

What do you do when truth loses its power? When all the evidence in the world means nothing? When you can marshal all the facts to prove the most important thing you've ever had to say, that will save lives, bring justice - and it all means nothing? And however much you scream and argue you just hit the wall of a world where truth is irrelevant?

Today we have more information than ever before. We live in an era of what academics call information abundance, inundated with floods of data, messages, information and disinformation.

But instead of fostering a greater sense of shared reality and informed debate, we are faced with social fracture and a catastrophic loss of common bonds.







But Simply pumping out more information, more evidence, won't help in a world where facts have stopped having any impact, where the powerful can no longer be held accountable with the truth. To truly address this epistemological crisis it will be necessary to reaffirm trust: in institutions like the media, but most importantly, trust between people, so that the reality we communicate to each other is not bathed in doubt and suspicion. Shared reality can appear when two people try to recognize each other, see each other beyond their own inner echo chambers and fears.

This film dramatizes that journey, and in doing so deepens the conversation around the crisis of 'disinformation'. It exposes how disinformation works in today's maddening propaganda chaos, but it also points to how it can only be solved at the level where trust between people is nurtured.





# PRODUCER'S NOTE



*Jack has been working with Ken Loach at his company Sixteen Films for the past five years – working up from an office junior to now head of Development and Production there. Jack works across the slate of projects in development, whilst working hands on on Sixteen's productions. On the short project SOFT FACTS:*

Sixteen Films has been producing politically motivated feature films for the past two decades – primarily with Ken Loach and Paul Laverty directing and writing respectively. With SOFT FACTS we're staying political but pushing forward along the bleeding edge of the 21st Century's global 'information war'. With every election polluted with disinformation, twisted by fake news, and charged up in polarised echo chambers, 'Soft Facts' will explore the ways in which layers of truth work in both a political setting, and an intimate one – how the manipulation of information in the wider world has implications for one's own private life.

We have now secured support from BFI Network to produce the short, which we intend to shoot in the first quarter of 2021

The team have discussed a feature film expanding on the stories of the characters and building on the themes of fake news and disinformation campaigns.



