The Desire for Thruth and the Political

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"Truth is where the funny lies"
On the Desire for Truth in Serious Times
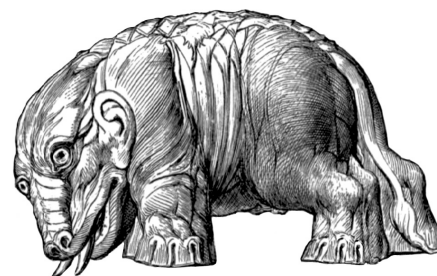
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Abstract

What can contemporary satire tell us about the desire for truth and the political as well as the mechanisms of sense-making in a "post-truth" era? In this introduction to the special issue on the "desire for truth and the political" we sketch a number of features of an emerging and fragile regime of truth. We argue that the crumbling certainty over truth's role in democratic politics has brought about the rise of a range of agencies, devices, and ethics that aim to restore the power of truth in different ways. While fact checking, moralizing, or calls to reason mark such a desire for truth in standard political communication, we explore political satire as a more vivid approach to the relationship between truth and the political, one that works by mobilizing a range of affective and imaginative registers. Focusing on segments of The Daily Show with Trevor Noah that satirize President Trump, we see the damaged truth-democracy-arrangement unpacked in its funniest, most outrageous, and serious articulation.

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Demise of the Will to Truth

In a 2018 interview with Oprah Winfrey, Trevor Noah, the host of The Daily Show, reflected on what he has learned from his comedian mentors: "The truth is where the funny lies. Tell the truth and that's where you'll find the funniest jokes. And, so for me, in pursuing the funny I pursue the truth. And if I find the truth then the funny will marry with that."[1] If the value of truth in public spheres is vanishing in contemporary democracies, in what registers can we find the desire for truth withstanding and reinventing itself? If truth never simply *is* (or *was*, for that matter), but always needs to be established, performed and accepted, what are the mechanisms at work in these supposedly post-truth times? Could it be that some of today's most ingenious, heartfelt acts of truth come from public comedians, who by exaggerating, making unexpected and absurd connections, or by sharing their outrage, intervene in a "post truth" public landscape, and by that, re-invoke a desire for truth? Television news parody programs such as The Daily Show, The Late Night Show hosted by Stephen Colbert or John Oliver's Last Week Tonight play a peculiar role for both reflecting passionately about the current crisis of truth in political affairs and articulating new imageries through an affective range of de/familiarizations. What can contemporary satire tell us about the desire for truth and the political as well as about the mechanisms of sense-making in an era that has been diagnosed as post-truth?

Yet, what does it mean to say that we live in times of post-truth politics? And, do we? What is actually new in today's politics if we consider that lying has always been a part of political life, even considered virtuous at times (Arendt 1967; Jay 2010)? While some argue that post-truth, i.e., the counter-movement to the scientific mainstream and the political establishment alike, is as old as philosophy itself and deeply ingrained in Western intellectual thinking (Fuller 2018), others succumb to the idea that we definitely live in an era of post-truth where the boundaries between truth and lies, honesty and dishonesty, fiction and nonfiction are blurring, and where deceiving others has become a disgraceful habit (Keyes 2004). Novel seems to be the bluntness with which factual accuracy and truthfulness are being dismissed, if not as virtues then at least as an accepted basis of democratic consensus and dispute, often with devastating consequences: for migrants who suffer from sudden policy changes that render illegal what had previously been legal or consistent practice; for allies who can no longer trust in the observance of contracts and agreements; or for global politics when the ecological crisis is denied. This, for some, is what constitutes the real challenge: "the blindness to extinction" and, perhaps, the realization that, "[o]nce you question truth, the human, the enlightenment and the veracity of the news, *there is nothing left*" (Colebrook 2018).

We argue that the crumbling certainty over truth's role in democratic politics is not a matter of having entered an age *after* or *beyond* truth. Rather, we want to ask how we can grasp and make sense of a *regime of truth* (Foucault 2014) whose emergence we have been witnessing over the past years. What are its contours, its dynamics and rules? Truth regimes, in Foucault's sense, determine

what counts as a true or false statement, what are the rules according to which things are presented and represented, and how subjects are encouraged and constrained to perform truthfully (see Brion/Harcourt 2014, 297). Truth regimes change over historical periods—they are owed to particular epistemes (Foucault 1989) of what is seeable and sayable—and with particular cultures or styles of reasoning and debate.

Perhaps, then, we have entered a new regime of truth, for which Trump, Brexit & Co. are only the most visible symptoms. Here are some preliminary features that may delineate our current condition (and we might be forgiven to turn to these obvious examples to make our point):

First, *the self-referentiality of truth*. Trump has been called a bullshit artist for his lack of any "concern with truth" and his indifference to "how things really are" (Frankfurt 2005, 34; see also Wenzel 2016). But there is more: with Trump, we cannot be sure whether he is telling a lie or nonsense or whether we better believe what we hear—or all of the three at the same time. Uncertainty is intrinsic to this regime (see Krasmann 2018, 7), where a different form of truth emerges, one that is utterly self-referential and triumphant. Any claim or gesture is inspired not by a concern with truth but by the will to affectively evoke and entertain supremacy (Drápal et al. 2016)—and to test loyalty. It is a form of clientelism that seeks to create and foster the desire to participate in that supremacy and feeling of superiority, and that divides the population into those who deserve to be part of that supremacy and those who do not. In this sense, truth and power are complicit in new ways.[2] As Russia expert Masha Gessen reasons in an interview with Trevor Noah on a peculiar similarity in the sovereign style of Trump and Putin:

> Everything about them is different. But there are certain things that I think are characteristic of autocrats. [...] For Trump and Putin one amazing similarity is the way they lie. [...] Most politicians [...] who sometimes lie will want you to [...] believe something. These guys lie to assert power. The more absurd what they say is, the more power they have asserted.[3]

Accepting, embracing the lie or the triumphant bullshitting, regardless of whether one believes it, is a way of giving in to power. And this ability to assert power without the need to make others believe renders the supremacy even more attractive. This is neither a ploy of the classic charismatic leader nor mere populism, but rather a strategy that forges followers by making them believe in nothing but one's own supremacy.

Second, *the affectivity of truth*. Emotions have always been part of truth telling (e.g., in the sense of prophecy, believing, fearing a truth). Telling the truth and learning the truth may shake us, touch us. It may disconcert and confuse us, and it may cause relief, a feeling of recognition or even enlightenment. While these moments are rarely accepted as part of (modern) scientific truth claims, they are indeed ingredients of those forms of truth-telling that cannot be divorced from the particular truth-telling, such as in ethical practices, criminal law procedures or political disputes (Foucault 2000, 2001; Valverde, this volume). But in the emerging regime of truth, emotions occupy a different

[2] Interesting in that regard is Clara Casabó's (2018) observation that post-truth politics à la Trump, ironically, breaks with the regime of neoliberal evidence-based and expert-oriented government.

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_7dw8bXRpk&feature=youtu.be (05/11/2018).

space. Especially striking is how people's fear (Bröckling 2016; Bargetz 2017), their pain and sentimentality (Berlant 2000) and their rage[4] is treated as a matter of truth that cannot be topped by any rational reasoning, including that which concerns people's alleged self-interests (Hochschild 2016, 8ff.). Truth, in other words, is cast as the property of "true patriots" whose pain and sentimentality, whose fears of what is yet to come, and whose outrage are taken as a peculiar deep truth (of feeling, as it were) (Hentschel 2018). Emotions also matter as that which does not allow us to exit our respective bubbles, because we are trapped between what Arlie Hochschild (2016, 5f.) has famously called "empathy walls". Both modes of affective truth dwell in a state of intensity where they are easy to mobilize and to fuse with other emotions that allow for reclaiming their own truth.

Third, a *dark sense of finitude*. While Trump and others deny climate change and related man-made threats, this truth regime coincides with a new awareness of finitude and the human being's subject position in the world. The truth today, it seems, exposes its radically existential dimension. Realizing its own capacity to destroy the environment in an era of the Anthropocene, humankind finds itself in the situation not only of reorienting its relationship with the multiple fellow beings inhabiting earth (Mbembe 2015) but also of rethinking its position as a subject of cognition (Colebrook 2012): the earth could survive without human beings (Grove/Chandler 2017).

Fourth, *truth without meaning*. On a less existential level, this experience, interestingly, recurs with the rise of big data and algorithms. Algorithms exceed the human capacity of cognition not only in their ability to parse incomputable data and render them visible and comprehensible to human cognition and perception in the first place; they also deploy a different mode of cognition that challenges established human sense making (Hörl 2011). Algorithms do not think hermeneutically in terms of words and language (Rouvroy 2012), nor do they search for causalities and explanations. When bringing disparate parameters together on the basis of resemblance and analogy (Aradau 2015), they are able to systematically draw unforeseen connections and, given certain inputs and rules, generate novel sets of relationships (Clough et al. 2015, 153f.). As Patricia Clough et al. expound, in view of its "capacity to be adaptable and 'creative'", digital computing problematizes the relationship between observer and observing subject (154f.), and, perhaps once again, the sovereignty of the human gaze. At the same time, algorithms ignore the world outside of data, their world is flat: they can communicate, though without "understanding" (Esposito 2017, 257). They may figure out the patterns of our behavior and our decision making—in such a way that they sometimes seem to know us better than we do ourselves. But they do not have a sense for the truth of our "inner selves" (Foucault 1993), nor for the world of texts and interpretation where the truth can only be grasped through, and is produced by, language—that on its part will always fail to ultimately determining the truth (Derrida 2001).

Fifth, *a regime of the all-visible, without appearance*. As regards the formation of public opinion, big data and algorithms also contribute to a shift away from reliance on facts to settle arguments towards addressing "public sentiment" and impression. As William Davies (2016) observes, whereas

[4] From a right-wing side: see e.g. Marc Jongen (2017): *Migration und Thymostraining – Dr. Marc Jongen beim IfS*, Feb 24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cg_KuESI7rY (05/11/2018), who draws on Sloterdijk (2006).

classical statistics is usually deliberately produced by expert design, big data are constantly being collected by default. And instead of producing facts in terms of rising or decreasing crime rates, unemployment figures or numbers of economic growth, parsing social media typically is to measure how a given politician, political body or policy is being "perceived", with algorithms virtually delivering real time-updates. According to Jacques Rancière (1998, 103f.), the classical survey is already a consensus machine that erases a democratic sense. Producing "a regime of the all-visible" that presents the "public opinion" as the epiphenomenon "to the body of the people", it renders difference, and dissensus, impossible. If mere representation is what prevails, it leaves no place for appearance to occur. In today's world of social media, we might conclude, the regime of the all-visible is perhaps more prevalent than ever, while the idea of the people raising their voice in an unforeseeable manner is fading away. There is not even a body: the body of the people to be represented, let alone a sense of a people that would elude (re-)presentation. It is a truth regime that faces us with a new challenge of thinking and enacting the political.

To be sure, talking of "regimes" is not to say that we were captives of these worlds and that there were no ways of seeing and thinking things differently. Our point is a different one: the emerging regime of truth—its self-referentiality, its affectivity, its dark sense of finitude, its algorithmic meaninglessness and its all-visibility with no appearance of the political—points us to an understanding of truth as utterly relational, as communicative practice. Truth is not just lying there in its bare form, to be taken notice of or carried away. It must be recognized and it must be said, spoken out, and a public is needed to accept this truth. Truth always involves establishing a meaningful connection, between utterances, acts, people, environments, histories, ideas, and so on. And we only have our senses and our knowledge to experience and judge what is true. As Claire Colebrook holds, with reference to J. Hills Miller (2001, 71): if something were universally and unquestionably true there would be no need to say it. Or to put it another way: nobody is in the position to say that something is unquestionably true, as "universality can have no copyright". And "to say that something *is*" only makes sense "if it is articulated against what *is not*" (Colebrook 2004, 166; see also Vogelmann, this volume). Truth is contested, and it must be open to contestation, which is what constitutes its political character (Vogelmann 2014).

Political Satire and the Desire for Truth

The demise of the will to truth in the contemporary political field brings about the rise of a range of agencies, devices, and ethics that aim to restore the power of truth in different ways. This reaches from "devices for the production of a fragile reassurance", as Ben Anderson has termed the proliferation of fact checking (Anderson/Mühlhoff forthcoming), to calls to "believe in truth", as Timothy Snyder has famously argued,[5] and to not allow emotions to reign and come back instead to the grounds of rational reasoning. The demise of truth comes with the desire for it. Yet while fact checking and calls to reason are standards in political communication, they are only partially equipped

[5] Number 8 of Synder's *20 lessons from the 20th century on how to survive in Trump's America* (November 21, 2016) reads: "Believe in truth. To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power because there is no basis upon which to do so. If nothing is true, then all is spectacle. The biggest wallet pays for the most blinding lights." http://inthesetimes.com/article/19658/20-lessons-from-the-20th-century-on-how-to-survive-in-trumps-america (05/11/2018).

to address the current political condition in which the amount of "noise" and "bullshitting" is overwhelming them. We want to take a closer look at a set of strategies that launch a different, perhaps more vivid approach to truth in times of its uncertainty. As we will try to show, expressions of the desire for truth that we find in Trevor Noah's daily satire of Trump may be symptomatic for the emerging regime of truth that we are trying to grasp in this special issue, while pointing to some of its most central mechanisms and fighting its most cynical effects.

Satire has been "accused of breeding cynicism" while also being "heralded as invaluable in speaking truth to power", Rebecca Higgie (2014, 183) writes. We are interested in what "speaking truth to power" can mean today and probe it as *making sense by evoking a range of imaginative and affective registers.* While scholars in the fields of comedy see the essence of satire in the power of carving out the absurdity in power arrangements and doing so by shocking its audience (Kaye/Johnson 2016, 132), it seems to us that, with the present's intrinsically uncertain relation between truth and democratic politics, satire's endeavor is more serious. The "constructive social criticism" (ibid.) that is at work here operates through a range of affective and imaginative registers that we want to explore. Rather than a cynicism about power, what comes to the fore is a desire for truth and a reopening of the political.

In The Daily Show, Noah addresses the breaking off of truth from the political through a range of acts of re-connecting—speech acts, persons, imaginaries—not only in such a way as to surprise us, and thus to make us laugh;[6] but also to make us see things differently, to move us, and, in Sara Ahmed's (2006) sense, to orient us. Emotions do not need to get out of the way for this endeavor, but are made to work hard. Noah engages in a mode of truth-telling—introducing new affective and imaginative registers to reach out to different relations of and concerns with truth.

By tracing four imaginary personifications of Trump that Trevor Noah evokes in different segments on the president, we want to carve out some of these registers that invite our, the audience's, affective thoughts and judgments to transgress common framings. These personifications are extracted from three shows covering the time when Trump was still a candidate in October 2015, to the week after his inauguration in 2017 up to the moment when an anonymous senior official in the White House published an opinion piece about the unrest in the White House in September 2018. The personifications reach beyond more conventional critical wisdoms about the president, according to which Trump is unfit for office, incoherent, unpresidential and much more. These personifications are at the same time perceptions about "us" in times of Trump. Together they invoke affective registers that, we argue, help us re/imagine truthful relations in uncertain political times.

We Hostages: Prelude to a Scary Reality

A first register that Trevor Noah employs consists of delineating an uncanny imagination of us as hostages in a new truth regime reigned by a man with a dark sense of the world. And so he begins his segment on January 21, 2017, a

[6] As Hedvig Ördén (2018, 24), drawing on Helmuth Plessner (1970), observes, it is the "unanswerableness" that provokes our laughter: in situations where things make a surprising appearance or take "an unforeseen turn", provided, of course, they lack of an existential threat.

week after Trump began his presidency, with a sentence full of fervor:**[7]** "It's been almost a week, a whole week since Donald Trump became president! But it *feels* like a lot longer *[intense booing in the audience]*." Noah hit it. So much has happened in that first week. He shares his grim vision on the matter of reality in times of Trump: not only that Trump, "from the get-go, is determined to creating his own reality", but "one week into Trump's Presidency [...] the realization is beginning to dawn: The difference between *candidate* Trump and *president* Trump is that now we have to live in his crazy reality". Zooming into a one-on-one conversation with a CNN reporter in the White House we see Trump, in a serious manner, leaning forward to his interviewer, as if passing on an important wisdom: "David", he says to the CNN reporter, "I know you are a sophisticated guy. The world is a mess. The world is as angry as it gets. Well, you think this is gonna cause a little more anger? The world is an angry place!"

Zooming out we see Noah again, befuddled, confused almost: "Jesus, Dude", he says "if he's gonna talk like that, I feel like he needs a different style of make-up." And suddenly a make up mask is hanging over Trump's face making him look like the joker in *The dark knight (Batman)* (see image 1). Then, the sequence is played again, with Trump speaking the same words, but this time with the joker make-up, his skin whitened, his lips red. It is scary. The audience explodes clapping. For the final sequence, Noah is pointing to Trump with his new joker make-up: "We are all his hostage. He's taken over *our* world."

The Daily Show - Welcome to President Trump's Reality

It is an uncanny moment: the make-up estranges Trump, while letting something extraneous, the face of the joker, reveal an element of familiarity and make us imagine a scary co-presence. Trump becomes the figure with a cynical view of the world for whom any action based on a sophisticated assessment is not worth the effort, or simply naïve.**[8]** The joker in batman is cryptic and obscure; his world one of deep darkness. "Some men just want to watch the world burn" is an iconic quote created in the movie. What Trump's "taking over our world" and making us his "hostage" means, remains open. But Noah has offered the imagery of a scary figure that we will not forget.

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2YLS8oNmls (05/11/2018).

[8] For a beautiful framing of the uncanny in this sense, see https://uncanny.ici-berlin.org: "The 'uncanny' delineates a strange proximity between the known and the unknown, either as something familiar presenting itself under an extraneous shape, or as something extraneous revealing an element of familiarity in its features."

Message from Africa: Familiarizing

A second remarkable register that Trevor Noah operates with is that of familiarizing us, the audience, with something we may otherwise perceive as having nothing to do "with us". Trump, we learn, is like an African president, an African dictator even. Noah, the young colored man from South Africa, recognize the striking parallels: "For me as an African, there is just something familiar to Trump, that makes me feel at home", Noah says in October 2015,[9] playing a clip of then South African president Jacob Zuma's xenophobic remarks in combination with Trump's infamous statements on alleged Mexican rapists. And, after a segment on Trump talking about autism and vaccines, Noah takes on a teacher's pose and asks: "Now: Was that factual? No! But was it presidential? Depends where you come from." The segment continues with a report on then Gambia's president Jammeh talking about curing AIDS with bananas and comes back to Trevor Noah bursting with laughter while himself taking a bite of a banana murmuring: "better safe than sorry". Then, he states with seriousness: "What I am trying to say is: Donald Trump is presidential, he just happens to be running on the wrong continent. In fact, once you realize that Trump is basically the perfect African President you start to notice the similarities everywhere" —while showing clips of Trump bragging with his richness, his intellect and his confidence of victory, and matching those statements with words by Uganda's Idi Amin, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi.

Donald Trump - America's African President: The Daily Show

After years of openly questioning Obama's legitimacy to be in office over his "being from Africa", now Trump himself is put into the costume of a stereotypical African autocrat (see image 2). Trevor Noah has reflected in many interviews on his ability to see things from an outsider's perspective, making American politics strange, and unsettling a certain taken-for-grantedness. Commentators have given him this credit for that, for example Keishin Amstrong from the BBC asserts that "Noah's outsider view allows the US to better see itself, and his comedy is so funny because it's that much more true".[10] It is a change of perspective that the anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff

[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FPrJxTvgdQ (05/11/2018).

(2006, 6) have articulated over a decade ago. Might it be, they asked, that "the world at large is looking ever more 'postcolonial'"? Long before autocrats emerging so prominently in the political leadership of Western democracies, the Comaroffs' speculation went that "Africa in particular, and the South in general, come, in significant respects, to anticipate the unfolding history of Euro-America", and that looking at and from the "'Global South' [...] affords privileged insight into the workings of the world at large" (Comaroff/Comaroff 2012, 114). It is a way of narrating modernity from its undersides, "like those maps that, as a cosmic joke, invert planet earth to place the south on top, the north below" (117). In Noah's cosmic joke, then, the perspective is downside up; and the argument is not so much a historical one, as many critics of Trump are trying to make when asking how much of a fascist he is, but it is an argument involving an elsewhere that he can give testimony of. He acts as the "messenger" from Africa at the risk of brushing aside any sophistication in narrating African realities. And he catches us on our own stereotypes, which are instantly turned around once we see the traces of this far-away reality in "our own" world: we begin to realize that Trump came to be the dictator of our reality.

We Passengers in the Hands of the Killer Pilot: On (Not) Showing Your Face

The third register is about the forms of becoming visible in this troubled political moment. Noah introduces the breaking news about an anonymous senior White House official's opinion piece in the New York Times of September 5, 2018, on the resistance against Trump inside the White House.[11] "There is a secret group of people", he comments *[raising the voice]*,

> within the White House, actively working to curb president Trump. Which is wild because this means this whole time we've been dealing with the watered down version of Trump? You telling me that this *[a public image of Trump making a speech appears]* is the better version? [...] This is diet Trump? That's what you're saying?

Instead of limiting himself to the criticism that the anonymous voice didn't even dare to show her face, as was the instant reaction of many commentators to this op-ed, Noah reverses the logic of its secretive gesture: conditions must be more desperate than we imagined if people in the White House are covertly working hard to avert the worst. But why, Noah echoes the public irritation, this revelation now at all? We hear a female voice reading a quote from the article: "It may be cold comfort in this chaotic era, but Americans should know that there are adults in the room. We fully recognize what is happening. And we are trying to do what's right even when Donald Trump won't." Noah *[staring, as if trying to understand what this means]:*

> Ok, that doesn't make me feel any better. Because before this, I knew there was turbulence. But now, someone just came on the P.A. system and is like *[in the manner of a flight attendant who makes her announcement in the best*

[10] http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20170918-how-trevor-noah-conquered-us-comedy (05/11/2018).

[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whQE6JnNoqM&t=320s&frags=pl%2Cwn (05/11/2018).

mood ever]. 'Uh, ladies and gentlemen, the pilot is actively trying to crash the plane, but don't be alarmed. We're doing everything we can to stop him. Mikey got a pretty good choke hold and I said some pretty harsh words. So please keep your seat belts fastened and enjoy your peanuts and tax cuts.

After a pause staring into the camera he shouts into a cheering crowd: "This is wild!" What is being conveyed here is not only an imagery of Trump the killer pilot. What is also called out are the professionals working with him who try to calm people down by mobilizing parts of their power that appear to be ridiculously useless in the face of the actual threat at hand. We are all in this plane. And no, neither peanuts nor tax cuts—the opium of the people—will get us out of this situation, we might continue to imagine.

Message from the Future: Imagining Change

The fourth register takes us to an imagery of Trump stripped of his power. Trump's legal team, as described in a new book, prepares Trump to be interviewed by FBI investigator Robert Mueller. A media report is now read out according to which, after an interview rehearsal that went really bad, one of Trump's lawyers advised him: "Don't testify, it's either that or an orange jumpsuit." Noah repeats the statement in his words, slowly: "Don't testify or you end up in an orange jumpsuit. How badly did Trump have to lie in a 'fake interview' for his lawyer to tell him that? […] And, by the way, 'orange jumpsuit' is also what Melania calls Trump's naked body. Yeah." *[audience cheering, wooing]*

We do not see a picture of this, but we can still imagine what this means. The orange jumpsuit is what prisoners get to wear, and what Melania Trump allegedly calls his body, which, we may assume, is very much untrue. The double interpretation of the jumpsuit metaphor as Trump being stripped off his lies, his power, his entourage, and his clothes. Trump, naked: the king without clothes. But this is no consolation, it is only to make us imagine that the bullshitting and the constant back and forth between telling the truth (maybe) and openly lying is not the end of the story and of Trump's power to literally misguide us ("How badly did Trump have to lie in a 'fake interview' for his lawyer to tell him that?").

So, what do we learn from these four imaginaries on the desire for truth in this current condition? Trump, *the joker* (the uncanny, who loves evil and thinks that any civilized act is naïve); Trump, *the African dictator* (with all the associations from narcissism, "tribalism", to not caring about the rule of law and the addiction to power); Trump, *the killer pilot* (willingly crashing the plain and exposing his own people to death), and even Trump *in the orange jumpsuit* (potentially stripped of his power, and his clothes) are scary imageries and confront us with the severity of the situation.

True Entanglements

"Satires moralise and they also simplify", writes literary scholar Robert Phiddian (2013, 52), but the work that the Trump segments in The Daily Show are different. Rather than moralizing, we see Trevor Noah assessing the intensity of the current political turbulence. By addressing matters of truth and lie as "matters of the risible" (Berlant/Ngai 2017, 235), Noah is far from ridiculing or trivializing what is going on. More than mocking political realities and their protagonists, he unpacks the damaged truth-democracy-arrangement in its funniest, most outrageous, and serious core. Noah himself appears to be enervated, angry, passionate, puzzled; he is laughing about how ridiculous things are, while not accepting, not giving in. This mode of involving oneself emotionally and speaking in a first-person voice (e.g., "what hit me most", "what strikes me", "what I don't understand") is a form of truth-telling, but it is not moralizing in the sense of judging, preaching or making one feel bad.

And, rather than simplifying, we see this kind of satire engaged in drawing a range of lighthearted connections, while bringing in new elements to complicate the matter. All of the Trump segments discussed above master a double de/familiarizing technique. When Trump is painted in joker make-up or is likened to an African dictator, when he is the protagonist in an imaginary killer plane scene or a naked president we may call this defamiliarizing (Palmer 1987; Druick 2009). He is made strange, while an outrageous costume, a ridiculous make-up, or a killer movie setting don't feel implausible anymore; instead, they make sense and are familiarized. It is in this cheerful, sometimes uneasy, strange yet familiar sense-making that we see political satire reinventing "venues of critical thinking" (Kaye/Johnson 2016, 131).

In these venues, truth must not get stripped of affective matter. On the contrary, Noah seems to do affective work for us, the audience, sometimes even on our behalf, to help us see the way through the current condition. While wanting our laughter, he is not cynical, but calls out the darkest cynicism that the Trump regime embodies. He thus not only offers variations to imagine Trump, but also points to a politically engaged subjectivity in post-truth times, transported by his own mode of truth-telling, as the one who masters the double technique of de/familiarizing. It is this mindset of orienting us, even if through absurd and exaggerated elements of style, that Noah's satire counteracts Trump's triumphant bullshitting and reopens the political in a refreshing way. It is a gesture of entangling the objects of his joke (and us), while not letting Trump off the hook, not allowing him to dwell in a space of un-boundedness with regard to truth. The questions Noah raises again and again "who is this?" (pointing to Trump) or "what does this even mean?" (reacting to a Trump statement) expose the indifference to truth in the name of supremacy as part of what holds us in the "grip of dread". Dread, David Theo Goldberg (2018) maintains,

> is the sense that there is no truth in the matter, nothing to
> know or grasp. Dread trades on the reduction to absolute
> absence: no-knowledge, no-truth, non-relation, nothing left

> to lose. Dread, in short, is unspeakable. Or more precise-
> ly, the urgent reach for a truth incessantly evaporating. […]
> Where dread privatizes the affective, isolates it as discrete
> individualized feeling, all that is left to this communality of
> feeling is pure futility.

The desire for truth in these troubling times, then, has to do with calling out the grip of the cynicism of no-knowledge and no-truth, with re-publicizing emotions and drawing lines of anger and laughter, and with declaring what is to lose. The "uncanny" evoked in some of the segments on Trump lures us right into the grip of the dread.

"Humor", Colebrook argues, "is not the reversal of cause and effect but the abandonment of the 'before and after' relations—the very line of time—that allow us to think in terms of causes and intentions, of grounds and consequents" (2004, 136). Trevor Noah's satire takes our mind back and forth, it is by immersing our imagination, just for a moment, into the grim reality of dictatorships, clientelism and corruption on the African continent, that we comprehend that this chilling world is not so far away as we thought, and nonetheless that it is different. Unlike irony, satire—and Noah in his show—does not aspire to a superior position, one that presumes to know better. Rather, it "examines life and its inherent propensities" (145). The absurd and the realistic situation intermingle and merge: we are hostages in the plane as it is about to crash, as we are of a government that is about to destroy everything that we might call progressive achievements or foundations of democratic thinking. Or we witness Trump, the unscrupulous potentate insistently speaking to the CNN reporter, entangling—and thus taking—him, and us, into the world that is "a mess" and that does not deserve any naïve humanism. We are being involved and see ourselves being involved in a reality we wish wasn't real.

In *Living in the End Times*, Slavoj Žižek (2010, 328) describes a gap between knowledge and belief in our socio-psychological perception of the impossible, the possible, and the real. "We know the (ecological) catastrophe is possible, probably even, yet we do not believe it will really happen." But once the catastrophe appears, it is "'renormalized', perceived as part of the normal run of things, as always already having been possible". This, Žižek explains, also happened with the victory of Trump in the US: first it was "unimaginable" for liberals, "a bad joke" that Trump was going to be elected. But then, "once it happened, it was instantly renormalized". Noah's political satire operates at the verge of such a renormalization of Trump and the disorienting relation to truth that surrounds his reign. Far from simply enacting the new reality as a "bad joke" and far from merely supplying relief, he puts his joking skills to work against this renormalization, i.e., to not let the lies to be passed over, to call out the cynicism, to expose some of the most dramatic features of this reign, and to revive our senses—of laughter, but also of anger and outrage, as we realize that this possibility indeed has come true. It is the recognition of this capture, and the inventive description of it, that may be at the beginning of thinking truth's relation to the political anew. We may laugh, and yet it does not produce relief. Rather, Noah's joke is more like a "lifeline" (Ahmed 2006,

17f.), i.e., an investment, a promise, and something that may be thrown to us to help us "get out of an impossible world" —a lifeline of laughter in a political realm where perhaps nothing less than the survival of democracy is at stake.

Introducing the Issue

To find truth in the funny—all while contemplating its darkest entanglements—is but one way of addressing matters of truth in our current conditions. The special issue sets out to cast a range of perspectives on the entanglements between truth, the political, affective publics and their subjectivities; in short, it looks for reorienting matters of truth in uncertain political times. In the remainder of this introduction we would like to come back to some of the features with which we began to delineate the current regime of truth (its self-referentiality and affectivity, its meaninglessness, and the all-visibility without appearance) and interweave them with the contributions in this special issue.

As Rainer *Mühlhoff* shows, a contemporary style of authoritarian politics operates on a highly affective register—and it is self-referential: the cynical will to disturb and destroy the established political apparatus receives the more attention and approval the more it deviates from the common matter-of-fact style of politics. The notion of affective susceptibility ("Angänglichkeit"), Mühlhoff elaborates, allows us to capture the gist of this populism under current media-technological conditions. In a similar vein, Mariana *Valverde* rediscovers Adorno's notion of a "jargon of authenticity" for making sense of current populist styles. As she demonstrates for the context of Toronto, a "combination of almost contentless platitudes and claims about unique individuality" constitutes a belief in the truth of power today. Avowal, in this populist attitude, not only becomes self-referential but, in a way, also meaningless. If subjectivity in the computer age is characterized by the informed subject type, Janosik *Herder* shows that this subject constitution is a process of affective in-formation, using the example of the practice of self-tracking. The relation we establish to our "true self" is governed by feedback-loops of information that are joyously being perceived and integrated into our own cosmos. Truth, here, means the mere perfection of information. Far beyond such a perfection, Norbert *Paulo* addresses the environment of social media where the epistemic rules of establishing truth to date are deeply uncertain. Post-truth thinking that emerges in this environment, the author argues, may nonetheless be considered "rational". People who navigate through such epistemic uncertainty rely on their own deliberation—and on trusting those whose opinions they share anyway. Interestingly, this is not only true with regard to the stereotypical filter bubble: to the extent that we all tend to overvalue our own judgements and trust the opinions of those "like us", while underestimating the value of expert reasoning—we all think in a post-truth way. Academia is claiming a last stronghold against this arbitrariness. Today's prevalent peer review procedures in academia have been widely criticized as fostering a mainstreaming process where scientists are subjected to a regime of all-visibility that minimizes the space of dissensus and non-conformist

creativity: there is, in Rancière's words, no space for appearance. As Peter *Niesen* elucidates in a plea for *The Cautionary Use of Fakes*, the scientific hoax is not simply exposing this regime. Instead, "falling for fakes" may be worth the risk and even help us thinkers to stay more honest. Truth, the author reminds us, is not "lurking" in an autonomous sphere, "beyond all possible justifications", but must be approached in contestation, which is the only way of re-appearance. Similarly, Frieder *Vogelmann* argues that there is no "epistemic sovereign" to defend truth. Drawing on Arendt's and Rawls' work, the author goes beyond post-truth diagnostics as well as relativist stances in order to develop a procedural conception of truth. This leads us to a productive reversion of the supposed tension between truth and politics and between the idea of a truth that is always contested, and therefore too weak, and at the same time despotic, and therefore too strong, to meet the political aspiration of consensus. If there is a sense of finitude today, there is also the force of truth waiting to be enacted, re-oriented and set on new paths.**[12]**

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The Problem of Post-Truth
Rethinking the Relationship between Truth and Politics

Frieder Vogelmann

Abstract

'Post-truth' is a failed concept, both epistemically and politically because its simplification of the relationship between truth and politics cripples our understanding and encourages authoritarianism. This makes the diagnosis of our 'post-truth era' as dangerous to democratic politics as relativism with its premature disregard for truth. In order to take the step beyond relativism and 'post-truth', we must conceptualise the relationship between truth and politics differently by starting from a 'non-sovereign' understanding of truth.

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Has politics, has society, well, have 'we' lost the respect for, or even worse, the interest in truth? This is the animating idea behind the newest diagnosis of our times, according to which we now live in a 'post-truth era'. Steve Tesich, a screenwriter and playwright, coined the phrase 'post-truth' in 1992 to accuse the North American public of silently accepting the lies by the administration of President George Bush (Senior). Tesich's drastic diagnosis is:

> We are rapidly becoming prototypes of a people that totalitarian monsters could only drool about in their dreams. All the dictators up to now have had to work hard at suppressing the truth. We, by our actions, are saying that this is no longer necessary, that we have acquired a spiritual mechanism that can denude truth of any significance. In a very fundamental way we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world. (Tesich 1992, 13)

The diagnosis didn't catch on in 1992, and it didn't in 2004, when Ralph Keyes published the first book to use "post-truth era" (Keyes 2004) as a title. Today, it has. The Oxford Dictionaries as well as the Association for the German Language (Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache) elected 'post-truth' as the Word of the Year 2016,[1] and its popularity is still growing, not only in the media but in scientific publications as well.[2]

I argue that the diagnosis of a 'post-truth era' is interesting—not in itself but as a symptom and because of its consequences. For 'post-truth' is a dangerous concept, both epistemically and politically: its simplification of the relationship between truth and politics cripples our understanding of it and encourages authoritarianism. This makes the diagnosis of 'post-truth' as dangerous to democratic politics as relativism with its premature disregard for truth. In order to take the step beyond relativism and 'post-truth', we must conceptualise the relationship between truth and politics differently by starting from a 'non-sovereign' understanding of truth.

To arrive at this conclusion, I first examine the diagnosis of us living in a 'post-truth era' (I). Its attraction lies partly in 'solving' the conflict between two basic insights about the relationship between truth and politics by simply giving up one of them (II). I argue that letting go of either one leads to either relativism or authoritarianism. An adequate conceptualization of the relationship between truth and politics requires a non-sovereign understanding of truth that allows taking a more complex stance towards truth and politics (III).

I.   After Truth?

'Post-truth' is not a precisely defined concept. We best understand it by looking at three examples often cited as evidence for the diagnosis of a 'post-truth era'. The first, notorious, example is Donald Trump's claim that 1.5 million people attended his inauguration, filling the space "all the way back to the Washington Monument".[3] Confronted with aerial photographs clearly demonstrating the contrary, Sean Spicer, the White House Press Secretary, defended the president's statement and proclaimed: "This was

[1] See Oxford Dictionaries 2016 and Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache 2016.

[2] See, for example, Peters et al. 2018 or Fuller 2018.

[3] Remarks by President Trump and Vice President Pence at CIA Headquarters, 21 January 2017. http://transcripts.factcheck.org/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-cia-headquarters/. (05/09/2017).

the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration—period—both in person and around the globe." (Spicer, quoted in Fandos 2017) And the president's advisor Kellyanne Conway boldly stated that the White House had registered legitimate "alternative facts" and would continue to oppose those to the facts reported by CNN or the New York Times (Fandos 2017). This episode surely is an instance of politics being uninterested in truth, but is it indicative of politics in a 'post-truth era'? When exactly did the 'era of truth' end and the 'post-truth era' begin? With the fable of mobile weapons of mass destruction, forged by the administration of George W. Bush (Junior) to justify the second war in Iraq? Or, if we stick to US-history, with the fact that the "the Johnson Administration had systematically lied, not only to the public but also to Congress" (Apple Jr. 1996), as shown by the Pentagon Papers?

The second example is from Great Britain. The Vote Leave campaign promised voters during the Brexit election that leaving the European Union would free 350 million GBP per week which would be used to finance the National Health Service. Yet as early as 8am on the day after the vote, Nigel Farage backpedalled on the promise: "No I can't [guarantee it], and I would never have made that claim. That was one of the mistakes that I think the leave campaign made […]." (Farage, quoted in Travis 2016) Given that he was part of the campaign, we seem to have a further case of post-truth politics. Or is it merely another broken promise made during an election campaign?

My third example is less well-known but noteworthy because it concerns the institution that society commissions to produce truths: the university. High-quality newspapers and other media outlets frequently report that universities have become dominated by leftist activists who shame, boycott and bully those who dare to voice different opinions (in the case of German universities see e.g. Forth 2016; Novotny et al. 2016). The two biggest 'success stories', invented and circulated by conservative and right-winged think tanks, are the concerns over a pernicious 'political correctness' (Feldstein 1997; Weigel 2016) and the self-proclaimed 'anti-genderism' (Hark/Villa 2015; Redecker 2016). Charging others with 'political correctness' allows those making this allegation to keep on discriminating against women, people of colour or other minorities.[4] Similarly, the current wave of 'anti-genderism' mobilises anti-academic sentiments and rhetoric to portray the Gender Studies as mighty corruptors of the university and society at large. Since neither a left hegemony nor domination by the chronically underfunded Gender Studies has ever been shown to exist,[5] does the insistence on such claims amount to a turn away from a concern with truth even in high-quality media outlets? Or are we just witnessing a clash of political opinions about what kind of university, what kind of science and ultimately what kind of society we want?

These three examples, then, are not simply evidence for the diagnosis of a 'post-truth era' but give us three reasons to be sceptical as well. First, we should doubt the *historical* claim inherent in the diagnosis of a 'post-truth era', for we will not find an 'era of truth' that came before. This is not a trifle problem of a narrow-minded empiricist, for any diagnosis of our times must spell out what is new today, must locate a break somewhere in history to divide 'our times' from the times before, and must state the criteria that allow

[4] Cf. Chait 2015: "Political correctness is a style of politics in which the more radical members of the left attempt to regulate political discourse by defining opposing views as bigoted and illegitimate."

[5] Studies on student's political attitudes in Germany show that the political interest of students and the potential for the political left at the universities have consistently declined in the last 25 years: see Multrus et al. 2017, 79–81, 86–89; Bargel 2017, 26 f., 30. Counting all professors at German universities even marginal related to Gender Studies shows that they make up 0.4 to 0.5 percent of all German professors, virtually unchanged since 2000 (see Hark/Villa 2015, 22).

dating the divide (see Vogelmann forthcoming).**[6]** It would be rather self-defeating if those diagnosing and criticizing our 'post-truth era' eschewed concerns about the truths of their claims.

Second, we should doubt the diagnosis of the 'post-truth era' because we lack *conceptual* criteria for distinguishing between e.g. propaganda, ideology, lies and the disrespect for truth that the concept 'post-truth' is meant to single out (D'Ancona 2017, 26). The most common attempt identifies as new the cynicism displayed by those producing 'post-truth'. For example, Vincent F. Hendricks and Mads Vestergaard (2017, 5) suggest that 'post-truth' is distinct from propaganda and simple lies because lies or propaganda statements are meant to be believed and therefore cannot be openly acknowledged as propaganda or lies. This, however, seems to be a rather naïve idea of both 'post-truth' and propaganda or political lies. On the one hand, 'post-truth' statements are certainly meant to be believed, for they aim at orienting people's behaviour. Even obvious cases like the silly inauguration claim are defended (see the various—and hilarious—attempts by Sean Spicer reported in Fandos 2017), and more complex cases are only obvious lies if access to truth is presumed to be a simple matter, against which Raymond Geuss (2014, 140f.) rightfully protests. On the other hand, propaganda and political lies are frequently used openly in politics because it demonstrates power over others to make them affirm a statement they all know to be false (Müller 2017, 127). Hence cynicism cannot successfully serve as a criterion for what is new in the 'post-truth era'.

The third reason why we should doubt the diagnosis of a 'post-truth era' is *epistemological*. Getting to know the truth is always hard work since the truth "doesn't lie there on the street in the sun waiting to be observed by anyone who glances in its general direction" (Geuss 2014, 140). And knowing the truth is presumed by diagnosing that others—'post-truthers'—no longer care for it. Still, those diagnosing a 'post-truth era' often replace the hard work of justifying their truth-claims with appeals that we must learn to trust again (D'Ancona 2017, 36): our political elites, our fellow citizens and, most of all, our scientists. Yet which experts, which scientists, which politicians and who of our fellow citizens should we trust? Without explaining how we can discriminate between blind faith and trust, calls for a renewal of the virtue of trust turn into calls for being less critical—certainly a bad strategy if we really lived in a 'post-truth era' with its reign of 'fake news' and phony experts. Epistemological questions are, ironically, the first victim of the diagnosis of a 'post-truth era'.

Harbouring these historical, conceptual and epistemological doubts comes naturally but is distracting. We should not presume that the problem addressed by the diagnosis of a 'post-truth era' is conceptualised well enough by that diagnosis to make it our starting point for further investigation. Louis Althusser's (1971, 162–165) warning that our social practices are not found in ideology, neither distorted nor undistorted, is pertinent in this respect. His conclusion is to analyse the practices producing the ideology instead of the ideology itself. Similarly, we should formulate the problem addressed by

[6] Matthew D'Ancona (2017, 113) emphasises that his critique of post-truth is "absolutely not a restorationalist or heritage project, a mission to turn back the clock to an imagined past of untarnished veracity. There was never such a time and, even if there had been, it would be impossible to recreate". Yet if what is new in the 'post-truth era' is the public's non-reaction to the "mendacity of politicians" (ibid.), then there was a 'pre-post-truth era', in which the public actually cared about truth. This concern for truth is what D'Ancona wants to restore.

the diagnosis of a 'post-truth era' in independent terms. Yet which problem is that?

II.   Truth in Politics: Too Weak or Too Strong?

That problem is neither the medialization of politics with the acceleration of information and gossip and the collapse of editorial gate-keepers nor the sudden rise of feelings against a rational politics nor the cunning of demagogues spinning 'narratives'. The problem is the troubled relationship between truth and politics—which lies beneath all of these formulations.

The diagnosis of a 'post-truth era' presupposes without argument that we already know the ideal form that relationship should take: politics must respect the authority of truth and must yield to truth if it finds itself in opposition to truth. I will return to this diagnosis, but in order to pose the problem that gives rise to the diagnosis of a 'post-truth era' in independent terms, we must take a detour through political philosophy which has analysed the relationship between truth and politics as the conflict between two 'forces'. Its two basic insights, trivial at first glance but immensely influential, are the sobering realization that truth rarely helps us settle our most important disagreements, and the stern warning of truth being hostile to politics because of its anti-political ('objective') character. For simplicity's sake, I will use John Rawls' (II.1) and Hannah Arendt's (II.2) formulations of these two insights, for they capture their underlying conviction particularly well. This does not imply that both share a common concept of truth or of politics—they certainly do not. Yet despite all their differences, both conceptualise the relationship between politics and truth as a conflict between two forces and thereby demonstrate just how common this conceptualisation of the relationship between truth and politics is and how basic the two convictions are.

II.1 The Rawls Conviction: Irresistible Reasonable Pluralism

The first conviction about the relationship between truth and politics stems from a lesson learned in bloody wars (especially in 17th century in Europe): toleration, most importantly the toleration of different religions. For tolerating religions means accepting that people fundamentally disagree about their most cherished truths. Although we commit ourselves to certain truths, we accept that other people are equally committed to other truths. And although we believe them to be wrong, we know of convincing counter-reasons to our own objections. This balance convinces us that we will have to tolerate disagreement and therefore will have to relativize our convictions—without necessarily becoming sceptics or relativists (Forst 2013, 22f., 480–496).

It is only a small step from the idea of toleration to the influential concept of reasonable pluralism as formulated by John Rawls. When constructing a conception of justice adequate for modern societies, he argues, we face the fact

> that the diversity of reasonable comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines found in modern demo-cratic societies is not a mere historical condition that may

> soon pass away; it is a permanent feature of the public cul-
> ture of democracy. Under the political and social conditions
> secured by the basic rights and liberties of free institutions,
> a diversity of conflicting and irreconcilable—and what's
> more, reasonable—comprehensive doctrines will come
> about and persist if such diversity does not already obtain.
> (Rawls 2005, 36)

Regarding the relationship between truth and politics, there are three important aspects to Rawls' statement: First, the pluralism of doctrines is neither a passing historical condition nor a problem to be solved but a permanent condition of modernity. It is not a problem that must be solved, Rawls argues, because a just society with democratic institutions encourages the free use of reason, and reasonable pluralism is the necessary result (Rawls 2005, 37). Attempts to resolve this pluralism would have to use illegitimate coercive means. Rawls calls the "fact of oppression" that "a continuing shared understanding on one comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power" (ibid.). In a free and just society, the pluralism of doctrines is destined to persist and likely to grow.

Second, reasonable pluralism is distinct from mere pluralism. The idea is not just that we find in our societies an overwhelming wealth of different moral, political, ethical or aesthetic doctrines, by which Rawls means sets of interconnected judgements that define the basic values and their role in life. We do find a plurality of such doctrines, but for Rawls only reasonable doctrines are of interest. They are characterised by a moral ideal of reciprocity, because proponents of such doctrines accept to abide by the fair terms of cooperation which they put forward themselves, and they accept the burden to give public reasons for their views that cannot presuppose a shared, reasonable comprehensive doctrine (54).**[7]** Reasonable pluralism is a pluralism of reasonable doctrines and implies that neither of these can be shown to be 'irrational', 'immoral' or simply 'wrong'. Truth will not resolve reasonable disagreements:**[8]** Reason is not unanimous and does not speak in one voice (*pace* Habermas 1992).

Third, Rawls gives a reason for the possibility of reasonable disagreement that significantly weakens the consequences of his "fact of reasonable pluralism". For he argues that reasonable disagreements stem from (at least six) obstacles to our exercise of reason (see Rawls 2005, 56f.):

(a) We encounter conflicting and complex evidence.

(b) Even if we agree on certain reasons, we assign different importance to them.

(c) All concepts are subject to interpretation because of their internal indeterminacy.

(d) How we reason is affected by our whole biography.

(e) Issues are difficult to judge because there are many reasons of different normative strength.

(f) Not all values can be realised at the same time, so decisions about priorities are necessary.

These "burdens of judgement" (54) are controversial, because—so is Rawls'

[7] Rawls is rather vague when it comes to "the reasonable". Furthermore, he characterises it as a trait of persons but repeatedly uses concepts like "reasonable doctrines", "reasonable pluralism" etc. See Wenar 1995, 38–57 and Habermas 2011, 37–40.

[8] "Let's say that reasonable disagreement is disagreement between reasonable persons: that is, between persons who have realized their two moral powers to a degree sufficient to be free and equal citizens in a constitutional regime, and who have an enduring desire to honor fair terms of cooperation and to be fully cooperating members of society." (Rawls 2005, 55)

argument—accepting them is a condition for being reasonable.**[9]** Furthermore, by locating the sources of reasonable disagreement in the circumstances of reasoning (and mostly in our finite and bodily nature: see Forst 2013, 487–491), Rawls implicitly presupposes an 'ideal reason' without these external shackles and therefore without reasonable disagreement. He thereby misunderstands his own insight into the fact of reasonable pluralism, because if we can presuppose such an 'ideal reason', the fact of reasonable pluralism could not play the role Rawls wants it to play. Why would we reconcile ourselves with an empirical hurdle instead of finding a way around it as best as we can? The fact of reasonable pluralism demands more: it forces us to give up even the transcendental ideal of a unity of reason,**[10]** to acknowledge that reason (even Reason) is not one.

What I call the Rawls conviction is the commitment to the insight that because of the fact of reasonable pluralism we cannot expect truth to resolve our reasonable disagreements. We should not mistake this view for relativism just yet, because on the one hand, it still maintains that we do get pretty far with reason (as proven by Rawls' own work). On the other hand, we are not forced into a relativist or sceptical position, because we can still hold on to our convictions as those best justified. The Rawls conviction merely demands that we heed the limits of what these justifications permit us to think and do with regard to others who are not convinced by them (489). **[11]** Yet it does mean that we cannot expect truth to guide us to the one and only reasonable political conception of justice, much less to the one and only reasonable policy in whatever debate we engage in. The Rawls conviction of the irresistible reasonable pluralism thus forces us to realise that truth does not resolve political debates. We might even be so bold as to speak of a necessary pluralism of truths.