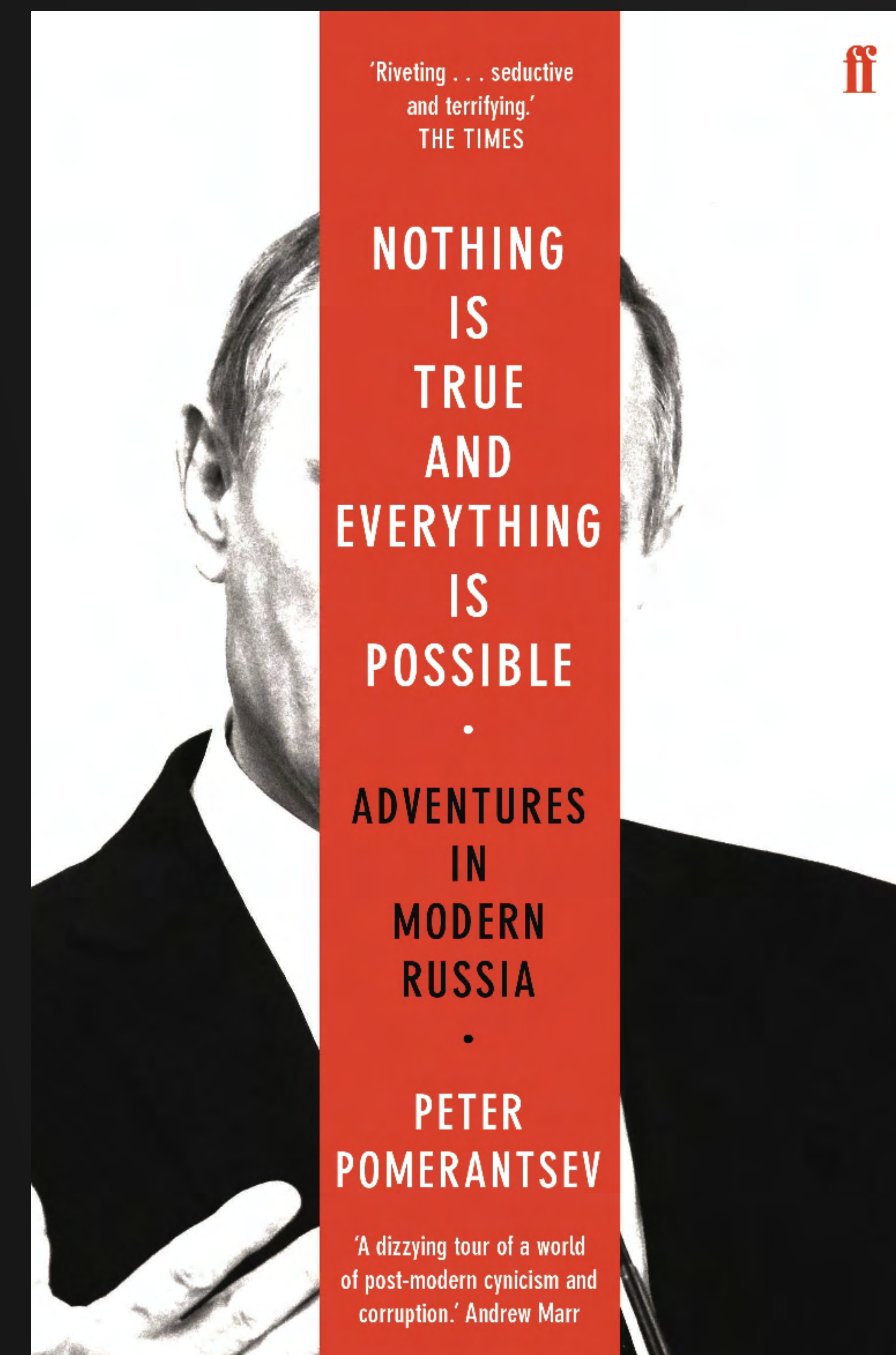
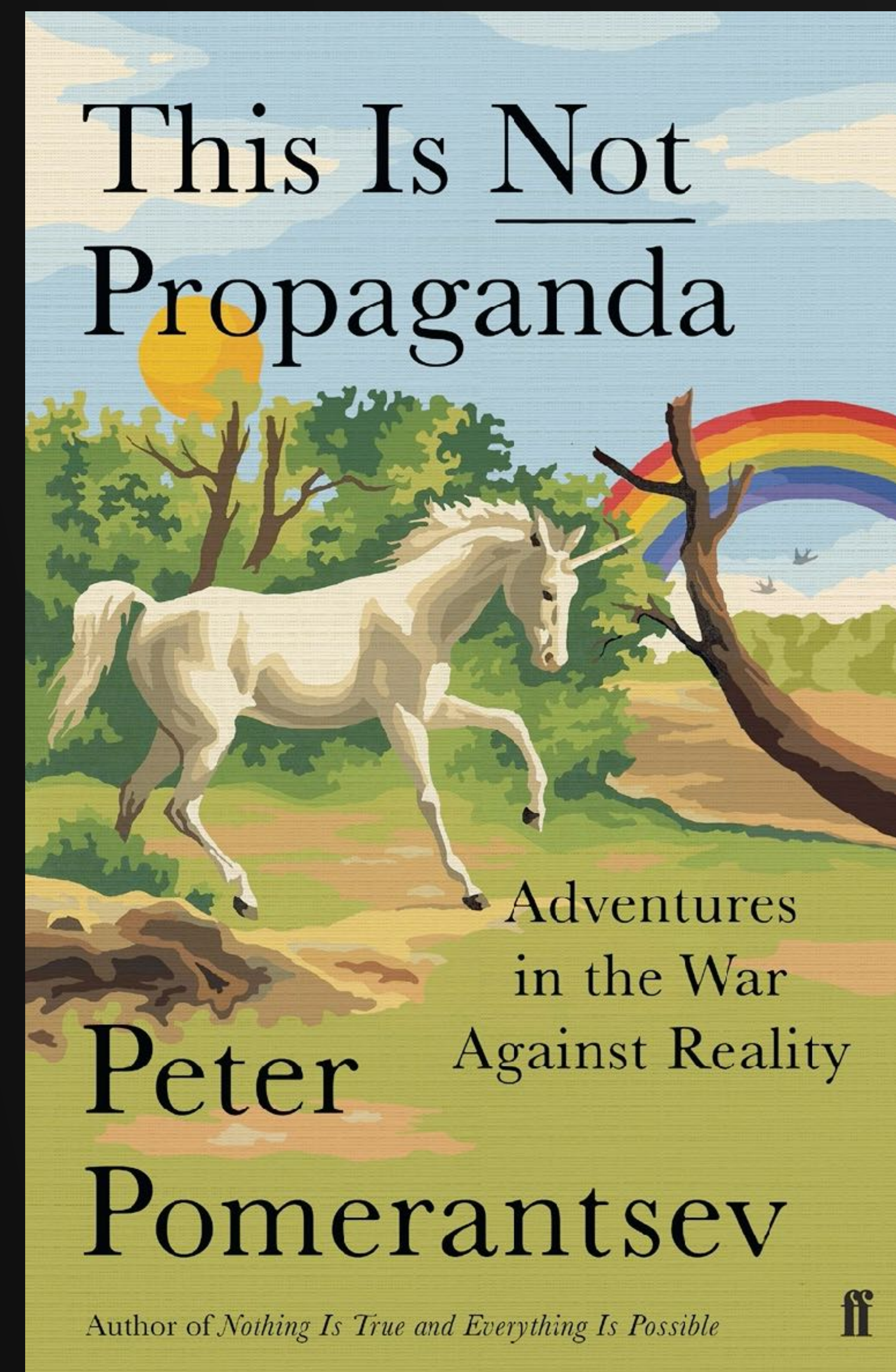


# KEY INFO

- BFI Network backed short film
- Production company Sixteen Films (Ken Loach & Rebecca O'Brien) *Sorry We Missed You, I, Daniel Blake, The Wind that Shakes the Barley.*
- Shooting in Leeds - Early July 2021
- Co-written by Peter Pomerantsev - author of *'Nothing is True and Everything is Possible'* (2014) and *'This is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality'* (2019)

**BFI NETWORK**

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# SOFT FACTS

BECAUSE FAKE NEWS BEGINS  
AT HOME

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