This is not a minority view in political theory, brought about by what is often denounced as a 'postmodern' contempt for truth. On the contrary, the commitment to reasonable pluralism is widespread and limited neither to political liberalism nor to poststructuralist political philosophy, radical democratic theory or deconstructivism. If we acknowledge the full force of the fact of reasonable pluralism, we can see how modern political philosophy is in unusual agreement in presupposing a plurality of truths.

II.2 The Arendt Conviction: The Compelling Force of Truth

In her well-known essay *Truth and Politics* (2006), Hannah Arendt sketches the long history of the struggle between politics and truth: Politicians have never been regarded as particularly honest whereas "truth-seekers" have always been an endangered species (Arendt 2006, 227–230). Her argument rests on a series of corresponding oppositions: One the hand, we have politics as the realm of plurality, opinions, future-directed actions and lies; on the other hand, we have the realm of philosophers and scientists in which truth (in singular) plays the decisive role for thinking. Politics is a mode of acting with others and necessarily with regarding the opinions of others, and its aim is creating and forming a shared reality in which together we can live a life in

[9] Wenar (1995, 41–48) argues that accepting the "burdens of judgement" is not necessary for being reasonable: According to Rawls, being reasonable minimally includes the willingness to propose and abide by fair terms of cooperation, and refraining from coercively repressing other comprehensive doctrines. Requiring others to accept the "burdens of judgement" as the reason to do so would define the reasonable too narrow, Wenar criticises, because most religious doctrines reject the "burdens of proof" as they "explain religious diversity by stressing the difficulty of finding the truth even under the best conditions, while universalistic religions present themselves as accessible to all clear minds and open hearts." (ibid.)

[10] However, even Rawls' weakened insight into the fact of reasonable pluralism in modern societies suffices for my argument.

[11] This has of course been disputed: see e.g. Raz 1990 and Cohen 2009. I will come back to this question in section III.2.

freedom. Science and philosophy instead are concerned with understanding, not acting, and with seeking the truth in singular. Even regarding this truth as a mere opinion on equal footing with other opinions is to devalue truth.

Against these background assumptions, Arendt introduces the distinction between "rational" and "factual" truth. Examples of rational truths are most clearly given by mathematical and scientific truths—the sum of all angles in a triangle is 180 degrees; every action causes a reaction of equal force (in a closed system). Examples of factual truths are the existence of historical events like the fact that the German army invaded Belgium in 1940 (231). Arendt argues that the historically older struggle between rational truth and politics is mostly over, as rational truths are tolerated (or simply ignored) today. [12] Now it is the factual truth that is endangered by politics—and it is more vulnerable to political action than rational truth because it is contingent. A historical fact can be liquidated from our knowledge by erasing all its traces. This could happen to a rational truth fact too, but because rational truths are necessary truths, they could be discovered again. Hence rational truths do not depend on their records as do factual truths (231f.).

The precarious factual truth is of vital importance to politics, "since facts and events—the invariable outcome of men living and acting together—constitute the very texture of the political realm" (ibid., see 238). We nonetheless witness a battle between factual truth and politics because factual truth has a "despotic character" (241) when it comes to politics:

> The trouble is that factual truth, like all other truth, peremptorily claims to be acknowledged and precludes debate, and debate constitutes the very essence of political life. The modes of thought and communication that deal with truth, if seen from the political perspective, are necessarily domineering; they don't take into account other people's opinions, and taking these into account is the hallmark of all strictly political thinking. (241)

Just as rational truths set limits for thought, factual truths set limits for political debates and actions (238). Herein lies the scandal: Factual truth is an external boundary of politics, and the question from a purely political standpoint is (for Arendt), whether politics should be limited "by something that arises from without, has its source outside the political realm, and is as independent of the wishes and desires of the citizens as is the will of the worst tyrant" (240).[13]

Yet politics should embrace these non-political boundaries for its own sake, Arendt argues, just as reason must know and respect its own limits (as Kant argued). Universities, Arendt suggests, could be understood as politically established institutions that produce factual truths in order to limit politics in the right way. We should think of science and philosophy as a politically sponsored limit-setting enterprise; hence the limits their truths establish would be politics' self-limitation via the detour of science and philosophy (259–264).

We need not enter into a fuller discussion of Arendt's complex text, for Arendt's most fundament presupposition is readily apparent: truth—whether

[12] This might have changed since 1967 when Arendt wrote her essay. The current struggle of conservative politicians against the scientific accounts of humanity's role in climate change could be interpreted to indicate that rational truth is no longer at peace with politics—if it ever was.

[13] Why is factual truth, which is "political by nature" (Arendt 2006, 238), an "external limit" to politics? This is just one of Arendt's many self-contradictions and implausible grandiose claims that lead Ronald Beiner to sharply (and rightly) criticise her "misleading and obfuscating account of truth" and her problematical view of politics as "addressing (heroically) the challenge of human mortality" (Beiner 2008, 123). For a spirited defense, see Zerilli 2005.

rational or factual—"possess[es] a strength of its own" (259) and "carries within itself an element of coercion" (239). Truth is forcefully compelling; hence it can be a useful external limit to politics as well as a depoliticizing tyrant. It is this fundamental insight into truth's own force that I will call the Arendt conviction: the commitment to the insight that truth is a unique force in this world, a compelling and sometimes despotic power that has no substitute (259).

As was the case with the Rawls conviction, naming the second conviction after Arendt is not meant to imply that it is only Arendt who shares this conviction. On the contrary, the idea that truth has a compelling "force" is widespread, whether Jürgen Habermas (1984, 24, 28) calls it "the peculiarly constraint-free force of the better argument" or Richard Rorty (1997, 22–32) opposes 'Truth' as a bad philosophical idol of great oppressive power. Arendt's position is especially interesting, however, because she neither defines away its coercive potential (as Habermas does) nor rejects truth altogether because of its coercive potential (as Rorty [sometimes] does). Instead, she realises that it is precisely the ambiguous nature of truth's compelling force that makes it irreplaceable for us.

III.   Beyond Post-Truth and Relativism

I have argued that (modern) political philosophy holds two basic convictions about the relationship between truth and politics. The Rawls conviction is the quite sobering realization that we cannot expect truth to resolve the most important political disagreements between reasonable persons. The fact of reasonable pluralism forces us to acknowledge the existence of reasonable disagreement in political debates and to tolerate different truths answering precisely those questions we most deeply care about. Truth in politics is plural and weak; we cannot use it to achieve unanimity without exercising illegitimate power against disagreeing persons.

The Arendt conviction demonstrates the compelling force of truth. It alerts us to the ever-present danger of truth turning into a coercive tyrant, because truth tolerates neither contradictory opinions nor being demoted to a mere opinion itself. The compelling force of truth makes it problematic in the realm of politics, but it is also what makes truth necessary for politics. Truth's compelling force keeps politics' tendency to alter our shared reality in check; hence, we need the compelling force of truth despite the danger of its "despotic character" (Arendt 2006, 21).

Both convictions are widely shared, yet clearly conflicting: Whereas the Rawls conviction sees truth as anaemic because truth is precisely *not strong enough* to overcome reasonable disagreement, the Arendt conviction sees truth as *too strong*—namely tyrannical—to rely on it without qualifications. The former conviction insists on the plurality of truth, the latter on its tyrannical and singular nature.**[14]** Having two basic and intuitively plausible but conflicting convictions not only complicates debates in political philosophy, it also (partly**[15]**) explains the attractiveness of the diagnosis that we live in a 'post-truth era'. For it solves the conflict between both convictions, albeit

[14] As said at the beginning of section II, my focus is on the conceptualisation of the relationship between truth and politics as a conflict between two forces which Rawls and Arendt share despite their many differences. However, helpfully pressed by an anonymous reviewer, let me indicate two possible starting points for further investigations along the concept of "plurality". Both locate the reason for "plurality" in the conditions of human life, yet whereas Arendt explicitly argues that this does not constitute an anthropological thesis because human conditions are different from human nature (Arendt 1998, 9f.), Rawls seems to tie the plurality of opinions to our finite bodily nature (see section II.1). Yet the decisive difference, I would argue, is that Arendt strictly separates action and thought (and therefore politics and science/philosophy) using the traditional distinction between opinions (plural) and truth (singular). None of these dichotomies are relevant for Rawls who therefore does not limit the scope of "plurality" to politics.

[15] Obviously, a full explanation would have to take into account basic sociological facts about the media as well as the role of reputation in the sciences because buzz words like 'post-truth' are attractive for journalists and scientists in order to gain valuable attention. As for this text: honi soit qui mal y pense.

in a misguided way: by purely favouring the Arendt conviction (III.1). It thus mirrors another misguided attempt to solve the tension purely in favour of the Rawls conviction: relativism (III.2). What is needed instead of these one-dimensional conceptualisations of the relationship between truth and politics is an understanding that combines both convictions (III.3).

III.1 Authoritarianism

We readily recognise that the critical diagnosis of a 'post-truth era' embraces the Arendt conviction without hesitation. The pluralism of opinions, 'post-truth' critics argue, is feasible only within a carefully guarded territory, the limits of which are set precisely by truth. How do we tell mere opinion from truth, and who is that 'we' authorised to do so? The answer given is 'science' in singular, defending a singular truth: "[…] the rise of truth as a binding force in scientific, legal, political and commercial practices was a gradual and hard-won achievement. It is a single currency, furthermore, whose value is determined by the extent to which it is defended in each of these interconnected spheres." (D'Ancona 2017, 101)[16] Hence the criticism of our 'post-truth era' implies that we have to restore and rigorously defend the authority of science which, according to this diagnosis, science has lost in recent years (e.g. D'Ancona 2017, 41f., 70, 91–96).

Already the claim that science has lost authority would merit more attention (see Shapin 2008; Gauchat 2012), yet I will concentrate on the extraordinary explanation given by critics of our 'post-truth era', namely that 'postmodernism' is to blame:

> For decades, critical social scientists and humanists have chipped away at the idea of truth. We've deconstructed facts, insisted that knowledge is situated and denied the existence of objectivity. The bedrock claim of critical philosophy, going back to Kant, is simple: We can never have certain knowledge about the world in its entirety. Claiming to know the truth is therefore a kind of assertion of power. […] Call it what you want: relativism, constructivism, deconstruction, postmodernism, critique. The idea is the same: Truth is not found, but made, and making truth means exercising power. The reductive version is simpler and easier to abuse: Fact is fiction, and anything goes. It's this version of critical social theory that the populist right has seized on and that Trump has made into a powerful weapon. (Williams 2017)[17]

The argument is popular but wrong, using two selective inaccuracies: First, 'postmodernism' is turned into a catch-all phrase for theories expounded by and developed from the thoughts of authors like "Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard and Richard Rorty", to use D'Ancona's (2017, 91) list.[18] Ignoring the theoretical struggles and dissent amongst these very different thinkers, the argument creates a homogenous block of "bad guys" —women, e.g. Luce Irigaray or Julia Kristeva, to name just two, are never mentioned—whom Bernard Williams (2002, 5) calls the "deniers" of truth. Obviously, this is not a neutral descriptive term

[16] Notice that although D'Ancona adds the political, legal and economic system to science, science still appears as one (uniform) enterprise and includes the natural and social sciences as well as the humanities.

[17] Variations of the same charge can be found in Keyes 2004, chapter 9; Boghossian 2006, 1–9; Frankfurt 2006, chapter 1; Hampe 2016; D'Ancona 2017, chapter 4.

[18] Also frequently included are Friedrich Nietzsche (in Williams 2017), Edward Said and Paul de Man (in Keyes 2004, 136, 141f.).

for a group of people supposed to share a certain view about truth but sets up a polemic divide. This alone is hardly problematic: a polemic gloss of a shared claim between otherwise different authors can be quite illuminating. Yet both Williams—Bernard and Casey—interpret what is shared among the 'postmodernists' to be

> a style of thought that extravagantly, challengingly, or—as its opponents would say—irresponsibly denies the possibility of truth altogether, waves its importance aside, or claims that all truth is 'relative' or suffers from some other such disadvantage (4f.).

This formulation of the shared claim amongst "deniers" paves over their different views precisely about the concept, the historicity and the significance of truth, thereby ignoring theoretical differences—e.g. between Nietzsche (1999), Foucault (1998a) and Lyotard (1988)—important to the argument based on the polemic divide.

Let us, for argument's sake, accept for a moment that it is the somewhat less contentious assertion that truth is socially and historically constructed and hence connected to power that is shared by 'postmodernists'. The second selective inaccuracy now reduces this shared view and then adds something. The claim that truths are socially and historically constructed and that therefore truth is connected to power is reduced to equating truth with power. Truth suddenly is nothing but the exercise of power. To this reduced version, those who blame the 'postmodernists' add that therefore, all truths are equal or simply that truth is relative. Hence, we can "wave its importance aside" (Williams 2002, 4).

Yet the unmodified shared claim that truths are socially and historically constructed and therefore connected to power implies of course that truth has a compelling force different from power. If it didn't, what would be the point of painstakingly researching all these small steps of its construction? By presupposing that any connection between power and truth invalidates truth, the critics presuppose a conception of truth which automatically invalidates the claim of the 'postmodernists'. Nothing could be further from the(ir) truth. And nothing could be less illuminating of their shared claim—if it exists at all.

In addition to this theoretical objection against blaming 'post-modernism' for the science's alleged loss of authority, empirical data (on the USA) suggests that "public trust in science has not declined since the 1970s except among conservatives and those who frequently attend church" (Gauchat 2012, 182). Very few of those worshippers will have been influenced by 'post-modernism'.

Yet whether or not we find the charge against 'postmodernism' plausible, the crucial step for critics of our 'post-truth era' is to reinstate the authority of truth over and above the plurality of mere opinions. Favouring the Arendt conviction and discarding the Rawls conviction, they argue that we need truth to keep the free play of opinions in check. And the decisive question how we tell truth from mere opinion is answered by reference to 'science' in the singular.

Herein lays the real danger—not because 'science' is not a fascinating machine

for producing compelling truths but because the sciences are much more diverse, contradictory and interesting than the picture of a singular science with its history interpreted as a story of progress allows for. Viewing the sciences as a homogenous enterprise progressively advancing our knowledge about the true nature of things is possible only if we ignore most of the research that has been done in the history and philosophy of science in the last century. To name just three landmark studies: Thomas Kuhn (1970) shows that the natural sciences do not simply expand our knowledge but that their history is discontinuous because the sciences undergo revolutionary paradigm changes. His path-breaking book inspired historical studies of actual sciences in the making instead of a philosophy of science registering textbook results from afar. One such study is Bruno Latour's and Steve Woolgar's (1986) exploration of the *Laboratory Life* in which they demonstrate how scientific facts are literally made, chronicling the hard work to achieve objectivity. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison (2007) have traced the history of this scientific ideal—objectivity—, revealing fascinating differences in what scientific objectivity meant at different times and how this oriented researchers and their scientific work quite differently. None of these studies is beyond debate, but the appeal to 'science' in the singular and to its linear historical progress forecloses such a debate from the start, for only by forcibly denying the complex history of the sciences can the critics of our 'post-truth era' uphold their clear distinction between mere opinions and authoritative scientific truths.

It is precisely at this point that we can see why the diagnosis of a 'post-truth era' entails two authoritarian tendencies as it embraces what Arendt (2006, 241) called the "despotic character" of truth without qualifications. The critics of a 'post-truth era' explicitly argue for reinstating the authority of truth which has, according to the Arendt conviction, a despotic character. More importantly, they implicitly brush aside all scientific research about scientific research in order to justify truth's authority, thus legitimatizing the compelling—despotic—force of truth with an authoritarian dismissal of dissenting voices. In their insistence on a fact-based politics that declares that 'there is no alternative', they are disconcertingly similar to those criticised for venting 'alternative facts'. Both seem driven by a wish for order without dissent, short-circuiting debate by appeals to authority.

III.2 Relativism

Yet it does not suffice to favour only the Rawls conviction and discard the Arendt conviction to void the authoritarianism of the critics of a 'post-truth era' and of those supposedly establishing it. For an unqualified embrace of the Rawls conviction either leads us to a contradictory denial of the fact of reasonable pluralism or straightforward into relativism. Rawls himself argues that the fact of reasonable pluralism does not demand to give up our considered judgements. It does, however, require us to defend our reasonable doctrine not as true but as being acceptable to all reasonable persons even though they might hold different reasonable doctrines:

> [Political constructivism] does not use (or deny) the con-
> cept of truth; nor does it question that concept, nor could it
> say that the concept of truth and its idea of the reasonable
> are the same. Rather, within itself, the political conception
> does without the concept of truth [...]. (Rawls 2005, 94)

Joshua Cohen has lucidly criticised Rawls' surprising claim. Truth is the norm
of beliefs, Cohen (2009, 13–15) states, and because even political conceptions
of justice that avoid commitments to comprehensive doctrines must assert
some beliefs, doing without the concept of truth (and not just without a
substantial theory of truth) is impossible. He therefore proposes a political
conception of truth, a conception 'thin' enough to fit within the confines of an
overlapping consensus in which the plurality of reasonable doctrines meet.
According to Cohen, conceptions of justice must include a non-metaphysical
("political") account of truth that minimally includes four "commonplaces"
about truth which Cohen deems relatively uncontroversial:

(a) Truth is the norm for beliefs, assertions and judgements.
(b) True beliefs represent things as they are.
(c) Truth is more than justification.
(d) Truth is independently important (26f.).

However, Cohen's argument that we need not explain those four commonplaces
in detail and thus that we need no substantial theory of truth to have a political
conception of truth (28) seems problematic. He claims that deflationary theories
of truth say "too little" (26) because they cannot explain the value of truth.
Yet his assertion that truth does have a value independently of justifications
is hardly more illuminating without giving further details. Thus Cohen either
falls prey to his own critique or would have to include a substantial theory
of truth in his account of truth, thus implicating him in the philosophical
controversies that the political account was designed to circumvent.

Even if we grant Cohen this political conception of truth, admitting the
existence of an overlapping consensus and thus a meeting point of reasonable
doctrines despite their pluralism judges the fact of reasonable pluralism to be
bounded from the start or even reintroduces the unity of reason as a regulative
ideal.[19] Either way we start to weaken or outright contradict the insight
into the fact of reasonable pluralism. Thus, the only way left to cope with
that insight seems to be relativistic in the sense that all truths are equal. If
we allow for more than one truth regarding the same issue—and nothing else
would amount to a pluralism of truths—, then denying the equality of these
truths seems to re-introduce a criterion by which we could judge which of
these truths is 'more true', thereby rejecting our premise of the plurality of
truths. Hence relativism seems unavoidable as soon as we embrace the Rawls
conviction wholeheartedly, yet of course we know why that is problematic:
On the one hand, the position appears to be unstable, as admitting that more
than one truth about the same issue exists leads us to conclude that no truth
about the issue exists (if we accept the law of the excluded middle and the law
of noncontradiction). On the other hand, it seems that resolving reasonable
disagreements will mostly come about by force. Relativism indeed does not
appear to be a particularly attractive position.[20]

[19] Obviously, the debate whether Rawls
(2005) can show the possibility of an over-
lapping consensus between reasonable
doctrines becomes important here. For
convincing criticisms see e.g. Wenar 1995,
38–57 and Talisse 2003, 189.

III.3 Non-Sovereign Truth in Democratic Politics

If solving the conflict between the Rawls and the Arendt conviction by giving up either of them threatens to end in relativism or authoritarianism, how are we to think about the relationship between truth and politics? How do we defend truth against relativism without succumbing to authoritarianism and vice versa?

In order to hold on to both conflicting convictions, we must develop a "post-sovereign" (Rouse 1996a), or better yet: non-sovereign, understanding of truth. If sovereignty is understood as a standpoint above and beyond political struggles, as a standpoint from which the sovereign can rule the struggling parties in an impartial manner without being implicated in their conflicts, the argument for a non-sovereign understanding of truth starts with the realization that there is no such epistemic sovereign standpoint.[21] For Joseph Rouse (1996b, 1987) such a non-sovereign understanding of truth and knowledge grows out of appreciation of our most advanced social practices in which we actually seek truth, namely scientific practices. If we avoid the mistakes of presupposing that these practices cohere in an orderly fashion, that they have a progressive and linear history and that they can be analysed as 'pure'—untainted by economic, political or other 'worldly' affairs—we will be able to see how scientific practices really unfold as conflicting, material and discursive activities in the world. They partake in political and economic struggles and are influenced by them, without their activities being reducible to these struggles. Scientific practices, Rouse suggests, must be understood as a network held together by conflict and cooperation in which knowledge claims are created, passed on, rejected, reproduced etc. Hence

> knowledge is not a status that attaches to particular statements, skills, or models in isolation or instantaneously. Rather, their epistemic standing depends upon their relations to many other practices and capabilities, and especially upon the ways these relations are reproduced, transformed, and extended. Knowledge is temporally diffused or deferred: to take something as knowledge is to project its being taken up as a resource for various kinds of ongoing activity—whether in further research or in various applications of knowledge (Rouse 1996a, 408).

Knowledge and truth are constituted by "epistemic alignment[s]" (Rouse 1996b, 185f.) of practices; defending or opposing a certain truth therefore means attempting to uphold or to change a specific strategic alignment of scientific practices. Yet there is no standpoint beyond these social practices and thus beyond the conflicts about truths from which we could safely adjudicate them: there is no sovereign epistemic standpoint. Truth is a product of contested scientific practices, and there would be no truth without these conflicting practices. Moreover, scientific practices are social practices. They do not merely involve pure thought but real living actors with their own concerns and interests, funding agencies, library resources, computing power, administrative complexities and so on. What can become a scientific truth depends on all these (and many more) factors *which are not external to truth*.

[20] See the long-term project of Martin Kusch (2017) for an interesting defence of relativism.

[21] Donna Haraway (1988, 582) has called the illusion to be able to occupy such a standpoint the "god trick".

In this way, a non-sovereign account of truth makes us understand that "truth is a thing of this world" (Foucault 1998b, 131). It makes us understand that the compelling force of truth is not an apolitical force and that truth therefore does not offer us a standpoint beyond the political and epistemic struggles from which we could adjudicate their proper limits. Any attempt to do so is itself a political and epistemic move located within these struggles; and, if successful, a quite powerful one. Insofar, the plurality of truths (the Rawls conviction) is affirmed yet augmented by the insight that truths do have a compelling force (the Arendt conviction), so the engagement in the struggles between different truths is important. Defending certain truths then does not mean to stand outside the practices in which the different truths are clashing and to impose limits on these struggles in an authoritarian fashion. It means engaging in and defending those social practices in which we establish and correct our standards of justification, in which we demand, give and scrutinise justifications according to these standards, and in which the different sciences are awarded the resources (in terms of freedom and generosity, of money and time) they need to support these efforts for making and defending truths. A non-sovereign understanding of truth allows (and forces) us to fight for the compelling force of truths both epistemically and politically, for it recognises the interconnectedness of epistemic and political struggles (see Alcoff 1996).

This is not, as some might suspect, just another route to relativism, for acknowledging the materiality and historicity of truth does not relativize truth or entail that all truths are equal. Quite to the contrary, it presupposes that we fight for certain truths and against others because we care for them—and we have our reasons why we care for them. Anyone objecting that these reasons are not the proper ones—because they are 'impure' reasons—reverts back to the illusion of a sovereign understanding of truth. Yet neither the sciences nor any other practice we know of and engage in can produce this epistemic sovereign position.

Of course, the call for these concrete and mundane actions sounds much less impressive than the solemn declaration of a new 'era of post-truth', as will be readily apparent if we briefly return to the three examples with which I started: Trump's inauguration lie, Vote Leave's broken promise and misleading reports about conflicts at universities. How would the 'non-sovereign' understanding of truth interpret these examples, and what response would it suggest, when maintaining both the conviction of a plurality of truths and the conviction of their compelling force? First, it draws attention to the struggles in which the truth-claims are raised. It thus decodes Trump's inauguration lie as a call for submission and a test of loyalty. The obviously false statement and its many siblings work like tiny traps: Those who do not object immediately will have more and more trouble the longer they wait to distance themselves from Trump because they would have to avow that their repeated submissions were shamefully wrong. In order to perform this function, the statements must be false, even from the Trumpists' perspective. Yet defending such false statements manifests a truth about its defenders, it provides proof of their loyalty. The response therefore should be clear: oppose the lie but, much

more importantly, call out its function, support those who do not submit, and create possibilities to abandon Trump for those who have a change of heart.

Second, and in addition, a non-sovereign account of truth does not look at truth-claims in isolation but analyses the 'epistemic alignment' that supports them. So the preposterous promise of the Leave campaign must be located within the political struggle and the epistemic alignments they form. The battery of numbers used by the Remain campaign to scare people was certainly important,[22] as was the anti-intellectualism of the Leave campaign (D'Ancona 2017, 16–23; for a defence see Fuller 2017, 9–23). Yet perhaps more decisive was the neoliberal austerity politics and its "deficit fetishism" pursued by almost the entire political class from 1992 to 2015.[23] To cut a long story short, Leave's broken promise was preceded by neoliberalism's broken promises and its silencing of concerned or disagreeing voices. Of course, this does not excuse or justify the Leave campaigns NHS-statement, let alone its open racism (see Bhambra 2018). Yet we do well to remember that statements acquire their epistemic significance against a background of other social practices and the standards of justifications upheld or eroded therein. Without years of austerity politics insisting that there are no alternatives, Leave's 'alternative facts' would never have looked so promising. Again, the political and epistemic response to this diagnosis from the perspective of a non-sovereign account of truth should be clear: insist that justifications are given, demand that sincere objections are met by arguments, not by silence or ridicule, and fight those who stifle criticism and dissent.

Third and last, beyond analysing political and epistemic struggles, a non-sovereign account of truth consciously intervenes in them. This is especially important in the third example in which the truth-claims raised are more difficult to judge than in the first two examples. Although we certainly will not find any left hegemony in German universities, moral arguments for silencing others are made, and neither they nor the objections against them are obviously false. Recognising the plurality of truths and their compelling force, those who hold a non-sovereign account of truth do not presume to have a neutral standpoint from which they judge these political and epistemic struggles. They are participants in them as soon as they take a stand on these matters. And so are reports on the battle over 'political correctness'. By using this label, they frame the issue of individual controversies in a common and peculiar fashion. Of course, there is a commonality between these conflicts at the universities, and certainly, there is nothing wrong with criticising excessive moralism. Yet identifying this pattern with the polemic concept of 'political correctness' does more than that. It refuses from the start to acknowledge that the pattern is simply given by what these fights target: power relations known as sexism, racism, classism etc. And it refuses to spell out why the moralism in question is worse than these power relations. Hence the response from the perspective of a non-sovereign account of truth must be twofold: It will fight against framing these struggles according to the preference of the right, and it will fight against anyone again erecting a sovereign standpoint from which to judge them. Neither god nor morality, neither the state nor capital, neither science nor art must lay claim to the compelling force of truth

[22] "[…] both camps relied heavily on fear as a negative economic motivation: the Leavers feared losing control over the fates of 'our' country to 'Brussels' (or of having to compete with foreign migrant labor for jobs), and the Remain camp feared the adverse economic consequences (jobs, trade, investment, exchange rates) of Brexit." (Offe 2017, 18)

[23] For a range of different analyses that converge around the same point see Hopkin/Rosamond 2017; Koch 2017; Streeck 2017; Jessop 2016. For a broader overview of the political and socio-economic background of the Brexit referendum see Outhwaite 2018.

without recognising the plurality of truths.

Defending truth without pretending to be epistemic sovereigns certainly is a lot more troublesome than the authoritarian declaration of absolute limits or the relativistic shrug. Yet it also is the only chance for a democratic—non-sovereign—understanding of the relationship between truth and politics.

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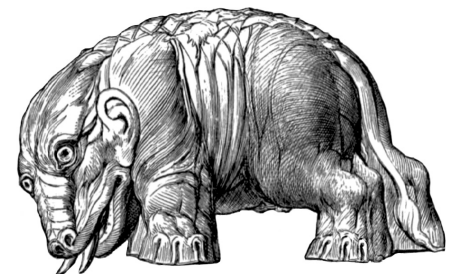
The Cautionary Use of Fakes

Peter Niesen

Abstract

In recent years, academic fakes have routinely been planted in order to discredit academic genres and subdisciplines. In line with Richard Rorty's late pragmatist attempt to identify 'cautionary' and 'metalinguistic' uses of the truth predicate, I suggest we ascribe such fakes a 'cautionary' function, thereby explaining and partly defusing them. The predicate 'is true' highlights both the justification-transcendence of truths as well as their relativity to a specific language or vocabulary. While the cautionary use of 'true' reminds us of possible errors, the cautionary use of fakes reminds us that we may have invested in a problematic vocabulary. Academic fakes point out a lack of critical self-correcting procedures in academic vocabularies, yet at the same time can obstruct their innovative potential at too early a stage. Fakes highlight the fact that academic discourse is not just an industry that produces truths (or falsehoods), but should also be seen as an endeavour to generate new truth value candidates.

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The academic world is largely united in taking the pursuit of truth to be its *raison d'être*, but torn between two intellectual reactions to the challenge of the 'post-factual'. On the one hand, humanities and social science scholars join natural scientists and engineers in their 'Marches for Science'. In siding with 'facts' against the cranks and ideologues in creationism or climate change denial, they align their understandings of truth claims with the objectivist conception of the natural sciences. On the other hand, this move can prove costly, since it can lead them to dumb down their own disciplines' more sophisticated understandings of truth. Conceptions of truth developed in the humanities and social sciences rarely claim that reality triggers specific human ways of describing and interpreting it. Humanities scholars and social theorists therefore did join the Marches for Science, yet with considerable unease (Hähnlein 2017). Where they insist that their understandings of truth are less straightforward than those of their colleagues in science and engineering, they risk being policed by the more simple-minded defenders of scientific common sense as well as foundationalist philosophers (Vogelmann, this issue). If they point towards the relevance of languages and descriptions in academic progress, or point out that sometimes scientific revolutions upset pictures of facts that have been taken for granted in the search for truth, scientific common sense is prone to labeling such conceptions 'constructivist' and blaming them for the decline of academic resistance to the post-factual.

In this article, I propose humanities and social science scholars turn to late-pragmatist conceptions of language and truth for guidance to avoid the traps laid out from either side, from the side of scientistic objectivism as well as from constructivist relativism. I illustrate the merits of this approach in discussing a disruptive practice that has gained currency in scholarly and scientific circles in the past twenty-five years, the use of the academic fake.[1] I suggest we apply lessons from Richard Rorty's life-long history of grappling with the truth predicate and ascribe fakes a 'cautionary' function. The 'cautionary' use of the truth predicate Rorty introduced in a 1986 article which tried to make a case for an understanding that is at the same time context-specific and justification-transcendent. In his article, Rorty distinguishes three senses in which the truth predicate might be employed: in its endorsing, cautionary, and metalinguistic ('disquotational') uses. The main examples for the cautionary use occur in statements like 'We all may justifiably think that belief in p is warranted, but p might not be true'. In cases like this, its function is to warn against holding as invariant even 'ideally justified' convictions, since even optimal evidence is open to being challenged by a recalcitrant world, or left behind by better descriptions. New descriptions, however, need not respect the conventions of the former idiom, and Rorty drives this point home in indexing, with Tarski and Davidson, the truth conditions of statements to the languages they have been framed in. Once the cautionary use of truth claims is combined with the metalinguistic insight that truth applies to statements-in-languages, it is no longer plausible to take the world itself to be 'refuting' beliefs, since only beliefs can justify or undermine other beliefs, and beliefs will be framed in one language or other. The cautionary and metalinguistic features of the justification-transcendent truth predicate conspire to pluralise

[1] By an 'academic fake' I mean a disingenuous and meaningless or false publication mimicking the tone and standards of a given discipline. 'Fake' may be the most neutral term available. 'Hoax' and 'sting' overemphasise the tricking of unwitting editors, reviewers, or publishers, which is indeed part of the success conditions of academic fakes, in contrast to the publication of literary or journalistic fakes that often likewise serve purposes of enlightenment and amusement (Ringel 2016).

truth-value candidates. At the same time, they transport a sense of non-arbitrariness that need not be connected to objectivist understandings of truth-claims.

Academic fakes come in many variants, and it is not the purpose of this article to provide a taxonomy. Most prominently, fake academic articles have been used to undermine and discredit the claims to seriousness of fashionable or entrenched academic discourses. Alan Sokal launched his famous 1996 hoax in the journal *Social Text* to shoot down a post-structuralist idiom that had not yet been adopted in the mainstream. Similarly, in 2017, the journal *Cogent Social Sciences* published an update of Sokal's hoax, entitled *The Conceptual Penis as a Social Construct*. The authors argue that the male sexual organ should not be viewed as a given but as "a social construct isomorphic to performative toxic masculinity" (Lindsay/Boyle 2017, 1). In this, they sought to discredit the social constructivist views they believe are dominant in gender studies. In contrast, some academic fakes attack the opposite target: They stand in the service of an epistemic minority and challenge established academic paradigms. In 2015, the journal *Totalitarismus und Demokratie (Totalitarianism and Democracy)* published an article by an authors' collective writing as *Christiane Schulte* who alleged that the bloodline of the German shepherds policing the GDR border went back to the guard dogs of the National Socialist concentration camps. This elegant fake fed on the journal's implicit commitment to an 'extremist' congruence between left- and right-wing totalitarian views and regimes. Unfortunately, the authors, in a clumsy attempt at self-explication, blur their clear-cut agenda, in claiming to have attacked not just a paradigm in political science, but at the same time the rhetoric of animal studies. While cautioning against an established research paradigm—that of extremism research—they claim to be cautioning against a marginal new language of inquiry at the same time.

In the final part of the paper, I draw some conclusions in connecting recent academic fakes with the late-pragmatist understanding of truth, in confronting the truth-orientation of research with the pluralisation of potentially truth-bearing research vocabularies. I interpret academic fakes not as arguments within, but about the aptness of academic vocabularies. My claim is a dual one. Academic fakes point out a lack of critical self-correcting procedures in academic vocabularies, yet at the same time can obstruct their innovative potential at too early a stage. No fake on its own will be capable of discrediting an established academic discourse, whereas they may be able to stifle upstart contenders in their wake. In warning against idioms not beliefs, the cautionary use of fakes needs to be distinguished from the cautionary use of the truth predicate. While the cautionary use of 'true' reminds us of possible errors, the cautionary use of fakes reminds us that we may have invested in a problematic vocabulary. Fakes highlight the fact that academic discourse is not just an industry that produces truths (or falsehoods, as it happens), but should also be seen as an endeavour to generate new truth value candidates.

I.

In his later writings, Richard Rorty switched allegiances from one pragmatist conception of truth to another. Originally, he was concerned with bringing truth within the reach of human practices, but had always found Charles Sanders Peirce's gloss—that truth was waiting for us at the end of human inquiry—unattractive and incoherent (1982, xlv). So, in fully committing to the pragmatist cause in 1982, he threw in his lot with William James' definition of truth as the "good in the way of belief". Over the next years, Rorty's critique of objectivist accounts of truth became more radical, but he conceded that there were decisive disadvantages to James' account. He therefore adopted a three-pronged approach, identifying three characteristic uses of the predicate 'is true': an endorsing use, a cautionary use, and a disquotational use. Rather than defending a single theory of truth, his new conception borrowed from three different traditions: first from the Jamesian tradition which holds that to call something 'true' is to recommend it; second from an anti-epistemic tradition that insists on the justification-transcendent character of truth; and third from an anti-reductionist 20th century tradition in the philosophy of language, where the truth predicate is employed as a primitive for the purpose of interpreting linguistic expressions. I will briefly go into the rejection of Peirce and the interim infatuation with James and then spend more time on the second and third of the uses of the truth predicate, on cautioning and on disquotation, which are more material to our question.

At first glance, Rorty's hostility to Peirce, coming from a pragmatist author, is surprising. For Peirce, truth is whatever we will turn out to believe once all evidence is in.[2] This process-based conception splits the difference between the natural sciences on the one hand, social sciences and humanities on the other, since it interprets the search for truth not via its elusive object of cognition, but via the search for evidence, the give-and-take of arguments and objections. The view that would survive all objections is the true one. This view connects truth with what is in principle knowable by humans and what is in principle justifiable to humans. The meaning of truth sees to it that whatever is in principle cognition-transcendent or justification-transcendent can be no possible object of it; in other words, truth is conceived of as a fully and transparently 'epistemic' notion, if only under certain idealising constraints. As we will see, Rorty rejects epistemic accounts of truth. But his main criticism of the Peircean conception is not that it connects truth too closely to human purposes and practices. On the contrary, he sees it as still not fully emancipated from objectivist accounts of truth.[3] Scientific objectivism presses us into assuming that truth lies in sentence-shaped pieces of reality corresponding to the sentences of a single privileged description. Peirce's end-of-inquiry idea plays into the hands of such a conception, since it is still tempted to pair off events and circumstances in the world with the linguistic items that survive all objections, and thereby supports the idea that there exists a unique final description. Rorty argues that the idea "for inquiry to have an end" presupposes that inquiry leads to such a universal convergence of beliefs and descriptions: "Peirce's idea of 'the end of inquiry'

[2] "The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth." (Peirce 1934, [5.407] 268) Apel (1975) is still an authoritative guide.

[3] By an objectivist account, I mean a conception of truth that pairs off linguistic items with isomorphically shaped circumstances and events in the world such that the latter (facts) make the former (statements, beliefs) true. In this definition, I have been influenced by what Rorty has termed *representationalism* about meaning and truth (1991a, 4–12), but hope to capture a wider family of approaches.

might make sense if we could detect an asymptotic convergence in inquiry, but such convergence seems a local and short-term phenomenon." (Rorty 1991c, 131) He is especially concerned with the observation that "conceptual convergence" is not to be had outside "normal science", and that it is constantly endangered by the possibility of scientific revolutions (ibid., fn.). He rejects the homogenising, anti-pluralist expectation that the idea of an end to inquiry is saddled with.

In his second book, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Rorty left Peirce behind and sought out an intuitive polemical allegiance with William James instead. He took on board James' comparatively vulgar pragmatist understanding of truth as "whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief" (James 1995, 30; Rorty 1982, xxv). James retained the connection introduced by Peirce, in tying the meaning of truth to human practices of inquiry, but not only threw out the idealising conditions that Peirce had relied on, but connected truth with human practical achievement, in a functionalist, broadly utilitarian understanding (which Rorty was then able to give a Nietzschean spin, criticizing our fascination with truth as something to be grown out of (1991b, 32f.)). However, the Jamesian conception had two defects.[4] It was vulnerable to a formal argument, and it was ill at ease with another philosophical allegiance Rorty was about to strike up, with the post-empiricist conceptions of language and truth introduced by Willard van Orman Quine and especially by Donald Davidson.

In his article called *Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth*, Rorty criticized James for having identified truth with "the expedient in our way of thinking" (Rorty 1991c, 127, quoting James 1995, 86), but concedes that this attempt at a definition of truth fares no better or worse than any other attempt. The formal knockdown argument, which he ascribes to Hilary Putnam, is that no definition of truth by a feature X can make it nonsensical to assert of a belief or statement that "it may be true but not X" (ibid.). This so-called 'naturalist fallacy' argument dates back to G. E. Moore, who used it on the term 'good', concluding that a reductive definition could not be successful. Similarly, Rorty argues that it always makes sense to wonder, and therefore caution, whether truth and whatever is said to define it may come apart in an individual case. In rejecting James' account as a complete conception of truth, however, Rorty does not entirely defect from the Jamesian project, retaining what he calls the 'endorsing' use of the truth predicate as one of three characteristic features of truth. The predicate 'true' can be used by way of paying a compliment to a belief or statement, as well as in recommending it for adoption as belief. Calling something true is expressing a pro-attitude towards that something. In this, Rorty adapts an 'emotivist' strategy vis-a-vis the truth predicate, a once popular stance in meta-ethics, according to which the meaning of a certain class of statements lies in their expression of signals of approval and disapproval (Boisvert 2015). This now unfashionable account from the 1950s tried to make sense of moral statements despite their presumed lack of cognitive credentials, i.e. despite the assumption that they did not convey anything that could be true or false. When Rorty adopts the endorsing use of the truth predicate, this is a provocation that his account

[4] I follow Rorty's paper cut-out version of Jamesian truth here. I cannot go into the recent scholarship from Putnam to Ira Allen (2014) that draws a more nuanced picture.

of the uses of truth is happy to retain, since part of his aim is to subvert and deflate the enormous prestige truth-talk has in our culture. In what follows, we need not commit to joining Rorty in this endeavour, as nothing depends on this feature of his account.

Besides the endorsing use, *Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth* introduced two further and systematically more interesting uses of the truth predicate:

> [A] cautionary use, in such remarks as 'Your belief that S is perfectly justified, but perhaps not true'—reminding ourselves that justification is relative to, and no better than, the beliefs cited as grounds for S, and that such justification is no guarantee that things will go well if we take S as a "rule for action" (Peirce's definition of belief)

> A disquotational use: to say metalinguistic things of the form 'S' is true iff -----. (Rorty 1991c, 128)

At first glance, the two features of the truth predicate seem neutral and almost truistic, but they turn out to conspire in a surprisingly productive way. The 'disquotational' feature makes sure that we know what the truth predicate is applied to—to linguistic objects of a certain type, objects we understand (sentences, statements, etc.). It uses truth as a primitive notion to account for the meaning of our statements and beliefs. The 'cautionary' feature insists that horizontal relations between beliefs constitute all there is in justifying our beliefs and statements, but that they do not exhaust what we mean by truth. In this, the cautionary use refutes 'epistemic' accounts of truth of the Peircian and Jamesian type, accounts that deny there is more to truth than (idealised) justification or human achievement. Note that Rorty speaks of the cautionary use of the truth predicate, whereas in fact the cautionary use employed in his example is a feature of the predicate 'not true' or, less elliptically, 'is not true', not of the predicate 'true' (= 'is true'). This negativistic approach is characteristic for the cautionary use. Indeed, it seems that the truth predicate does not have a cautionary use in its affirmative form. There is no sense in cautioning somebody by specifically warning them that 'X is true!' instead of 'X!'. 'Beyond this point, there be monsters!' is no less effective than "Beyond this point, there be monsters!' is true'. It is the cautionary use of the negation of the truth predicate that Rorty's account highlights. When turning to the cautionary uses of fakes in section II., we will see that they share this negativistic strategy.

Before we move on, note that the cautionary use of 'true' is at cross-purposes with the endorsing use. While the endorsing use assumes that the truth predicate serves no cognitive purpose, but rather channels preferences for beliefs which may or may not be capable of justification or corroboration, the cautionary use admits that truth may lie beyond even the most sustained and successful attempts at justification. What holds both uses together is that James-type definitions à la 'the truth is what's good in the way of belief' and Peirce-type definitions à la 'the truth is what would be consented at the end of inquiry' both fall victim to Putnam's formula. Something may be good in the way of belief, but not true. Something may be perfectly justified, but

perhaps not true. But while the endorsing use lowers the bar for the successful employment of 'true', the cautionary use raises the stakes in denying that there is any stable connection between truth and our most sustained epistemic endeavours. The cautionary use denies what Peirce asserted, namely that truth is an idealised epistemic predicate: that there is a necessary and (in its idealised form) sufficient connection between justification and truth. Rorty breaks with the broadly epistemic accounts that his pragmatist predecessors had tried to get right.

The disquotational sense of the truth predicate may at first seem like a technicality. In both Quine and Davidson, the truth predicate serves as a device in explaining how we understand statements in natural languages. The phrase 'is true' dismantles quotation marks when the meaning of a quoted expression is at issue. "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white'—sentences like this show how the truth predicate enables us to open the black box of a given quoted utterance, and to specify its meaning. This works for expressions of the same and of different languages, since *'Schnee ist weiß'* is true if and only if snow is white. These so-called T-sentences (T for Truth) can be used by competent speakers to translate content into their own languages (sometimes trivial and mechanical, as in the case of the homonymous translation from 'snow is white' to snow is white, sometimes informative as in the case of the translation from German to English). Since the phrase 'is true if and only if' is used to explain meaning and not vice versa, Quine's and Davidson's approach presupposes an intuitive grasp of the truth predicate. If truth is already well-understood, conflicts about which conception of truth is the most satisfactory one seem unncecessary.

A second feature of disquotation proved crucial for Rorty's adaptation. The German language example shows that the truth-predicate needs to be indexed to a language in order to be successfully dis-quoted. *'Schnee ist weiß'* is true in German if and only if snow is white. Whenever the truth predicate is applied to linguistic expressions, it must always be weighed down with a contextualising index indicating the language L concerned: 'true-in-L'. There is no 'true as such' in a disquotational approach, there is just truth-in-various-L. The introduction of T-in-L sentences goes back to the Polish logician Alfred Tarski and proved a major influence on the analytical revolution of the mid-20th century. Tarski insisted that succesfully applying the concept of truth to linguistic expressions is dependent on the "particular language under consideration. The same expression can, in one language, be a true sentence, in another a false one or a meaningless expression" (Tarski 1935, quoted in Künne 2003, 181). Tarski's insight was originally developed for formal languages, but soon generalised to natural languages by authors such as Quine and Davidson. It can be illustrated with examples such as the following:

> A billion is a thousand millions.

A statement of this sentence is true in American English (AE) but false in British English (BE) and meaningless in Polish (see Künne 2003, 181).[5] In BE, a billion is a million millions, such that 'A billion is a thousand millions'

[5] In fact, it appears that the statement is no longer false in BE. At any rate, it used to be false at least well into the 1970s, when a major linguistic shift took place.

is false. 'Billion' in BE means what 'trillion' means in AE. Using the truth-predicate as a disquotational device, a speaker of American English could assert "A billion is a million millions' is true-in-BE if and only if a trillion is a million millions', i.e. if 'billion' in AE means what 'trillion' means in BE. Of course, unlike formal languages, natural languages are not immune to ambiguities, or to shifts in meaning over time, and they contain dialects that make stable individuations of one-and-the-same language difficult. What is more, linguistic normativity in natural languages is not prescriptive in the sense that speakers are tied to standard usage. Outside legally relevant contexts, speakers are free to use expressions as they please. Attentive listeners, let alone interpreters and professional translators, are rarely at a loss when sorting out personal idiosyncrasies in usage. These observations led Donald Davidson to the conclusion that not only was Tarski's formal and confined understanding of what would qualify as a consistent L in 'true-in-L' to be rejected. Faced with the innumerable variations, divergences and deficiencies of speakers of natural languages, he proposed leaving the collective semantics of codified bodies such as 'American English' or 'British English' behind and focusing on idiolects instead (Davidson 2005). The L in 'true-in-L' would then have to be particularised to singular linguistic performances of individual speakers at specific points in time (and open to changes in the same speaker's later uses of the same terms). Tarski's disquotational idea, having started out as the controlled application of the truth predicate to stipulatively defined artificial languages, had first migrated to provide guidance for theories of meaning for natural languages, only to lead to the fragmentation of the truth predicate into myriads of languages L, languages for which the expression 'true-in-L' only marked out a momentous and individualistic reference.

Rorty's 1986 insight was that using 'true-in-L' as an undefined primitive could be instrumental in introducing a pluralistic turn into contemporary theories of truth, since truth could never be unbound from the L it was tied to, without thereby falling foul of the justification-transcendent implications of the 'cautionary use'. Whenever the truth predicate is applied to linguistic objects, it needs to reflect the variation in descriptive languages, a variation that may or may not be open to convergence of the 'billion'-trillion type, resolvable or irresolvable by stable word-for-word translation. Cautionary uses reflect the justification-transcendence of truth, while disquotational uses stand for the fragmentation and particularisation of the truth predicate to individual languages, and, with Davidson, to individual speakers and even individual occasions of utterances. Once we see the cautionary and disquotational uses as reacting to a spent Peircean paradigm, they underline two closely connected points. Justification-transcendence rules out that human convergence in beliefs and descriptions will exhaust our sense of truth, while the proliferation of languages, producing potential vehicles for the truth predicate, attests to that same divergence. Truth cannot be reduced to justification, but since languages cannot be reduced to language, there is no such thing as a single big truth lurking beyond all possible justifications. Instead, there is a standing cautionary admonition behind any justificatory repertoire, for innumerable repertoires.

II.

Perhaps the most celebrated of academic fakes is the physicist Alan D. Sokal's *Transgressing the Boundaries. Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity.***[6]** Its publication in the cultural studies journal *Social Text* in April 1996 was greeted as a major academic scandal. Sokal had made use of a battery of poststructuralist terminology to suggest that the concept of relativity employed in quantum physics could be understood to have politically liberating effects. Although departing from a sound grasp of the state of the art in physics, the article abounded with non-sequiturs and absurdities. Publicly, the Sokal hoax was quickly coopted to mark out a position in the Science Wars of the late 1990s, reflecting a deep split in the academic system and in the scholarly community as a whole. While the article had a lasting impact on the reputation of poststructuralist discourse outside of its core disciplines, its aim, at least in Sokal's retrospective self-interpretation (2008, xiv), was more narrow. Its immediate goal, Sokal later said, was to attack the journal's attempted debunking of scientific objectivity as multiply prejudiced and prey to ideological purposes, and its propagation of interdisciplinarity, which in Sokal's eyes sabotaged the integrity of scientific disciplines. However, a broader interpretation took hold according to which even within cultural studies, their adopted *lingua franca* did not make much sense. "The overwhelming take on the affair by the media was that Sokal had exposed the pretentiousness and sloppy scholarship of 'the academic left'." (Howard 2012, 281) Immediately after the successful hoax in *Social Text,* Sokal himself and his co-author Jean Bricmont had launched a broader critique of post-modernist cultural studies as nonsense upon stilts in their volume *Impostures Intellectuels,* which exemplified not the narrower narrative of a defense of hard science against its detractors, but subscribed to the traditional diagnosis of intellectuals' moral and political irresponsibility (Sokal/Bricmont 1999). Still, it is remarkable that among the critical reactions to Sokal's hoax and the subsequent book, defensiveness reigned. Attributions and quotations were contested, yet no direct refutation attempted (see e.g. Derrida 2005, 70ff.). Even where the *ressentiment* expressed in the Sokal hoax was derided, the integrity of the separate scholarly practises in science and the humanities was defended (Rorty 1999). One lesson to be learned, therefore, by those on the receiving end of Sokal's hoax, is that organised redescriptions of scientific endeavours have to respect some success conditions. If they cannot be made hoax-proof, in other words, if they cannot be immunised against self-parody, they will not succeed in de-mystifying science in the broader culture. With regard to the narrow interpretation, it seems clear that if you can't rule out to be fooled by an academic fake, you do not command the rules of your own vocabulary to a sufficient extent to be offering it as a replacement for existing descriptions. This does not entail, however, that the vocabulary cannot serve other purposes.

In 2017, Jamie Lindsay and Peter Boyle (the latter a pseudonym for Peter Boghossian) published an article in the Journal *Cogent Social Science* entitled *The Conceptual Penis as a Social Construct*. Their stunt was often compared to Sokal's fake, and hailed as its contemporary successor. In line with Sokal,

[6] For a much annotated version with multiple afterwords, see Sokal 2008.

and in contrast to the more recent phenomenon of the mechanical fake, where authors have algorithms spout prose and trick conferences and journals into accepting even syntactically non-well-formed papers,[7] the authors of *The Conceptual Penis* respected genre conventions. They argue that a penis is best understood not as a male bodily organ but rather as "a social construct isomorphic to performative toxic masculinity", claiming that their study opens "an avenue to a new frontier in gender and masculinities research that can transform our cultural geographies, mitigate climate change, and achieve social justice" (Lindsay/Boyle 2017, 1). The authors try to expose what they believe is a social scientific paradigm bordering on nonsense, identifying the critical target of their paper as that of "the style of post-structuralist discursive gender theory" (Boghossian/Lindsay n.d.). In contrast to Sokal's, Lindsay and Boyle's sting does not admit of a narrow interpretation. The authors attack the hermetic vocabulary of gender studies itself, not its attempts to stray across disciplinary borders, or into the hard sciences. In the aftermath of the hoax, commentators pointed out that the open access journal *Cogent Social Science* was not the authors' first choice, but that they had submitted their contribution to *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies.* The gender studies experts at the latter journal had rejected the article, but for inscrutable reasons had recommended it for publication in *Cogent Social Science. Cogent Social Science* is to some extent a vanity publication since authors are asked to pay to have their contributions published, which is not the case for most serious journals. Some commentators argue that thereby, the joke exploded in the authors' faces, more concretely that it exposed them as resentment-fuelled males rejecting the comparative academic success of gender studies, yet still being rejected in disciplinary peer review. Others accepted their fake as a valid criticism of the structural problems in controlling what passes into open access publications. The interpretation of Lindsay and Boyle's 'sting' operation thus centered less on the field of gender studies and more on contemporary standards in the publishing industry, with special regard to publications that churn out large numbers of contributions, with little quality control and added economic incentives. This was not the case for Sokal, who did receive suggestions from editorial review, but whose paper, unlike Lindsay and Boyle's, was not subjected to peer review (Howard 2012, 282). Whereas Sokal landed his hoax in the centre of post-structuralist academic discussion, Lindsay and Boyle showed that the periphery of social scientific discourse is not sufficiently alert to be hoax-proof.

Christiane Schulte was introduced to her readers with the photograph of a smart, pensive brunette.[8] According to the authors' later disclosure, the photo was sourced via Google Pictures, with a bland search term such as 'beautiful female face', settling on one of the very first results that came up. *Christiane* was allegedly born in 1989, the year the Berlin wall came down, and in the process of writing a dissertation on the topic of *The German-German Shepherd – A Comparative History of Violence in the 20th Century.* Her affiliation was given as Kassel University's history department, a well-known stronghold of Human-Animal Studies. The article set out to prove that an unbroken continuity of terror from National Socialism to Real Existing

[7] For an initial orientation, see the Wikipedia *List of scholarly publishing stings:* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_scholarly_publishing_stings (13/11/2018).

[8] DIE ZEIT insisted she was blond (Machowecz 2016) which indicates that even the power to confuse is culturally colour-coded.

Socialism ran through the veins of generations of their guard dogs. Files in the (non-existent) *Rasse- und Zuchtarchiv Umpferstedt* proved the direct bloodline lineage from Concentration Camp guard dogs to the unfortunate *Mauerhunde* who were chain-linked to border fortifications. This lets *Christiane* conclude that

> Beide totalitären Diktaturen des 20. Jahrhunderts verband also eine Gewalttradition; in einem fast schon dynastischen Verhältnis wurden mehrere Generationen von Schäferhunden als Instrumente totalitären Terrors eingesetzt.
>
> [Hence both totalitarian dictatorships of the 20th century were linked by a tradition of violence: in an almost dynastical relation, several generations of guard dogs were employed as instruments of totalitarian terror.] (Anonyma 2015, 324)

It is obvious that connecting the two 20th century regimes of injustice via the DNA of their instruments of terror is intended to rehabilitate both the default ambidextrous 'anti-extremist' strategy that thrived in West Germany after WWII, where right- and left-wing 'extremism' were viewed as equally salient challenges to the republic (Niesen 2004), as well as the 'Two Totalitarianisms'-interpretation in which excesses of the authoritarian regime of the GDR, during and after its Stalinist beginnings, were set morally on a par with the genocidal crimes of National Socialism (Žižek 2005). The continuity in the history of its guard dogs would count against the 'singular' character of the Holocaust that had been fought over since the famous historians' debate (*Historikerstreit*) in the late 1980s. The *Yearbook for Extremism and Democracy*, the predecessor journal, had built its reputation in equating left- and right-wing extremism, National Socialism and Communism as 'equidistant' from liberal constitutionalism, and the journal re-fashioned as *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* was now keen to reproduce this. The fact that the editor of the non-peer reviewed journal had fallen victim to an academic fake proved the self-corroborating tendencies of a research paradigm that had survived the Cold War, but had not paused to reflect its basic assumptions. If by 'ideology' (a term with many uses) we mean a view that necessarily self-confirms from a given, interested perspective, the *Schulte* fake had proved the ideological character of the research assumptions behind *Totalitarianism and Democracy*.

In an interesting twist, however, the *Schulte* collective argued that their hoax served a dual aim. In an *ex post facto* declaration, they insisted that on the one hand, it had aimed to show that "extremism theory is not a scientific method". On the other hand, the authors said they had wanted to start a full-blown debate over the question "why engaged social criticism has become the exception in the humanities" (Anonyma 2016). The authors' declaration exposed a political agenda that overlapped to a great extent with the worldview kept alive by *Totalitarismus und Demokratie:*

> Mit dem Zusammenbruch des Staatssozialismus und dem Utopieverlust der politischen Linken wurden Subjekte wie ‚die Arbeiterklasse' oder ‚wir Frauen' jedoch zunehmend fragwürdig. Stattdessen bekamen nun die lieben Tiere ihre

Agency zugesprochen. Die entstehende Tierrechtsbewegung übertrug das Vokabular von Ausbeutung und Entrechtung auf Tiere, fügte der Triade von ‚class, race, gender' ein neues Herrschaftsverhältnis hinzu und kritisierte alle, die zwischen der Ausbeutung von Milchkühen und Sklaven noch Unterschiede erkennen wollten.

[With the collapse of state socialism and the loss of utopias on the political Left, subjects such as 'the working class' or 'we women' became increasingly dubious. Instead, agency was ascribed to the dear animals. The emerging animal rights movement transferred the vocabulary of exploitation and the loss of rights to animals, added a new form of domination to the triad of 'class, race, gender' and criticised those who kept on distinguishing between the exploitation of dairy cows and that of slaves.] (Anonyma 2016)

The authors do not explain why it should seem impossible to criticise both slavery and industrial agriculture, and why the latter agenda is obviously inferior from the point of view of the political Left. They made no effort to explain why ascribing agency to animals is incompatible with 'engaged social criticism' and not one of its contemporary forms. For our purposes, it is decisive that they did not manage to place their article in an animal studies journal, or displayed familiarity with the standards, terminology or state of the art of that genre. In a similar move to Sokal's strategy, who placed a ludicrous view of physics in a cultural studies journal, not a physics journal, *Christiane* claims to have fooled Animal Studies for which *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* has no track record. On the contrary, their article's surface sensitivity to human-animal relations has arguably contributed to its acceptance (see Machowecz 2016), in a misguided attempt at modernisation of a struggling academic and political paradigm. Nobody with expertise in human-animal-relations had fallen for the charm of the splendidly invented evidence offered in the piece, and nobody in animal studies could possibly have been exposed by the fake's success. An eye-opener with regard to the partiality of the vocabulary of 'extremism research', the *Schulte* fake failed in regard to its avowed second aim. But of course we should allow that some fakers may be confused as to their target.

III.

In this concluding section, I want to connect the lessons from our discussion of the truth predicate in section I. with the analysis of the meaning and function of academic fakes in section II.

The cautionary use of 'true' served to express skepticism toward justification as a final *arbiter*. While justification is immanent to a given set of statements and beliefs and to given ways of expressing them, truth transcends actual and potential justification. The fact that truth transcends all justification does not only entail that we might be wrong in what we believe to be true-in-L, but it may also encourage us to come up with alternative L. The disquotational use of the truth predicate reminds us of the fact that we need to index truth

conditions to the language used in quoted statements, and that we must not be too confident about homonymous translatability. On the contrary, the confrontation with strange ways of speaking in unfamiliar academic genres underlined the fragmentation of truth claims to the languages employed. The late-pragmatist take on the truth predicate, combining its cautionary and its disquotational uses, is itself neither objectivist, nor does it have relativist implications. It does not deny that truth is independent of whether we grasp it, nor that what is true remains so. It can firmly commit to facts (truths under a description) but insist that the world does not get to pick those descriptions. The combination of cautionary and disquotational uses thus recommends seeking out new languages in order to complement or supersede the existing carriers of meaning and justification. Of course, the disquotational particularisation of truth claims to languages does not entail that vocabularies themselves can vouch for the truth of their statements, on the contrary. They can add justification upon justification, yet may never be complacent about their own claims, since they will not connect with a true-making world that then privileges their type of description over others.

One function of academic fakes is therefore to expose the limited immanent efficacy of concrete genres of justification in given languages L. In contrast to the cautionary use of the truth predicate, which may or may not be redeemed by a move within a given vocabulary, a successful academic fake must not be understood as a tool of falsification of particular truth claims, but as a critique of a given vocabulary itself. In some instances, for example in *Christiane Schulte's* highlighting the biased nature of extremism research, it applies a form of immanent critique in bringing to light assumptions that seem necessarily self-reinforcing from a particular epistemic perspective (Stahl 2013). In contrast to more traditional forms of immanent critique, fakes do not expose contradictions, but ridicule through a strategy of subversive over-affirmation. Although fakes do not venture explanations for why certain vocabularies tend to self-enforce (beyond imputations of prejudice or the political instrumentalisation of scholarship which are shown but not stated in the fakes themselves), they expose the un-guarded reproduction of assumptions through an irreverent exploitation of a vocabulary's conventions. Fakes operate in an immanent way in that they do not bring to bear alternative 'correct' norms and ways of speaking, although those will of course motivate and inform the work of the fakers. But although fakes pretend to be moves, or rather collections of moves, within a given register, it seems more apt to see them cautioning against employing the register itself, since its protagonists fail to see that its statements and beliefs are prone to self-confirmation, not just tone-deaf to its humourous abuses. But like the cautionary use of the truth predicate, a cautionary use of fakes is not an argument. Fakes push and shove, but do not refute.

With regard to Sokal's original hoax, recall that we distinguished between a narrow and a wide use of fakes. The narrow use is defensive. It reminds innovators not to stray beyond their area of competence. They can hardly hope to redescribe the domain of a formerly dominant academic discourse, such as physics, if they do not sufficiently command its rules in order not to

be fooled by its practitioners. While the narrow use is anti-hegemonic, so to speak, the wide use is itself based on a desire for hegemony, in attempting to destroy vocabularies that fail to comply with its standards. More often than not, it is the fakes themselves that stand in the service of corroborating dominant discourses. The self-image of the faker is that of an embattled fighter in struggles for academic hegemony (Boghossian/Lindsay n.d.; Sokal 2008; Anonyma 2016). This can lead them to attack easy targets, for example in the Boyle/Lindsay triumph of fooling a bottom-of-the-foodchain journal, or to claim victory over an opponent whom they have not in fact tricked (as in Boyle and Lindsay's rejection by a *bona fide* gender studies journal, and in *Christiane Schulte*'s false claim to have exposed animal studies' assumptions, which they have not in fact tested). The recent proud unveiling of an industrial scale production of fakes by Boghossian, Lindsay and their co-author Helen Pluckrose has still widened the gap between what the authors take themselves to have established, and the rivalling, more impassive explanations.**[9]** While the cautionary use of the truth predicate reminds us that we may need new descriptive languages, the cautionary use of fakes to test these languages can take on a reactionary function when attempting to shoot down new upstart vocabularies. I take *Christiane Schulte* at their word in illustrating this propensity with one of the alleged targets of their fake, the incriminated language of animal studies.

Recent work by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2011) gives a political reading of human-animal relations. It invites us to see domesticated animals as co-citizens, i.e. as members of our polities who display political preferences and deserve political representation. Its language of political inclusion (replacing, e.g. languages of ethical compassion or the 'animal liberation' approach that *Schulte* allude to) makes a new start where other allusive descriptions seem spent. Donaldson and Kymlicka's suggestion has met with some predictable knee-jerk reactions (Electoral rights for sheep?), and we cannot know what fakes are already being prepared to put the boot into the rhetoric of animal citizenship. In our contemporary political language, 'domesticated animals are co-citizens' is as absurd as it is in Polish. But the wager is that it might be productive to spell out the conditions under which a statement such as 'domesticated animals are political co-citizens' could be true-in-L, where L is the default human-animal relations vocabulary in affluent societies. Treating 'domesticated animals are political co-citizens' as a truth value candidate of course does not make it true, but it may lead to a debate over the suitability of the citizenship metaphor, the conditions under which it is plausible to ascribe animals citizenship, and, eventually, over the suitability of keeping alive such (at first) counterintuitive ways of talking. A literalisation of the citizenship metaphor would depend not only on the specification of what animal citizenship would mean-in-our-L, by settling on necessary and sufficient conditions, but also on succesful social and political struggles. It would need to catch on as a way of describing important commonalities between domesticated animals and humans, and be propped up by good normative reasons (internal justifications) as to why this should be the case (co-dependency, cooperation, coexistence, etc.). The risk of failure, and not

[9] For a first roundup of interpretations, see Kafka 2018. There is a new dimension to the most recent barrage of hoaxes in that the invention of data and the fabrication of empirical studies on the part of the authors seem to have been key in securing publication. This element seems to push the analysis of fakes toward the analysis of academic imposters and frauds, which cannot be pursued in this paper.

just of internal implausibility, must necessarily accompany the launch of such a vocabulary, as well as the permanent shadow of academic fakes. A successful fake of the animal citizenship paradigm would have to show that its cards are stacked against counter-evidence. Absent such a showing, it could demonstrate no more than that an uncharitable homonymous translation can lead to a *reductio ad absurdum* of intra-vocabulary claims. It cannot show that framing human-animal relations under the co-citizenship description does not have an edge over some other languages of human-animal relations, as a whole or in some aspects. Such a vocabulary may enable formulations that qualify as facts, and therefore truths, that are not yet accessible from the perspective of existing vocabularies.

To wrap up, the existence of academic fakes shows that not all scholarly debate is concerned with the question of which statements in a given vocabulary are true, but also with improving or changing vocabularies that generate new candidates for truth and falsity. It is those candidates, and the systematic conceptual connections they provide, that fakes aim to sabotage. In applying cautionary practises to standard and non-standard repertoires, fakes combine the cautionary and metalinguistic lessons of Rorty's late pragmatist conception of truth. They caution not against errors in but the error of such repertoires. In only apparently conducting their single-minded pursuit of truth within a given academic vocabulary, they warn against the use of unproductive old and unprincipled new vocabularies. Fakes play a dual role, in revealing the lack of self-correction mechanisms in the employment of standard and new vocabularies, and in attempting to foreclose on new fledgling vocabularies. Sometimes fakes just confirm that a given vocabulary is counterintuitive and can be parroted, which is not informative in itself. Of course, being liable to be parodied (and failing to notice) makes practitioners look bad, as in all three fakes discussed, and initial skepticism applies to practitioners who can't tell when their vocabulary is the butt of a joke. But the lack of a working sense of humour that would allow to detect a fake indicates no epistemological failure, but only a failure of worldliness. Where fakes do more than cause gratuitous amusement they also sow a suspicion that, as in the case of the *Schulte* fake, research paradigms are prone to confirming their own expectations. Such cautioning can be used to uncover self-corroborating tendencies in established discourses, and suggest that they be left behind, as in the case of extremism research. At the same time, fakes can channel the tyranny of scientific common sense and the impatience of accepted methodology vis-a-vis experimental new vocabularies, intending to shut them down before they have had a chance to prove their worth. This seems to be the case when *Christiane*, in a misguided self-interpretation, complain that animal studies are taking up the attention formerly reserved for women and the working class. To conclude, it is impossible, but also undesirable, not to risk falling for fakes, and the continuous danger of being fooled may have a hand in keeping thinkers more honest than they would otherwise be disposed to. But falling foul of a fake is a risk worth taking, since academic progress may lie with the linguistic innovators.**[10]**

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[11] Note: The article has been withdrawn from the journal's online resource, but can be accessed in hard copy. A pdf-copy is on file with the author.

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Die Rationalität postfaktischen Denkens

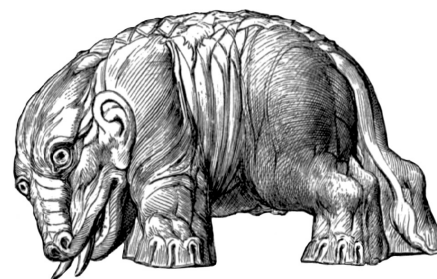# The Rationality of Post-Truth Thinking

Norbert Paulo

Abstract

Can post-truth thinking be rational? In order to answer that question I develop, in the first part of this article, a non-pejorative understanding of post-truth thinking, namely as the systematic underestimation of the epistemic value of the expert discourse as compared to one's individual deliberation in relation to politicized factual issues in an environment without secure epistemic rules. Everyone significantly underestimates how more reliable academic discourse, say, is compared to individual epistemic means. In post-truth thinking this underestimation concerns questions the answers to which allow for predictions about political affiliation. In answering such questions—about the truth of the theory of evolution, say—almost everyone has to draw on the testimony of others one regards as being trustworthy. Oftentimes one finds these trustworthy people in his or her social media filter bubbles. Post-truth thinking happens when one has to inform oneself in social or alternative media for which we currently lack safe epistemic rules of thumb or heuristics. "Post-truth thinking" seems to imply indifference about truth or rationality. Against this assumption I argue, in the second part, that post-truth thinking can be regarded as being rational, at least in the sense of "bounded rationality". After all, everyone has to rely on the testimony of others in almost all fields of knowledge. In non-ideal circumstances, which are characteristic for post-truth thinking, it is rational, in navigating social and alternative media, to follow epistemic rules well-established in other domains. These rules often speak for believing what emerges in one's filter bubble.

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Spätestens seit 2016 haben Begriffe wie „postfaktisch", „alternative Fakten" und „Fake News" Hochkonjunktur. Genauere Bestimmungen dessen, was diese Begriffe bezeichnen sollen, fehlen aber noch weitgehend.**[1]** Mich interessiert im Folgenden der Begriff des postfaktischen Denkens, der gemeinhin für mehrere miteinander verwandte Phänomene steht. Dazu zählt etwa, was Harry Frankfurt bereits 1986 als „Bullshit" bezeichnet hat, nämlich die – meist öffentlich in Politik, Medien oder Werbung auftretende – Rede in völliger Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber der Wahrheit des Gesagten (Frankfurt 2006). Dazu zählt aber auch, was andere „truthiness" genannt haben, das heißt, das Vertrauen auf das eigene, subjektive Gefühl von der Wahrheit (siehe Heath 2014, 2f.). Das kann zum Beispiel heißen, es nicht für relevant zu halten, wie die Kriminalitätsrate sich tatsächlich entwickelt hat. Stattdessen zählt der eigene Eindruck: Wenn „die Leute" sich bedroht fühlen und glauben, dass es immer mehr Kriminalität gibt, dann sei das die relevante Grundlage für politische Maßnahmen – und eben nicht die von „sogenannten" Expert_innen ermittelte Entwicklung der Kriminalitätsrate. Schließlich, so die dahinter stehende Überzeugung, verfolgten Expert_innen auch nur ihre persönliche Agenda, und objektive Fakten gebe es ohnehin nicht.

Ebenso wie „Bullshit" und „truthiness" wird „postfaktisches Denken" ganz überwiegend pejorativ gebraucht und als problematisch empfunden, besonders im politischen Bereich, wo es oft mit populistischen Politikformen verbunden wird, die die liberale Demokratie herausfordern (Voßkuhle 2018). Ich werde in diesem Aufsatz zunächst einen Vorschlag unterbreiten, wie postfaktisches Denken verstanden werden kann, nämlich als die systematische Unterschätzung des epistemischen Werts des Expert_innendiskurses im Vergleich zur individuellen Überlegung in Bezug auf politisierte bzw. ideologisierte faktische Fragen in einer Umgebung mit unsicheren epistemischen Regeln.

Alle Menschen – so das erste Element dieses Vorschlags – haben psychologische Dispositionen, die postfaktisches Denken ermöglichen: Wir unterschätzen systematisch und signifikant, wie viel verlässlicher beispielsweise der wissenschaftliche Diskurs im Vergleich zu unseren eigenen Erkenntnismöglichkeiten ist. Das zweite Element besagt, dass sich diese Unterschätzung im postfaktischen Denken auf politisierte faktische Fragen bezieht, also auf solche Fragen über Tatsachen, deren Beantwortung normalerweise eine politische Verortung erlaubt. Eine Antwort auf die Frage nach dem Zusammenhang zwischen Migration und Kriminalität beispielsweise erlaubt eine relativ sichere Vermutung darüber, welche politische Affiliation eine Person hat. Ein wichtiges Problem im Kontext derartiger politisierter bzw. ideologisierter faktischer Fragen ist, dass es für Nichtexpert_innen im jeweiligen Bereich sehr schwer ist, sich verlässlich zu informieren. Die meisten Menschen müssen sich bei der Beantwortung solcher Fragen an dem orientieren, was andere, die sie für vertrauenswürdig halten, sagen. Nach dem dritten Element meines Vorschlags tritt postfaktisches Denken auf, wenn die Unterschätzung des epistemischen Werts des Expert_innendiskurses im Vergleich zur individuellen Überlegung in Bezug auf politisierte faktische Fragen in einer Umgebung mit unsicheren epistemischen Regeln auftritt. Eine solche Umgebung, in der uns gegenwärtig noch Faustregeln oder Heuristiken

[1] Für einen Definitionsversuch von „Fake News" siehe Gelfert 2018.

fehlen, wie verlässlich die dort verbreiteten Informationen sind, stellen soziale und „alternative" Medien im Internet dar. In diesen Medien werden einige der Effekte der ersten beiden Elemente postfaktischen Denkens noch potenziert, was meines Erachtens erklärt, dass dieses Phänomen noch verhältnismäßig neu ist.

Wenn ich das hier angedeutete Verständnis postfaktischen Denkens sogleich eingehender erläutern werde, so ist das Ziel dieses ersten Teils meiner Ausführungen weder eine umfassende Phänomenologie noch eine empirische Analyse der Verwendung von „postfaktisch" oder „postfaktisches Denken". Vielmehr unterbreite ich einen Vorschlag, wie man das Phänomen postfaktischen Denkens verstehen kann. Diesen Vorschlag versuche ich sodann dadurch zu plausibilisieren, dass ich das Auftreten postfaktischen Denkens unter Rückgriff auf sozial- und kognitionswissenschaftliche Erkenntnisse erkläre. Das vorgeschlagene Verständnis postfaktischen Denkens und seine Erklärung stellen einen Versuch dar, besser zu verstehen, was genau es ist, das seit 2016 so viel Aufmerksamkeit erregt hat.

Postfaktisches Denken wird oft als problematisch empfunden, nicht zuletzt, weil der Begriff eine Abkehr von oder Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber Wahrheit und Rationalität zu implizieren scheint. Ich werde mich im zweiten Teil dieses Aufsatzes der Frage widmen, ob oder inwiefern diese Gefahr tatsächlich besteht. Postfaktisches Denken, so das zentrale Argument, kann als – zumindest vorläufig und begrenzt – rational gelten. Schließlich fehlt es im Bereich politisierter Tatsachenfragen für Nichtexpert_innen an einfachen und klaren Erkenntnismöglichkeiten. Sie müssen sich auf andere verlassen, wenn sie sich eine Meinung darüber bilden wollen, ob es beispielsweise den anthropogenen Klimawandel gibt oder ob die Evolutionstheorie stimmt. Unter „nicht-idealen" Bedingungen, die für postfaktisches Denken charakteristisch sind, ist es begrenzt rational, sich in sozialen und „alternativen" Medien an den epistemischen Regeln zu orientieren, die sich in anderen Bereichen, also außerhalb dieser Medien, etabliert haben. Postfaktisches Denken tritt in Themengebieten auf, die umstritten sind; es ist nicht leicht, sich in diesen Bereichen als Laie unter Zeitknappheit und ohne einfachen Zugang zu sicheren Erkenntnismitteln rational eine Meinung zu bilden. Schritt für Schritt, so die Schlussfolgerung, sollten bessere epistemische Regeln für die Bereiche entwickelt werden, in denen gegenwärtig postfaktisches Denken auftreten kann.

Was ist Postfaktisches Denken?

Unterschätzung sozialer Deliberation

Das erste Element des vorgeschlagenen Verständnisses postfaktischen Denkens ist die systematische Unterschätzung des epistemischen Werts des Expert_innendiskurses im Vergleich zur eigenen, individuellen Überlegung. Beginnen wir mit einem Beispiel: Der Klimawandelskeptizismus ist eine in der Bevölkerung und in der Politik weit verbreitete Haltung, die potentiell

weitreichende Konsequenzen hat. Denn gemeint ist die Überzeugung, entgegen einem signifikanten wissenschaftlichen Konsens (statt vieler Cook et al. 2013), dass es entweder gar keinen Klimawandel gibt oder dass dieser nicht von Menschen mitverursacht wurde und wird (Leiserowitz et al. 2013).[2]

Zunächst mag es naheliegen, Klimawandelskeptiker_innen für uninformiert zu halten.[3] Und tatsächlich zeigen Untersuchungen, dass die Skeptiker_innen den Grad an wissenschaftlichem Konsens in dieser Frage massiv unterschätzen (Linden et al. 2015). Aber wie erklärt man den großen Anteil derjenigen, die das nicht tun, aber trotzdem skeptisch sind? Man könnte auf Informiertheit, Intelligenz, kritisches Denken, argumentative Fähigkeiten etc. verweisen: Wie Kahan (2015) für den US-amerikanischen Kontext gezeigt hat, erhöhen solche Fähigkeiten bei den Vertreter_innen des liberalen Spektrums[4] die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass der wissenschaftliche Konsens in Bezug auf den Klimawandel akzeptiert wird. Bei den Konservativen allerdings ist das Gegenteil der Fall: Ein höherer Grad dieser Fähigkeiten führt hier eher dazu, den wissenschaftlichen Konsens abzulehnen.

Als Erklärung für diese und ähnliche Erkenntnisse schlagen Hugo Mercier und Dan Sperber aus kognitionswissenschaftlicher und anthropologischer Sicht vor, die rationalen und kritischen Fähigkeiten generell so zu verstehen, dass sie überwiegend dazu genutzt werden, um die eigenen Intuitionen nachträglich zu rationalisieren, Lücken und Schwächen in der Argumentation der „Gegner" zu erkennen („motiviertes Denken") und von der Mehrheitsmeinung abweichende, alternative Erklärungen zu formulieren (Mercier/Sperber 2017, 2011). Dieses Verständnis der Funktion menschlicher Vernunfttätigkeit stützt sich auf ein Paradigma der Kognitionswissenschaften, welches grob von zwei kognitiven Systemen ausgeht: einem eher schnellen, intuitiven und mit Emotionen verbundenen, und einem langsamen, kontrollierten und mit Rationalität verbundenen (Evans/Frankish 2009; Stanovich 2011). In diesem Paradigma zeigt sich, dass potentiell fehleranfällige Intuitionen und Emotionen in menschlichen Entscheidungen eine größere Rolle spielen als lange angenommen wurde und als es subjektiv erlebt wird. Vor allem in Hinblick auf die Rationalität im Bereich wirtschaftlichen Entscheidens *(behavioral economics)* und statistischer Zusammenhänge konnten eine Reihe von irrationalen Fehlwahrnehmungen, Heuristiken und sogenannten *biases* nachgewiesen werden (für einen Überblick siehe Kahneman 2012).

Um nur ein Beispiel zu nennen: Bereits vor über 30 Jahren haben Amos Tversky und Daniel Kahneman mit einem berühmten Experiment die sogenannte „conjunction fallacy" untersucht (Tversky/Kahneman 1983). Testpersonen sollten die Beschreibung einer Person, Linda, lesen und auf dieser Grundlage eine Frage über Linda beantworten. In der Beschreibung hieß es, Linda sei ein 31 Jahre alter Single, wortgewandt und sehr klug. Sie habe Philosophie studiert und sich während des Studiums mit Fragen von sozialer Gerechtigkeit und Anti-Diskriminierung beschäftigt. Ferner habe sie an Anti-Atomkraft-Demonstrationen teilgenommen. Die Testpersonen wurden gebeten, anzugeben, welche von drei Aussagen über Linda mit höherer Wahrscheinlichkeit zutrifft als die anderen. Hier die Aussagen: Erstens, Linda ist in der feministischen Bewegung aktiv. Zweitens, sie ist Kassiererin. Drittens, sie ist Kassiererin

[2] Es geht also nicht um einen Dissens darüber, welche konkreten Auswirkungen der Klimawandel haben wird oder wie darauf individuell oder politisch reagiert werden sollte.

[3] Hier folge ich teilweise Levy 2017.

[4] „Liberal" ist grob zu verstehen als „freiheitlich" oder „sozialdemokratisch". Der Begriff dient in den USA gemeinhin der Abgrenzung zur politischen Rechten („Konservative") wie zur politischen Linken.

und in der feministischen Bewegung aktiv. Eine Mehrheit der Testpersonen hält die dritte Aussage für wahrscheinlicher als die zweite. Das ist insofern überraschend, als die dritte Aussage überhaupt nur dann wahr sein kann, wenn auch die zweite wahr ist. Konjunktionen können nicht wahrscheinlicher sein als die in ihnen verbundenen Aussagen (deswegen „conjunction fallacy"). Irgendwie erscheint die dritte Aussage aber wahrscheinlicher als die zweite – und das auch dann, wenn man sich klar gemacht hat, dass das rein logisch nicht sein kann. Ähnlich wie bei optischen Illusionen verfallen wir immer wieder in das gleiche Muster zurück, auch wenn wir das „Problem" verstanden haben (Levy 2007, 282ff.). Solche Muster scheinen sich auch in anderen Bereichen zu zeigen. Die allermeisten normativen Urteile (etwa in Moral, Politik oder Recht) scheinen nicht langsam, bewusst und kontrolliert-rational gefällt zu werden, sondern schnell, unbewusst und intuitiv (Brand 2016; Haidt 2013, 2001), bei Laien ebenso wie bei Expert_innen in den jeweiligen Bereichen (siehe Schwitzgebel/Cushman 2015 m.w.N.). Der epistemische Wert individueller Überlegung ist also relativ gering.

Eine Vielzahl an Studien hat gezeigt, dass *soziale Überlegung bzw. Deliberation*[5] unter bestimmten Bedingungen – wie eine diverse Zusammensetzung der Gruppe und die Möglichkeit, Gründe auszutauschen – viele der Fehler individueller Überlegung vermeiden kann und insgesamt zu rationaleren Entscheidungen führt (Mercier/Sperber 2017, Kap. 18). Sie gewichten Evidenzen angemessener, machen weniger logische und statistische Fehler etc. Mitunter bringen genau die Dispositionen, die individuelle Überlegung unzuverlässig machen, in Gruppen epistemische Vorteile: Wenn mehrere Gruppenmitglieder ihre je divergierenden Standpunkte intensiv verteidigen und besonders gut darin sind, Gegenargumente zu entkräften, alternative Erklärungen zu finden etc., dann führt dies in der Gruppe insgesamt zu besseren Ergebnissen. Schließlich wird so eine größere Anzahl von Standpunkten, Argumenten und Evidenzen einer kritischen Prüfung unterzogen, als das in der individuellen Überlegung der Fall ist. Unter geeigneten Bedingungen findet in Gruppen also eine fruchtbare kognitive Arbeitsteilung statt.

Der beachtliche Erfolg der institutionalisierten Wissenschaft kann teilweise so verstanden werden: Die permanente Kontrolle wissenschaftlicher Arbeit durch *Peers*, idealerweise weltweit (Diversität), anonymisierte Verfahren der Qualitätssicherung, der regelmäßige Austausch von Gründen sowie Zeit für individuelle Reflexion und Möglichkeit zur Analyse und Bewertung von Alternativen etc. – all diese Elemente wissenschaftlicher Arbeit wurden institutionalisiert (oder werden zumindest angestrebt) und ermöglichen die oben beschriebene kognitive Arbeitsteilung, die normalerweise zu besseren Ergebnissen führt als die je individuelle Überlegung der beteiligten Personen. Das Verfahren der Peer-Review in den Wissenschaften kann als eine solche Hoffnung auf höhere Qualität durch „kognitive Arbeitsteilung" verstanden werden.[6]

Die meisten Menschen unterschätzen die Vorteile der sozialen Deliberation erheblich. Mercier et al. (2015) konnten in einer kulturübergreifenden Studie zeigen, dass der Grad an Überschätzung der eigenen im Vergleich zur sozialen Deliberation sogar dann nur geringfügig abnimmt, wenn man die

[5] „Deliberation" ist hier in keinem spezifisch theoretischen Sinn gemeint. Ich möchte ihn verstehen als jede Art nicht bloß individueller Überlegung, Beratschlagung oder Argumentation. Um den sozialen Charakter der Deliberation zu betonen und um die Abgrenzung zur bloß individuellen Überlegung zu verdeutlichen, spreche ich von „sozialer Deliberation".

[6] Dass das Peer-Review-Verfahren allein nicht rationalitätswahrend ist, zeigt ein kürzlich veröffentlichter Bericht über *Hoax*-Aufsätze, die teilweise in angesehenen wissenschaftlichen Zeitschriften veröffentlicht wurden (siehe Pluckrose et al. 2018).

Testpersonen den Zusammenhang praktisch erfahren lässt und ihn außerdem theoretisch erklärt. Selbst einschlägig vorgebildete Sozialpsycholog_innen haben die Fehleranfälligkeit der individuellen Überlegung zwar realistischer eingeschätzt als die Laien, aber auch sie haben trotz ihrer Vorbildung den Unterschied zur sozialen Deliberation deutlich unterschätzt (Mercier et al. 2015). Interessanterweise hängt der Erfolg der sozialen Deliberation genau davon ab, dass sich alle Gruppenmitglieder individuell überschätzen und das Potenzial der Gruppe unterschätzen. Denn wenn die Gruppenmitglieder der Ansicht wären, dass ihre individuellen Überlegungen im Vergleich zu denen der gesamten Gruppe nachrangig sind, würden sie ihre divergierenden Standpunkte wahrscheinlich nicht so intensiv verteidigen und Gegenargumente so vehement zu entkräften versuchen. Der Erfolg der sozialen Deliberation hängt aber davon ab, dass sie genau das tun. Nur wenn sich alle individuell überschätzen, so könnte man sagen, kommt es zu einer fruchtbaren kognitiven Arbeitsteilung (Levy 2017).

Den eingangs genannten Klimaskeptizismus kann man also ebenso wie andere wissenschaftsskeptische Positionen wie folgt erklären: Die Skeptiker_innen haben ihre persönliche Meinung, ob sie nun auf bloßer „truthiness" beruht oder auf intensiven Recherchen. Die Skeptiker_innen erkennen auch den Konflikt mit dem wissenschaftlichen Konsens. Sie halten aber die Rationalitätsunterschiede zwischen ihrer individuellen und der sozialen Deliberation in der Wissenschaft für so gering, dass sie im Ergebnis ihre persönliche Meinung für gleichwertig erachten. Diejenigen Skeptiker_innen, die ihre Meinung auf eigene Recherchen stützen, verstehen sich oft als „Aufklärer_innen": Sie haben den Mut, sich des eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen. Aber sie unterschätzen die Begrenzungen des je individuellen Verstandes. Die systematische Unterschätzung des epistemischen Werts des Expert_innendiskurses im Vergleich zur individuellen Überlegung ist also das erste Element des vorgeschlagenen Verständnisses postfaktischen Denkens.

Politisierte faktische Fragen

Das bisher Gesagte betrifft jedoch lediglich ein allgemeines psychologisches Phänomen, dem fast alle Menschen unterliegen. Postfaktisches Denken erklärt es nur teilweise. Für eine angemessenere Erklärung muss – so möchte ich vorschlagen – ein Bezug zu politisierten oder ideologisierten faktischen Fragen – also Fragen über Tatsachen – hinzukommen. Schließlich sind Meinungen je nach Gruppenzugehörigkeit in Bezug auf bestimmte Themen relativ genau prognostizierbar. Diese Meinungen scheinen auch von testimonialem Wissen abzuhängen. Von testimonialem Wissen ist dann die Rede, wenn eine Person etwas für wahr hält, weil eine andere Person behauptet, dass es wahr sei.

Welchem Zeugnis man glaubt, hängt teilweise vom Inhalt ab (Corner et al. 2012; Keller 2015). Stärker scheint aber die Beziehung zur Person der Zeugin oder des Zeugen zu wirken (Harris 2012). Grundsätzlich gilt: Jemandem aus dem eigenen Lager glaubt man eher, auch wenn man das subjektiv anders wahrnimmt (Cohen 2003). Vor dem Hintergrund des politischen Konflikts beurteilen etwa Israelis und Palästinenser_innen einen Vorschlag für ein

Friedensabkommen abhängig davon signifikant unterschiedlich, ob ihnen gesagt wurde, dass der Vorschlag von den Israelis oder von den Palästinenser_innen gemacht wurde (Maoz et al. 2002). Die Glaubwürdigkeit von Informationen wird abhängig davon eingeschätzt, wer die Information überbringt. Sogar relativ offensichtliche Fehlvorstellungen können sich verfestigen, wenn die Korrekturversuche von den „falschen" Personen unternommen werden; sie können sich dadurch sogar verstärken (sog. „Backfire-Effekt", vgl. Nyhan/ Reifler 2010; Berinsky 2017).

Diese Phänomene zeichnen sich prinzipiell unterschiedslos bei allen Menschen ab. Allerdings treten sie signifikant nur bei solchen Themen auf, die politisiert bzw. ideologisiert sind (Kahan et al. 2017). Solche klaren politischen oder ideologischen Korrelationen finden sich beispielsweise bei Themen wie Evolutionstheorie, Klimawandel und Migration, nicht aber bei Esoterik, vermuteten Gefährdungen durch Impfungen oder durch Gentechnik, weswegen diese Themen aus dem Bereich des postfaktischen Denkens, wie ich es verstehen möchte, ausscheiden. Postfaktisches Denken bezieht sich also in diesem Sinne auf politisierte bzw. ideologisierte faktische Fragen.

Umgebungen mit unsicheren epistemischen Regeln

Die soeben genannten Punkte über die Funktionsweise testimonialen Wissens sagen noch nichts darüber aus, wie man seine Zeug_innen auswählen sollte. Diese Frage betrifft das dritte Element meines Verständnisses postfaktischen Denkens. Ich behaupte, dass postfaktisches Denken dort auftritt, wo es noch keine etablierten epistemischen Regeln gibt. Mit „epistemische Regeln" meine ich sozial etablierte Faustregeln oder Heuristiken, die in ihrer jeweiligen Umgebung in den allermeisten Fällen wahre Zusammenhänge aufzeigen (vgl. Gigerenzer 2007; Hahn 2013, Kap. 8). Solche Regeln sind veränderbar und unterschiedlich stabil. Sie können natürlich auch darin fehlgehen, wahre Zusammenhänge aufzuzeigen, etwa wenn es um Vorurteile geht.

In diesem dritten Element liegt – so meine These – das Spezifische am postfaktischen Denken. Skeptizismus in Bezug auf den anthropogenen Klimawandel oder die Evolutionstheorie gibt es schon länger, und beides kann mit den ersten beiden Bedingungen erfasst werden. Neu sind – und dies ist ein wichtiger Grund dafür, dass seit 2016 das Interesse am Phänomen des postfaktischen Denkens derart gewachsen ist – die unsicheren epistemischen Regeln vor allem in den neuen sozialen und „alternativen" Medien. Diese Medien, die für immer mehr Menschen eine wichtige Nachrichtenquelle darstellen (Newman et al. 2018), tragen mittlerweile erheblich zur Verbreitung von Inhalten aller Art bei und verstärken die Polarisierung (siehe Sunstein 2017).

Nehmen wir das Beispiel Twitter (für Facebook würde es ganz ähnlich funktionieren):[7] Zeug_innen berichten in ihren *Tweets* normalerweise etwas, das sie selbst erlebt haben bzw. glauben gesehen zu haben und insofern für wahr halten. Der Status von *Retweets* auf Twitter ist hingegen längst nicht so klar: Wir haben noch keine epistemischen Regeln dafür etabliert, ob jemand, der den Tweet einer anderen Person nochmals postet (also retweetet) und damit weiter verbreitet, auch hinter dem jeweiligen Inhalt steht. Anders als ein

[7] Das Beispiel der Retweets ist angelehnt an Rini (2017).

eigener Tweet ist ein Retweet keine selbst formulierte Aussage. Man kann Posts anderer aus verschiedenen Gründen retweeten, etwa weil man sie für besonders interessant oder richtig hält und möchte, dass mehr Leute sie lesen; oder weil man sie lustig grotesk oder gar skandalös findet und darüber eine Diskussion anregen will. Entsprechend viele Möglichkeiten für Missverständnisse oder Gelegenheiten für Irreführungen gibt es. Relativ bekannt ist inzwischen, was Regina Rini die „just a retweet"-Verteidigung nennt (Rini 2017, E 47): Wenn jemand gefragt wird, warum sie etwa einen Post mit offensichtlich falschen Aussagen oder mit rassistischen Untertönen weiter verbreitet hat, ist die Antwort oft „Das ist doch nur ein Retweet". Man sei, so lautet die implizierte Verteidigung, also nicht für die Äußerungen anderer verantwortlich, auch dann nicht, wenn man sie weiter verbreitet. Wir mögen eine solche Verteidigung nicht immer akzeptieren oder für aufrichtig halten, vor allem dann, wenn das gleiche Muster wiederholt auftritt, wenn also eine Person wieder und wieder diese Verteidigungsstrategie nutzt. Aber wir sind uns auch noch nicht sicher, ob wir diejenigen, die eine „just a retweet"-Verteidigung vorbringen, genauso behandeln sollen wie diejenigen, die direkt lügen oder eine eigene Aussage mit rassistischen Untertönen treffen. Kurz: Wir sind uns der epistemischen Regeln im Umgang mit Retweets noch unsicher.

Der Punkt wird noch klarer, wenn man sich vor Augen führt, dass wir in anderen Bereichen sehr wohl etablierte epistemischen Regeln haben. Bei klassischen Druckwerken gelten etwa folgende Regeln: Wer in der Fußgängerzone Zeitungen verkauft, steht nicht für die Inhalte der Zeitung ein. Die Person will diese Inhalte in aller Regel nicht befürworten oder kritisieren, sie steht in gar keinem klaren Verhältnis zu den Inhalten.

Wenn es sich jedoch um Zeitungen handelt, in denen kontroverse politische oder religiöse Inhalte einseitig dargestellt werden, dann haben wir guten Grund anzunehmen, dass die Person diese Inhalte teilt. Je extremer die Inhalte sind, desto stärker sind unsere Gründe anzunehmen, dass die Person sie teilt. Denn eine Person, die die Inhalte tatsächlich nicht teilt, wird sich gut überlegen, ob sie diesen Job annimmt, wenn sie nicht fälschlich mit den Inhalten in Verbindung gebracht werden möchte. Auch dann, wenn die Zeitungen kostenlos angeboten werden, gehen wir in der Regel davon aus, dass die Person, die sie verteilt, in den allermeisten Fällen hinter den Inhalten der Zeitung steht (man denke etwa an politische Wahlwerbung); außer es handelt sich offensichtlich um eine Werbeaktion.

Weil wir diese epistemischen Regeln haben, wird eine Zeitung-verkaufende Person *unter bestimmten Umständen* mit den Inhalten in Verbindung gebracht, diese Umstände sind abhängig von Inhalt und Aufmachung der Zeitung. Die epistemischen Zurechnungsregeln bei der Distribution von Zeitungen (und in etlichen anderen Bereichen) sind also relativ nuanciert und – so möchte ich behaupten – wohl etabliert, stabil und zuverlässig. Derartige Regeln fehlen uns derzeit aber für Retweets bei Twitter ebenso wie für viele andere Äußerungen in den sozialen Medien.

Aber auch über die sozialen Medien hinaus brachte die Digitalisierung der letzten Jahre viele Bereiche epistemischer Unsicherheit hervor. Erinnert sei hier an – meist internetbasierte – „alternative" Medien wie Unzensuriert.at,

Breitbart.com oder Russia Today, die nicht selten in aufklärerischer Manier Narrative anbieten, die dezidiert vom Mainstream abweichen. Der Milliardär und Gründer von Red Bull, Dietrich Mateschitz, hat kürzlich eine sogenannte „Medienstiftung" mit dem Namen „Quo Vadis Veritas" gegründet, die seit 2017 mit Addendum.org ein neues „alternatives" Medium betreibt. In der Selbstdarstellung auf der Homepage heißt es:

> Bei Addendum finden Sie die Ergebnisse von intensiven Recherche-Projekten, die dem Leitmotiv unserer Organisation folgen: Wir suchen ‚das, was fehlt'. Wir agieren dabei vollkommen unabhängig, unser Ziel ist, einen Beitrag zur Wiederherstellung einer gemeinsamen Faktenbasis für eine qualifizierte politische Debatte zu leisten. Dieser rekonstruktive Journalismus stellt nicht den Anspruch, die Wahrheit gefunden zu haben, wir bemühen uns aber, ihr mit den Mitteln von Recherche und Datenanalyse so nahe wie möglich zu kommen.[8]

Das klingt grundsätzlich nach einem journalistisch wertvollen Ziel. Bei genauerer Betrachtung zeigt sich allerdings ein ambivalentes Bild: Die Beiträge zeichnen sich einerseits durch eine relativ hohe journalistische Qualität aus, was bei den Leser_innen für Vertrauen auch in den epistemischen Wert der Beiträge sorgen dürfte. Dazu tragen die seriöse Gestaltung mit vielen Grafiken und Übersichten, aber auch die prominent platzierten Möglichkeiten, Ungenauigkeiten und Fehler zu melden, bei. Addendum wirkt also wie ein verlässliches neues Medium – und vielleicht ist es das auch. Andererseits kommen aber auch Zweifel an der journalistischen Qualität von Addendum und damit an der epistemischen Verlässlichkeit der dort verbreiteten Informationen auf: Dietrich Mateschitz hat sich mitunter sehr kritisch zum wahrgenommenen Mainstream in Medien und Politik geäußert. Er sprach von „Meinungsdiktatur" und von „unmündigen, kritiklosen und verängstigten" Staatsbürgern (siehe Patterer/Nöhrer 2017). Es ist also nicht ausgeschlossen, dass er als Geldgeber Addendum zur Verbreitung seiner eigenen Ansichten nutzen will und wird. So hat jedermann die Möglichkeit, an Addendum „vertrauliche Informationen, die für Recherchen relevant sein können" zu übermitteln. Das kann epistemisch wertvoll sein, es kann aber auch so verstanden werden, dass davon ausgegangen wird, dass die klassischen Medien relevante Informationen nicht verbreiten oder sogar aktiv unterdrücken.

Das ist also das dritte Element meines Verständnisses postfaktischen Denkens: Postfaktisches Denken tritt vermehrt oder sogar vornehmlich dort auf, wo es noch keine etablierten epistemischen Regeln gibt, beispielsweise in sozialen und „alternativen" Medien. Wenn politisierte oder ideologisierte Inhalte in Medien verbreitet werden, die eine erhebliche Reichweite haben, für die uns aber etablierte epistemische Regeln fehlen, dann haben wir es tatsächlich mit einem neuartigen Phänomen zu tun. Schließlich scheinen durch Mechanismen wie Filterblasen und Echokammern[9] die oben beschriebenen Effekte der Politisierung bzw. Ideologisierung noch potenziert zu werden (Pariser 2011; Bakshy et al. 2015; Sunstein 2017). Der Unterschied zwischen dem „klassischen" und dem postfaktischen Skeptizismus in Bezug auf eine Mehrheitsmeinung

[8] Siehe https://www.addendum.org/uber-addendum/ (19/10/2018).

[9] Zur Unterscheidung Nguyen 2018a.

in den Wissenschaften liegt also nicht in der Art der Überzeugung oder in der Erkenntnisquelle – beide basieren auf einer Unterschätzung des epistemischen Werts des Expert_innendiskurses im Vergleich zur individuellen Überlegung, und beide beziehen sich auf politisierte bzw. ideologisierte faktische Fragen. Der Unterschied liegt vielmehr darin, dass die Überzeugungsbildung und -verfestigung zu signifikanten Anteilen in einer medialen Umgebung stattfinden, für die wir noch keine sicheren epistemischen Regeln haben. Skeptizismen in Bezug auf den anthropogenen Klimawandel oder die Evolutionstheorie können sich in einer solchen Umgebung in viel größerem Umfang bilden und dann vor allem auch vor abweichenden Ansichten oder Kritik abschirmen, was wiederum die Politisierung bzw. Ideologisierung verstärkt (siehe auch Schaffner/Luks 2017).

Bisher habe ich versucht, das Verständnis postfaktischen Denkens als die systematische Unterschätzung des epistemischen Werts des Expert_innendiskurses im Vergleich zur individuellen Überlegung in Bezug auf politisierte bzw. ideologisierte faktische Fragen in einer Umgebung mit unsicheren epistemischen Regeln zu plausibilisieren. Im Folgenden werde ich der Frage nachgehen, ob oder inwiefern das so verstandene postfaktische Denken als rational gelten kann.

Rationalität postfaktischen Denkens

Bei vielen Themen wie der Evolution oder dem anthropogenen Klimawandel scheiden für Laien (also für die allermeisten Menschen) die als verlässlich angesehenen Erkenntnisquellen aus: Evolution und Klimawandel kann man nicht in ihrer Gänze mit den eigenen Sinnen wahrnehmen. Wenn man das systematisch versuchen wollte, müsste man, weil der Gegenstandsbereich so komplex ist, mit großen Datenmengen arbeiten, Modelle entwickeln, Hypothesen testen etc. Man müsste also wissenschaftlich zu dem Thema arbeiten und wäre mithin selbst Expertin oder Experte. Ebenso wenig kann man die Wahrheit der Evolutionstheorie oder die Existenz des anthropogenen Klimawandels apriorisch herleiten. Wenn man von drei grundsätzlichen Erkenntnisquellen – Wahrnehmung, apriorisches und testimoniales Wissen – ausgeht (vgl. Grundmann 2017, Kap. 7), bleibt Laien also lediglich der dritte Weg.

Wie bereits erläutert, ist dann von testimonialem Wissen die Rede, wenn eine Person etwas für wahr hält, weil eine andere Person behauptet, dass es wahr sei. In den vergangenen drei Jahrzehnten ist die Erforschung testimonialen Wissens vom Rand ins Zentrum der Erkenntnistheorie gerückt (z.B. Coady 1992; Goldberg 2010). Und das aus gutem Grund, schließlich ist ein erheblicher Anteil unseres Wissens fast ausschließlich durch das Zeugnis anderer begründet: die Wahrheit der Evolutionstheorie die Überzeugung, dass die Erde keine Scheibe ist, das Wissen, dass die *Mona Lisa* von Leonardo da Vinci stammt oder auch nur die Kenntnis über den eigenen Geburtstag. Wie sollten wir ohne das Zeugnis anderer Wissen über Ereignisse erlangen, die vor unserer Zeit oder räumlich weit von uns entfernt liegen? Oft ist es epistemisch wertvoll, auf das Zeugnis anderer zu vertrauen. In der jüngeren erkenntnistheoretischen Literatur werden epistemische Regeln auch in Bezug

auf neue Medien diskutiert.**[10]**

Wenn hier und im Folgenden von der Rationalität postfaktischen Denkens die Rede ist, dann ist „Rationalität" im Sinne des epistemischen Werts solcher Regeln gemeint. Rationalität wird verbreitet als Wohlbegründetheit charakterisiert (Hahn 2013, Kap. 4). Postfaktisches Denken wäre demnach rational, wenn es durch gute Gründe gerechtfertigt ist. Oben habe ich von epistemischen Regeln als veränderbaren und unterschiedlich stabilen sozial etablierten Faustregeln oder Heuristiken gesprochen, die in den allermeisten Fällen wahre Zusammenhänge aufzeigen. Die Rationalität postfaktischen Denkens ist vom epistemischen Wert solcher Regeln abhängig, also davon, wie gut diese Regeln darin sind, faktisch richtige Zusammenhänge aufzuzeigen. Je höher der epistemische Wert dieser Regeln ist, desto größer ist auch die Rationalität des postfaktischen Denkens, das sich auf diese Regeln bezieht. Der epistemische Wert der Regeln für die Auswahl von Zeug_innen bemisst sich beispielsweise danach, wie wahrscheinlich es ist, dass deren Zeugnis wahr ist.

Epistemische Regeln in sozialen Medien

Ein Kennzeichen sozialer Medien, das sich in vielen Hinsichten als besonders wertvoll herausgestellt hat, liegt in der Möglichkeit, dass die jeweiligen Inhalte mit fortschreitender Nutzung immer genauer den individuellen Vorlieben und Interessen der Nutzer_innen angepasst werden können. Dieser Anpassungseffekt führt allerdings auch zu erheblichen Problemen. Wie bereits gesagt, stellen soziale Medien für immer mehr Menschen eine wichtige Nachrichtenquelle dar und tragen zur Verbreitung von Inhalten aller Art bei (Newman et al. 2018). Die klassischen Medien, sog. „general interest media" (Sunstein 2017, Kap. 1) wie große Tageszeitungen, Radio- oder Fernsehsender, bereiten Inhalte für alle Konsument_innen gleich auf. Dadurch kommen diese mit Themen und Meinungen in Kontakt, die sie nicht interessieren oder die sie nicht teilen. Genau das bleibt durch die Filtermechanismen in sozialen Medien weitgehend aus. Wenn sie gut funktionieren, dann zeigen soziale Medien einer individuellen Nutzerin nach einer gewissen Zeit der Nutzung, in der sich Nutzerin und das entsprechende Programm „kennenlernen", immer punktgenauer die Inhalte, die sich als die herausgestellt haben, an denen die Nutzerin am meisten interessiert ist. Das ist hilfreich, wenn es um Musik- oder Filmtipps geht. Es kann aber auch bedenklich werden, beispielsweise wenn es um politische Meinungen oder um politisierte faktische Fragen geht. Dann werden der Nutzerin immer präziser solche Meinungen anzeigt, die sie teilt, so führen soziale Medien zu Filterblasen. Durch den Filtermechanismus sozialer Medien in Bezug auf politische Meinungen oder politisierte faktische Fragen sieht die Nutzerin vor allem von anderen Nutzer_innen formulierte Inhalte, die ihr in Hinblick auf Interessen, religiöse, politische oder ideologische Orientierung ähnlich sind. Meist sucht man sich diese Personen sogar als „Freunde" aus oder „folgt" ihnen. Kurz: Die Nutzerin nimmt in ihrer Filterblase Äußerungen von anderen Nutzer_innen zur Kenntnis, mit denen sie zu einem großen Teil Werte und Ansichten teilt.

[10] Für einen relativ frühen Versuch siehe Goldman 2008; für ein aktuelles Beispiel siehe Nguyen 2018b.

Kürzlich hat Regina Rini argumentiert, dass es meistens rational ist zu glauben, was man in der eigenen Filterblase liest (Rini 2017). Wenn es um normative (z.B. moralische oder politische) Fragen geht, ist das leicht zu erklären: In der Beurteilung normativer Fragen, über die wir uns selbst noch keine feste Meinung gebildet haben, orientieren wir uns regelmäßig an „epistemic peers", also an Menschen, die wir zumindest für epistemisch gleichwertig halten. Im normativen Bereich sind das Menschen, bei denen wir davon ausgehen, dass sie in normativen Fragen meist zu „richtigen" Antworten kommen.[11] Eben weil in der Filterblase Inhalte so gefiltert werden, dass man als Nutzer_in fast ausschließlich von Menschen hört, mit denen man Werte und Ansichten teilt, kann es als rational gelten, diesen Inhalten zu glauben, weil es wahrscheinlich scheint, dass deren Zeugnis „wahr" ist.[12] Und wie Adam Elga plausibel argumentiert, sind das genau diejenigen, deren Ansichten mit unseren über verschiedene Bereiche hinweg weitgehend übereinstimmen (Elga 2007). Dies sind wiederum mit hoher Wahrscheinlichkeit die Personen, von denen Nutzer_innen in ihrer Filterblase lesen, weil diese Personen ihnen in Hinblick auf Interessen, religiöse, politische oder ideologische Orientierung ähnlich sind. Wenn die „epistemic peers" nun also zu einer normativen Frage, über die eine Nutzerin noch keine feste Meinung hat, ihre Meinung darstellen, dann hat die Nutzerin normalerweise guten Grund, diese Meinung zu übernehmen (Rini 2017, E 51f.). Die entsprechende epistemische Regel ist in diesem Sinne epistemisch wertvoll und ihr zu folgen kann als rational gelten.

Oben habe ich vorgeschlagen, postfaktisches Denken so zu verstehen, dass es auf politisierte bzw. ideologisierte *faktische Fragen* bezogen ist. Kann es also auch in Bezug auf faktische (im Gegensatz zu normativen) Fragen als rational gelten, den Inhalten der eigenen Filterblase zu glauben? Wenn die Frage so umfassend gestellt wird, lautet die Antwort: Nein. Schließlich erfordert die Beantwortung vieler besonders schwieriger faktischer Fragen – im Gegensatz zur Beantwortung vieler normativer Fragen – besondere Kenntnisse, Fähigkeiten und Mittel. Diese haben nur wenige Menschen, die nicht Wissenschaftler_innen in den fraglichen Fächern sind. Natürlich haben einige Menschen Kontakt zu Expert_innen in einem oder mehreren Fachgebieten, sodass auch die Möglichkeit besteht, dass sich dieser Kontakt in epistemisch wertvoller Weise auf die Inhalte der Filterblase auswirkt. Aber die Kontakte werden sich auch in diesen Fällen auf relativ wenige Fachgebiete beschränken, etwa auf die Soziologie, die Klimawissenschaften oder die Astronomie. Nur sehr wenige dürften in so gutem Kontakt zu Expert_innen in allen drei (oder weiteren) Fächern stehen, dass sich dies in epistemisch wertvoller Weise auf die Inhalte der Filterblase auswirken kann. Entsprechend dürften die allermeisten Nutzer_innen sozialer Medien nicht mit Expert_innen für viele Fachgebiete in Kontakt stehen. Es kann also für die allermeisten Nutzer_innen auch nicht als rational gelten, in Bezug auf schwierige faktische Fragen den Inhalten der eigenen Filterblase zu vertrauen.

Anders könnte dies aber in Bezug auf solche faktischen Fragen zu beurteilen sein, die *politisch relevant* sind (Rini 2017, E 52). Damit meine ich vor allem Fragen über die Bedeutung deskriptiver Informationen für normativ-politische Bewertungen. Es geht also weniger um die Akkuranz der Information, denn

[11] Mit der Rede von Wahrheit und Richtigkeit möchte ich mich hier nicht auf eine realistische metaethische Position festlegen, die moralische Sätze für wahrheitsfähig hält. Mit leicht veränderten Formulierungen sollten meine Ausführungen auch mit nicht-realistischen Positionen vereinbar sein. Für eine Übersicht über die hauptsächlich vertretenen Positionen siehe Tarkian 2009.

[12] Hier und im Folgenden beschränke ich mich auf ein einzelnes soziales Medium wie Twitter oder Facebook. Tatsächlich nutzen viele Menschen mehrere soziale Medien, deren individualisierte Inhalte einander widersprechen können. Außerdem sind alle Menschen natürlich auch Einflüssen außerhalb sozialer Medien ausgesetzt. Diese Vereinfachung ist aus meiner Sicht für die Zwecke dieses Beitrags aber gerechtfertigt, weil die diskutierten epistemischen Regeln sich an der ganzen Bandbreite der verfügbaren Einflüsse und Erkenntnismöglichkeiten bewähren müssen, um dem angesetzten Rationalitätsstandard zu entsprechen.

um die Einschätzung ihrer Relevanz. Diese Relevanzeinschätzung ist selbst normativ, weswegen es wiederum naheliegt, auch hier anzunehmen, dass man als Nutzer_in rationalerweise der Einschätzung der „epistemic peers" glauben kann: Wenn also in meiner Filterblase beispielsweise im Themenfeld Migration vor allem deskriptive Informationen über Kriminalität verbreitet werden, so habe ich guten Grund anzunehmen, dass diese Informationen für die normativ-politischen Fragen im Bereich der Migration besonders relevant sind. Gleiches gilt in Bezug auf den anthropogenen Klimawandel: Wenn in meiner Filterblase vor allem Informationen darüber verbreitet werden, dass die arktischen Eismassen tatsächlich größer werden oder dass Wissenschaftler_innen Daten „frisieren", dann habe ich guten Grund anzunehmen, dass diese Informationen für die normativ-politischen Fragen im Bereich des Klimawandels besonders relevant sind.

Wenn man nun also, wie ich es vorgeschlagen habe, postfaktisches Denken als auf politisierte bzw. ideologisierte faktische Fragen bezogen versteht, kann man vor dem Hintergrund des gerade Gesagten feststellen, dass postfaktisches Denken als rational gelten kann. Schließlich funktioniert das testimoniale Vertrauen auf normative Inhalte in der eigenen Filterblase so ähnlich wie das sonstige Vertrauen (in normativen Fragen) auf die eigenen „epistemic peers", mit deren Ansichten man über verschiedene Bereiche hinweg weitgehend übereinstimmt. Die epistemischen Regeln sind in beiden Fällen also epistemisch wertvoll, weil sie normalerweise wahre Zusammenhänge aufzeigen. Es kann mithin grundsätzlich als rational gelten, sich auf diese Regeln zu verlassen.

Qualifizierung der Rationalitätsthese

Es fällt nicht schwer, Gründe zu finden, an der soeben aufgestellten Rationalitätsthese zu zweifeln. Beispielsweise kann es zwar unter „nicht-idealen" Bedingungen – also etwa wenn wir wenig Zeit und begrenzte Informationen haben und uns nur oberflächlich mit Themen beschäftigen können – rational sein, der eigenen Filterblase zu glauben. Die grundsätzlich epistemisch wertvollen Effekte der Ähnlichkeit („epistemic peers") können aber auch ein epistemischer Nachteil sein, besonders dann, wenn sie auf ähnlichen Werten und Ansichten beruhen. So zeigt etwa eine Studie von Sunstein et al. (2016), wie stark die Wahrnehmung von *deskriptiven* Informationen von Werten und Ansichten abhängt. In der Studie wurden Testpersonen mit unterschiedlichen Ansichten zum anthropogenen Klimawandel gefragt, welche Temperaturveränderungen sie bis zum Jahr 2100 in den USA erwarten. Einige befürchten einen relativ hohen Anstieg, andere einen eher geringen. Die eine Gruppe bekam sodann Berichte darüber, dass Wissenschaftler_innen herausgefunden hätten, der Klimawandel wäre sehr viel drastischer als ohnehin schon angenommen; die andere Gruppe hingegen las in ihren Berichten das Gegenteil. Interessant ist, wie die Testpersonen auf diese Berichte reagiert haben: Diejenigen, die ohnehin einen nur geringen Anstieg der Temperatur angenommen hatten, fühlten sich von den positiven Berichten stark bestätigt und korrigierten ihre eigene Einschätzung deutlich nach unten. Die negativen Berichte haben aber nicht dazu geführt, dass sie ihre eigene Einschätzung entsprechend

nach oben korrigiert hätten; sie blieb schlicht unverändert, so als hätten sie diese Information gar nicht aufgenommen. Das Gleiche zeigte sich umgekehrt bei der anderen Gruppe. Aufgrund der negativen Berichte haben sie ihre eigene Einschätzung deutlich nach oben korrigiert; die positiven Berichte haben aber nicht dazu geführt, dass sie ihre Einschätzung entsprechend nach unten korrigiert hätten. Es zeigt sich also, dass Werte und Ansichten – auf irrationale Art – signifikant beeinflussen können, für wie relevant wir faktische Informationen halten, wenn diese potentiell politische Implikationen haben.

Dieses Beispiel deutet bereits an, dass die Gründe, an der Rationalitätsthese zu zweifeln, teilweise mit den anderen beiden Elementen postfaktischen Denkens zu tun haben, die ich oben vorgeschlagen habe: mit der Überschätzung des epistemischen Werts individueller Überlegung und mit der Umgebung mit unsicheren epistemischen Regeln. Wenn es stimmt, dass man die Fortschritte der Wissenschaft u.a. durch die Institutionalisierung bestimmter Strukturen erklären kann, die (idealerweise) erfolgreiche soziale Deliberation ermöglichen – weltweite Kontrolle wissenschaftlicher Arbeit durch *Peers*, anonymisierte Verfahren der Qualitätssicherung, regelmäßige Treffen auf dem Büroflur, auf Workshops oder Konferenzen, die einen stetigen Austausch von Gründen ermöglichen etc. –, dann spricht dies auch dafür, dass das Umfeld sozialer Medien nicht in ähnlicher Weise wie die Wissenschaft zu Erkenntnissen führen kann. Schließlich sorgen die oben beschriebenen Filterblasen zu etlichen Effekten, die Diversität, Meinungspluralismus und Qualitätskontrolle eher entgegenstehen als fördern. Hätten die Testpersonen in dem Experiment von Sunstein et al. die Gelegenheit bekommen, sich auszutauschen, wären die Anpassungen ihrer Erwartungen vermutlich sehr viel rationaler – nämlich in beide Richtungen – erfolgt. Schließlich ist eine einseitige Anpassung als epistemische Regel nicht wertvoll, weil sie nicht verlässlich wahre Zusammenhänge aufzuzeigen vermag. Im Bereich der sozialen Medien wird ein Austausch von Gründen tendenziell verhindert. Gerade weil Filterblasen bestehen, findet ein Austausch sich stark widersprechender Gründe nicht statt. Schließlich liest man fast ausschließlich die Einschätzungen derjenigen, deren Sichtweise der eigenen ohnehin sehr ähnlich ist, was sich auch darin äußert, dass man ihre Gründe bzw. ihre Gewichtung von Gründen überwiegend teilt.

Obwohl soziale Medien mit Mechanismen funktionieren, die epistemisch wertvolle Formen sozialer Deliberation erschweren, wäre es aber zu einfach gedacht, wollte man argumentieren, postfaktisches Denken könne schon deswegen nicht rational sein. Schließlich sind wir auch dann, wenn wir nicht postfaktisch denken, nicht immer irrational, bloß weil wir die Vorteile der sozialen gegenüber der individuellen Überlegung unterschätzen. Oft spielt das schlicht gar keine Rolle, etwa dann, wenn man (noch) gar nichts über die Mehrheitsmeinung weiß. Dann kann es durchaus rational sein, *vorläufig* die Meinung der eigenen „epistemic peers" zu übernehmen oder sich an dieser zumindest zu *orientieren*.[13]

Das eigentliche Problem scheint im Bereich des dritten Elements meines vorgeschlagenen Verständnisses postfaktischen Denkens zu liegen, nämlich darin, dass das Phänomen in Umgebungen mit unsicheren epistemischen Regeln auftritt. Ich habe argumentiert, dass wir in vielen Bereichen etablierte

[13] Man könnte natürlich auch argumentieren, dass es in den beschriebenen Situationen rational wäre, sich noch gar keine Meinung zu bilden bzw. noch kein Urteil zu fällen, sich also zu enthalten bzw. ein Urteil aufzuschieben. Der Unterschied zwischen dieser Möglichkeit und der von mir vorgeschlagenen dürfte jedoch marginal sein. Schließlich steht eine sich enthaltende Person tatsächlich so gut wie nie vollkommen neutral den bestehenden Optionen gegenüber. In den allermeisten Fällen hat sie vor dem Hintergrund ihrer sonstigen Überzeugungen zumindest eine Tendenz, die Gründe für eine der Optionen für gewichtiger zu halten. Wenn in dieser Situation die „epistemic peers" ebenfalls diese Option befürworten, spricht das für eine entsprechende Orientierung. Wenn sie hingegen die andere Option befürworten, spricht das dafür, die eigenen Gründe zu hinterfragen. Das meine ich also mit „Orientierung" an den „epistemic peers". Außerdem ist eine Enthaltung oft keine Option, wenn die entsprechende Überzeugung eine Handlung anleiten soll.

epistemische Regeln haben, die uns relativ genau sagen, wer in welcher Situation wie zu einer Aussage steht. Solche Regeln sagen uns oft auch, wie bedeutend diese Aussage ist (wie viele sie teilen, ob sie sicher oder unsicher ist, ob sie umstritten ist etc.). In sozialen und „alternativen" Medien fehlt uns oft die erste Art epistemischer Regeln. Wir wissen oft schon nicht, wer hinter welcher Aussage steht. Nicht weniger wichtig scheint aber die zweite Art epistemischer Regeln zu sein, also die Regeln darüber, wie bedeutend eine Aussage ist. Filterblasen schirmen uns von Informationen darüber ab, ob eine Aussage umstritten ist, weil andere Meinungen und Kritik herausgefiltert werden. Wir haben bisher keine epistemischen Regeln dafür etabliert, wie wir mit diesem Mangel an Information umgehen sollen. Auch erfahren wir nur scheinbar viel darüber, wie viele Menschen eine Aussage teilen. Zwar gibt es *Retweets*, *Shares* und *Likes*, aber diese können nur eine ganz grobe Orientierung bieten. Einerseits weil – vor allem im hier relevanten politischen Bereich – ein erheblicher Anteil der entsprechenden Aktivitäten nicht von Menschen kommt, sondern von programmierten *Social Bots* generiert wird (Grimme et al. 2017); andererseits weil in sozialen Medien schnell und mehr oder weniger zufällig sogenannte Kaskaden entstehen (Sunstein 2017, Kap. 4).[14].

Zur Frage nach der Rationalität postfaktischen Denkens können wir vor diesem Hintergrund sagen, dass zwei Antwortmöglichkeiten wohl ausscheiden: Postfaktisches Denken ist *nicht grundsätzlich rational*. Wir haben gerade gesehen, dass es eine Reihe von Gründen gibt, anzunehmen, dass es oft irrational ist. Postfaktisches Denken ist aber auch *nicht grundsätzlich irrational*.[15] Auch wenn die allermeisten Menschen die Vorteile der sozialen Deliberation unterschätzen, sorgt das nicht für grundsätzliche Irrationalität, u.a. weil dieses Faktum oft schlicht keine Rolle spielt.

Der bessere Ansatzpunkt, um die Frage nach der Rationalität postfaktischen Denkens zu beantworten, scheinen mir die unsicheren epistemischen Bedingungen zu sein, die wir heutzutage vor allem in sozialen und „alternativen" Medien vorfinden. Maßstab für Rationalität kann hier keine epistemische Idealwelt sein. Rationalität bemisst sich vielmehr daran, wie mit den vorhandenen Informationen unter den jeweiligen Rahmenbedingungen umgegangen wird. Postfaktisches Denken kann also dem Bereich *begrenzter Rationalität* („bounded rationality") zugerechnet werden.[16] Die Frage ist, wie man als an Wahrheit orientierter, gut informierter und bedachter Mensch auf rationale Weise mit Informationen aus sozialen und „alternativen" Medien umgehen soll.

Gerade im Bereich politisierter faktischer Fragen, um die es beim postfaktischen Denken geht, sind auch die Informationen, die man in klassischen Medien – den „general interest media" – findet, oft unterschiedlich. Eher konservativ-liberale Zeitungen wie die Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung berichten über Migration und Migrant_innen oft anders als eher linksliberale Zeitungen wir die ZEIT. Auch über die klassischen Medien hinaus ist es sehr schwer, zu politisierten faktischen Fragen klare und verlässliche Antworten zu finden. Es mag für einen besorgten Vater, der verunsichert ist, ob Impfungen für Kinder gefährlich sind, rationaler sein, sich auf die Empfehlungen des Robert-Koch-Instituts zu verlassen als auf die Meinung, die sich in seiner Filterblase

[14] Zur Veranschaulichung des „irrationalen Kaskadeneffekts" siehe die Studie von Salganik et al. 2006.

[15] Den Bereich des Arationalen spare ich hier aus.

[16] Zum Unterschied zwischen „begrenzter" und „voller" Rationalität siehe Hahn 2013, Kap. 8.4.

herausbildet. Nicht zufällig hatte ich aber die Gefahren durch Impfschäden oben nicht den politisierten faktischen Fragen zugeordnet: Bei den wirklich politisierten faktischen Fragen – Klimawandel, Migration, Evolutionstheorie etc. – gibt es kein Äquivalent zum Robert-Koch-Institut. Diese politisierten faktischen Fragen sind eben nicht nur in den sozialen und „alternativen" Medien umstritten. Diesbezügliche Meinungsverschiedenheiten gehen – in unterschiedlicher Ausprägung und Tiefe – durch die gesamte Gesellschaft und spiegeln sich in den Programmen der politischen Parteien wider. Es ist für Menschen, die keine Expert_innen sind, in diesen Bereichen also kaum möglich, schnell und einfach eine klare Antwort auf politisierte faktische Fragen zu erhalten. Es erscheint mir nicht plausibel, einem solchen Menschen zu raten, im Umgang mit sozialen Medien ganz auf epistemische Regeln zu verzichten, die sich in anderen Bereichen genau in dem Sinne etabliert haben, dass sie unter Einbeziehung der ganzen Bandbreite verfügbarer Einflüsse und Erkenntnismöglichkeiten verlässlich wahre Zusammenhänge aufzeigen – gerade weil es vielfach Sinn macht, sich auf die „epistemic peers" zu verlassen. Eine Orientierung an diesen Regeln dürfte also rationaler sein als ein vollständiger Verzicht auf sie oder als das erratische Austesten alternativer Regeln.

Unter unsicheren epistemischen Bedingungen treten allerdings die angesprochenen Probleme auf, die ein Vertrauen auf die gleichen epistemischen Regeln, die unter besseren epistemischen Bedingungen verlässlich sind, doch nur bedingt oder begrenzt als rational erscheinen lassen. Die sozialen und „alternativen" Medien, die heutzutage als Umgebung mit unsicheren epistemischen Regeln gelten, verändern sich weiterhin. Entsprechend werden sich auch die epistemischen Regeln für den Umgang mit ihnen entwickeln und immer wieder an veränderte technische Möglichkeiten und verändertes Nutzerverhalten anpassen.

In loser Analogie zum Popper'schen wissenschaftstheoretischen Falsifikationalismus (Popper 1994) muss der gut informierte und bedachte Mensch also seine in epistemisch unsicherer Umgebung gewonnenen Überzeugungen immer wieder an epistemisch sichereren Quellen „testen"; nur dann gelangt er zu langfristig rationalen Überzeugungen. Anders als in den Wissenschaften muss er zwar nicht aktiv nach Falsifikationsmöglichkeiten suchen. Um rationalerweise an der unter unsicheren epistemischen Bedingungen gewonnenen Überzeugung festzuhalten, muss er sie aber zumindest wiederholt anderen Erkenntnisquellen aussetzen und sollte sich der bedingten Verlässlichkeit seines Erkenntnismittels und mithin der bedingten Sicherheit seiner Überzeugung bewusst sein. In diesem Sinne ist postfaktisches Denken bloß in einem schwachen Sinne – nämlich vorläufig und begrenzt – rational. Die Rationalität einer in epistemisch unsicherer Umgebung gewonnenen Überzeugung nimmt aber mit der Zahl erfolgreicher Überprüfungen an epistemisch sichereren Quellen zu. Ziel der Testung von Überzeugungen, die nur als begrenzt rational gelten können, ist nicht zuletzt die schrittweise Entwicklung sicherer epistemischer Regeln.

In diesem Beitrag habe ich vorgeschlagen, postfaktisches Denken als die systematische Unterschätzung des epistemischen Werts des Expert_innendiskurses im Vergleich zur individuellen Überlegung in Bezug auf politisierte bzw. ideologisierte faktische Fragen in einer Umgebung mit

unsicheren epistemischen Regeln zu verstehen. Dieses Verständnis ist nicht pejorativ. Fast alle Menschen denken mitunter in diesem Sinne postfaktisch. Wir alle überschätzen den epistemischen Wert der individuellen Überlegung, auch in Bezug auf politisierte bzw. ideologisierte faktische Fragen. Und fast alle Menschen bilden oder korrigieren ihre Überzeugungen auch in Umgebungen mit unsicheren epistemischen Regeln, beispielsweise in sozialen Medien. Postfaktisches Denken in diesem Sinne ist zwar kein sicherer Weg, um zur Wahrheit zu gelangen. Aber es kann dennoch zur Wahrheit führen. Es scheint weder klarerweise rational, noch klarerweise irrational zu sein. Das liegt vor allem daran, dass es nicht in einer epistemischen Idealwelt vorkommt.**[17]**

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Affekte der Wahrheit
Über autoritäre Sensitivitäten von der Aufklärung bis zu 4Chan, Trump und der Alt-Right

Affects of Truth
On Authoritarian Sensitivities from the Enlightenment to 4Chan, Trump, and the Alt-Right
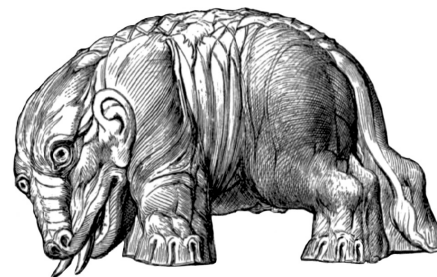
Rainer Mühlhoff

Abstract

Based on a theory of affectivity and subjectivity, this article analyzes different affective sensitivities behind authoritarian styles of politics. Following the late work of Michel Foucault, I formulate a concept of political subjectivity that describes the emergence of (new) forms of political articulation as a result of an interplay of individual affective sensitivities and media-technical structures of public communication. To illustrate the theoretical points, the article starts from a brief outline of affective subjectivation in the context of the discourse ethics of (German) Enlightenment. Then I will discuss the emergence of political subjectivities in the context of the election of Donald Trump as the 45th US President in 2016. As I will argue, the current rise of right-wing populism and the Alt-Right movement shows a political impulse aimed at disturbing and destroying the established political apparatus. This can be theorized as a form of authoritarian mobilization based on the activation of a cynical and destructive authoritarian sensitivity. While this sensitivity must be distinguished from a civic and indignant form of authoritarian sensitivity, both forms resonated in a symbiotic affective interplay that emerged out of a complex strategy of media guerilla around the election of Donald Trump.

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1. Einleitung

Die Wahl von Donald Trump zum 45. US-Präsidenten am 8. November 2016 hat zahlreiche Kommentator_innen in Politik und Medien kalt erwischt. Die wenigsten waren darauf vorbereitet, dass allen Prognosen zum Trotz die Wahl so ausgehen könnte. Viel wurde über die sachliche Inkompetenz des Milliardärs Donald Trump geschrieben, über seine Impulsivität und Wankelmütigkeit in konkreten politischen Fragen. Mit fassungslosem Kopfschütteln und teilweise alarmistisch wurde er in bürgerlichen Medien als wichtigtuerisch, aufbrausend, rassistisch und sexistisch beschrieben. Die Mehrheit der Kommentator_innen war sich schon vor der Wahl darüber einig, dass dieser Mensch charakterlich wie fachlich für das Amt nicht geeignet ist. Wenn ihn einige Menschen wählen, so wurde erklärt, dann aus Protest und aus Unzufriedenheiten, die mit Positionen der „Abgehängtheit" und „Abwärtsmobilität" zusammenhängen.[1] Paradoxerweise würde ein großer Wählerkreis damit einen Präsidenten wählen, von dessen Politik sie *nicht* profitieren werden.

Im Ausgangspunkt dieses Artikels steht die Beobachtung, dass Trump und sein politisches Agieren auf der Ebene propositionaler Gehalte, ideologischer Analysen und politischer Sachpositionen nicht erschöpfend erklärbar ist. Stattdessen möchte ich hier eine Frage stellen, die in der Debatte – auch vieler linker Kreise – vielleicht zu zögerlich aufgenommen wurde: Wie und auf wen wirkt Trump eigentlich *attraktiv*? Wie funktioniert diese Attraktion, die so viele ihn hat wählen lassen (vgl. Mühlhoff 2017)? Es ist davon auszugehen, dass Trump vielen Wähler_innen keineswegs als inkompetent oder charakterlich ungeeignet erscheint, sondern gerade *wegen seines Charakters* von ihnen gewählt wurde – und zwar nach einem Mechanismus, der nicht auf Protest reduzierbar ist, sondern eine eigene, bejahende Rationalität besitzt. Was Trump Sympathien verschafft, ist sein polternd-autokratisches Temperament, das immer wieder in seinen riskanten Weigerungen zum Ausdruck kommt, sich auf einen Diskurs präziser Sachpolitik überhaupt einzulassen. Dem Kopfschütteln viele Beobachter_innen zum Trotz ist das keine Schwäche: Trump hat sich in authentischer und kohärenter Weise den Konventionen des politischen Apparats entzogen und ist *damit* schon im Wahlkampf als charakterstark erschienen – von der Weigerung, seine Steuererklärung offenzulegen, bis zum rhetorischen Herumgepolter in den TV-Debatten. An die Stelle des *Yes, we can!* Obamas ist mit Trump das *Yes, I can!* eines einsamen Helden gerückt, der vom Konsens des ‚liberalen Mainstreams' diffamiert und schikaniert wird. Gerade die Momente, in denen er verletzlich erschienen ist – wie etwa nach den TV-Debatten – haben damit paradoxerweise noch weiter zu einer authentischen Wahrnehmung seines ‚Kampfes' gegen das ‚Establishment' beigetragen.

Der Wahlerfolg Trumps kann als Anlass für eine dunkle Zeitdiagnose dienen: Jenseits des Tableaus politischer Sachpositionen und Argumente, in dem Leitmedien und politische Meinungsträger_innen den unkalkulierbaren Trump nicht so richtig zu fassen bekommen, wird gegenwärtig in zahlreichen westlichen Demokratien eine *andere Dimension des politischen Wirkens*

[1] Vgl. George Packer: Hillary Clinton and the Populist Revolt. In: *The New Yorker,* 31.10.2016. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/31/hillary-clinton-and-the-populist-revolt (19/11/2018).

bedeutsam, die orthogonal zu den Bahnen und Praktiken des gewachsenen Politikbetriebs steht. Was wirkt, ist nicht das Argument, sondern ein spezifisches *ethos:* eine Haltung, die darauf zielt, sich gar nicht in das Spiel der Politik einzufügen, sondern es zu stören und zu durchbrechen. In dieser Dimension des Wirkens ist Trump tatsächlich erschreckend kohärent, authentisch und gar nicht wankelmütig. Eine Analyse der affektiven politischen Stile unserer Zeit muss deshalb davon ausgehen, dass für viele Wähler_innen eine enorme Attraktivität auf *dieser* Achse liegt. Trump trifft, wie ich in Abschnitt 4 argumentieren werde, primär auf Resonanzen einer zynisch-autoritären affektiven Sensitivität, die sich aktuell in vielen Ländern als eine starke politische Kraft herauskristallisiert.

2. Affektive Subjektivierung und politisches Sprechen

Die theoretische Herangehensweise, mit der ich mich im Folgenden dem Phänomen neo-autoritärer populistischer Bewegungen philosophisch-explorativ nähern werde, adressiert das Wechselspiel zwischen einer individuellen affektiven *Angänglichkeit* für bestimmte Stile der politischen Artikulation und den medientechnologischen Bedingungen von Öffentlichkeit, in denen diese Artikulation stattfindet.**[2]** Zwischen diesen beiden Polen – einer das Individuum kennzeichnenden Sensitivität und einer den politischen Raum kennzeichnenden medialen Topologie – spielt sich, so meine These, das ab, was als Artikulationsformen *politischer Subjektivität* bezeichnet werden kann: Mit diesem im Anschluss an Foucault zu formulierende Begriff werde ich mich dem Problem der Wahrheit in der Politik als einer Frage der (auch affektiven) Wirkungsweise politischen Sprechens zwischen Körpern und Subjekten in den Arenen der Öffentlichkeit(en) nähern. Im Themenkreis dieses Artikels werde ich mich dabei vor allem auf *autoritäre* Formen der politischen Subjektivität beziehen. Damit möchte ich zeigen, in welcher spezifischen Weise Autoritarismus stets sowohl in einer Dimension der Subjektgenese fußt, in der die affektive Angänglichkeit für einen autoritären Stil sozial-relational vermittelt wird, als auch in einer das einzelne Subjekt übersteigenden, kollektiven Dimension der medientechnologischen Struktur kommunikativer Räume.

Unter Subjektivität verstehe ich im Anschluss an Foucault zunächst grundsätzlich „die Art und Weise, wie das Subjekt die Erfahrung seiner selbst in einem Wahrheitsspiel macht" (Foucault 2007a, 222). In Anlehnung an das „Sprachspiel" Wittgensteins verweist das Wort „Wahrheitsspiel" hier auf einen praktischen und vollzugsmäßigen Rahmen, mit dem die epistemische Funktion einer objektivierenden Bezugnahme auf sich selbst und die anderen verwoben ist. Nicht allein ein „Diskurs", sondern ein umfassendes praktisches und agentielles Gefüge *(agencement)* ist somit konstitutiv für Subjektivität. Zugleich verweist der Spielbegriff, in dessen Gestalt hier die klassischeren Foucault'schen Begriffe wie „Episteme" und „Diskurs" mit enthalten sind, erstens auf den Aspekt der aktiven Teilnahme jedes Subjekts an seinem eigenen Prozess der Subjektwerdung und zweitens auf eine konstitutive Offenheit dieses Systems für inhärent sich herausbildende Mutationen und Variationen. Die *Art und Weise,* wie das Subjekt zum Gegenstand einer

[2] Ben Anderson (2016) hat über die „affektiven Stile" von Donald Trump geschrieben. Mich interessieren hier nun komplementär dazu die affektiven Sensitivitäten der Wähler_innen, die mit diesen Stilen resonanzfähig sind.

Wahrheit wird und Erfahrung seiner selbst in einem Wahrheitsspiel macht, kann also spezifischen historischen und kulturellen Prägungen, sowie ständigen Dynamiken der Neu- und Umorganisation unterliegen, die man natürlich auch unter medientechnologischen Gesichtspunkten thematisieren kann.

Wenn Subjektivität, als Bezugnahme auf sich selbst und die anderen in einem Wahrheitsspiel, somit aktiv, praktisch und medial vollzogen wird, dann lässt sich diese Perspektive außerdem im Kontext moderner Affekttheorien noch um einen weiteren Schritt ergänzen: *Affektive Dynamiken* – verstanden als relationale Prozesse des Affizierens und Affiziertwerdens zwischen sowohl menschlichen als auch nicht-menschlichen Individuen – bilden einen Teilaspekt des Wahrheitsspiels, in dem eine Foucault'sche Episteme wirksam wird (Mühlhoff 2018). Grundlegend für dieses Verständnis ist ein anti-mentalistischer und relationaler Affektbegriff, der Affektivität als reziprokes Wirkungsgeschehen, das heißt, als Dynamiken des Affizierens und Affiziertwerdens zwischen Individuen und in Umgebungen auffasst, und Affekte somit nicht als „innere Zustände" oder biologische Stimulus-Response-Verschaltungen des einzelnen Individuums begreift. Solch einen Begriff findet man in der philosophischen Tradition nach Baruch Spinoza und den daran (meist vermittels Deleuze) anschließenden Beiträgen der *Affect Studies*.[3] Ein wichtiger Aspekt des Spinozismus ist der sog. „Parallelismus", nachdem Affekt gleichermaßen und untrennbar ein körperliches und ein geistiges Geschehen bilden. In einer konsequenten Auslegung Spinozas liegt *keine* „Autonomie der Affektivität" (Massumi 1995) gegenüber dem Diskurs vor, denn Affizierung ist nicht unabhängig, sondern eine Form von Signifikation durch diskursive Bedeutungseinheiten. Genauso wenig steht Affektivität der Rationalität gegenüber, vielmehr verhalten sich Affekte bei Spinoza selbst nach rationalen Prinzipien und sind prinzipiell rational einsehbar. Zur Formulierung der subjektivierenden Wirkungsweise relationaler affektiver Dynamiken ist es schließlich von großem Interesse, dass Spinozas Affektenlehre eine inhärente Verknüpfung des Affektbegriffs zu einem Begriff von Macht in Form der *potentia* bietet, die diese Theorie besonders für sozialtheoretische Anschlüsse fruchtbar macht.[4]

Nicht nur bestimmte Praktiken – z.B. des Umgangs zwischen den Geschlechtern, der körperlichen Disziplinierung oder der Reflexion – sind demnach Bestandteil von Machtwirksamkeit und erzeugen einen Bezug bestimmter Wahrheitsgehalte (Ideen, Normen, Kategorien, Einsichten) auf bestimmte Subjekte. Auch affektive Dynamiken, sowohl im Mikrosozialen, als auch auf der politischen Bühne, können unmittelbare subjektive Verwobenheiten diskursiver Elemente mit affektiven Qualitäten stiften und sind somit an der Hervorbringung von Subjektivität beteiligt. Wenn ich diese Rolle affektiver Relationalität für den Prozess der Subjektivierung betonen möchte, dann spreche ich im Folgenden auch kompakt von *affektiver Subjektivierung*. Damit ist nicht gemeint, dass Subjektwerdung *ausschließlich* durch Relationen des Affizierens und Affiziertwerdens vermittelt wäre. Vielmehr wird mit dieser pointierten Bezeichnung betont, dass Affektivität als Analysekategorie der langen Liste „heterogener Elemente", die nach Foucault ein Dispositiv ausmachen, hinzugefügt wird (Foucault 1978).[5]

Es ist nun ein markanter Zug der späten Vorlesungen am *Collège de France*

[3] Vgl. Spinoza 2010 [1677]; Deleuze 1993, 1988; Massumi 2002; Gregg/Seigworth 2010.

[4] Siehe zum hier verwendeten Affektbegriff auch Slaby/Mühlhoff 2019 und zu dem Ansatz, Subjektgenese als einen Vollzugsaspekt affektiver Relationalität aufzufassen, ausführlich Mühlhoff 2018.

[5] Der Grund, warum Foucault selbst den affektiven und subjektiven Aspekten von Subjektwerdung eher skeptisch gegenübersteht, wird damit zusammen hängen, dass eine lange psychoanalytische Tradition die affektive Konstitution des Menschen seiner Subjektivität für vorgängig gehalten hat – mit der Wendung gegen die „Repressionshypothese" in *Sexualität und Wahrheit I* (Foucault 1983) richtet sich Foucault gerade gegen diese Auffassung. Für die Zusammenführung einer Affekttheorie mit einer Theorie der Subjektivierung bedarf es eines begrifflichen Instrumentariums, welches das *spezifische Vermögen* eines Individuums, andere zu affizieren und durch andere affiziert zu werden, selbst als *Produkt relationaler Prägung* – also von affektiver Subjektivierung – ausweist. Ein solch relationaler Theorierahmen setzt eine weitestgehende Loslösung von der mentalistischen Tradition der Emotionsphilosophie und Psychologie voraus; er ist etwa bei Spinoza mit seinem Begriff der *potentia* gegeben, siehe Mühlhoff 2018.

(Foucault 2012a, 2012b), dass Foucault den Begriff der Subjektivität dort an
Akte und Szenen des *Sprechens* bindet. Eine „Geschichte der Subjektivität"
müsse auch als eine Geschichte der konkreten, situierten, verkörperten Akte
des „Wahrsprechens" vorgenommen werden. Damit wird der vergleichsweise
leichtlebige Begriff des „Wahrheitsspiels" um eine existenzielle Note ergänzt:
Denn jetzt geht es um jene mikrosozialen Szenen, in denen ein Individuum
im Angesicht anderer Individuen sich daranmacht, eine Wahrheit über sich
oder die anderen nicht nur zu „erfahren", sondern *auszusprechen* und damit
zu einer Wahrheit zu *machen*. Es handelt sich dabei um jene Mikroszenen, in
denen sich das Zum-Gegenstand-einer-Wahrheit-werden eines Individuums
tätlich, als Akt zwischen Körpern, vollzieht. Foucault thematisiert dies in
Bezug auf ganz verschiedene situative Kontexte, darunter die politische Arena,
das pädagogischen Gespräch, die intime Beziehung oder Akte der Notwehr
gegenüber Mächtigen. Dieses Wahrsprechen ist mitunter riskant, es erfordert
Mut, körperliches Vermögen, mitunter affektive Involvierung, und es macht
verletzlich und angreifbar. Subjektwerdung rückt damit in den *situativen*
Praxiskontext des sprechenden, dialogischen Bezugs auf eine intersubjektive
Wahrheit und wird als Herausbildung eines Vermögens zum Spielen*können*
dieses Wahrheitsspiels – und das heißt auch, des Affizierenkönnens und des
Verkörpernkönnens – thematisierbar.

Ein dieserart sowohl ins Situative als auch Affektiv-Relationale gewendeter
Begriff der Subjektivität wird besonders interessant, wenn es dabei um die
Frage nach dem politischen Sprechen im engeren Sinn geht. Wer kann
überhaupt in einer öffentlichen Arena in Fragen des Gemeinwesens sprechen
und wer nicht? Wie vermag der eigene Körper in einer Situation das Wort
zu ergreifen – oder nicht? Und wie hängt dieses subjektive Sprechenkönnen
von den rezeptiven Sensitivitäten – dem Affizierungsvermögen *(potentia)*
– der angesprochenen Subjekte und von den medialen Eigenschaften des
Kommunikationsraums (mit) ab? Es ist diese Frageperspektive, die ich hier für
einen kritischen Blick auf das Heraufkommen neuer autoritärer Bewegungen
und ihrer Sprechformen fruchtbar machen möchte: Ich gehe heuristisch davon
aus, dass bestimmte mediale Umgebungen, wie z.B. anonyme Online-Foren,
Kommentarspalten unter Nachrichtenartikeln, Facebook-Gruppen, Pegida-
Demonstrationen oder Ortsvereinstreffen politischer Parteien als Räume
aufgefasst werden müssen, in denen sich spezifische affektive Sensitivitäten
plötzlich in politischen Sprechweisen artikulieren und manifestieren können.
In solchen Prozessen kommt es dann zur Herausbildung und Verübung
konkreter Formen *politischer Subjektivität*. Mit diesem Begriff möchte ich
eine Unterform von Subjektivität bezeichnen, in der die Erfahrung des Selbst
beginnt, sich als Erfahrung politischer Eingebundenheit oder Ausgeliefertheit,
Machtausübung oder Machtlosigkeit zu artikulieren.

Politisch ist eine Subjektivität also in der Weise und in dem Grade, wie
die Thematisierung seiner selbst und der anderen explizit auf politische,
ökonomische, kollektivistische usw. Semantiken zurückgreift. Während der
Prozess der *Subjektivierung* (das heißt die Genese von Subjektivität) *immer*
politisch ist, weil er in der Immanenz gesellschaftlicher Machtrelationen steht
(Foucault 2007b), muss das semantische und affektive ‚Repertoire' subjektiver

Reflexivität nicht grundsätzlich politisiert sein. Denn ein Bezug zu sich selbst und den anderen kann sich subjektiv auch als a-politisch und desinteressiert darstellen und in Begriffen, Emotionen und Thematisierungsformen erschöpfen, die keinen bewussten Verweis auf ein Feld politischer Gehalte umfasst.[6] Ein Prozess der *Politisierung* ist sodann eine bestimmte Subjektivierungsform, die eine vormals unpolitische Subjektivität (in der z.B. das eigene Leiden als persönliches Versagen thematisiert wurde) in eine politische Subjektivität verwandelt (in der z.B. gesellschaftliche und politische Ursachen für das eigene Leid angeführt werden).

3. Affekt und Öffentlichkeit: Arenen des politischen Sprechens

Um die zeitdiagnostische Frage aktueller autoritärer Politiken und ihrer korrelativen politischen Sprechweisen vor einer Kontrastfolie studieren zu können, werde ich in diesem Abschnitt damit beginnen, zwei historische Extrempunkte zu umreißen: Zum einen wird die aufklärerische Diskurskultur des öffentlichen Disputierens auf ihre korrelative politische Subjektivierungsweise hin befragt; zum anderen werde ich kurz auf die Struktur von Subjektivität und Öffentlichkeit in totalitären Formationen eingehen.

Das Diskursideal der Aufklärung

Foucault eröffnet die bereits erwähnte Vorlesung von 1982/1983 mit einer Diskussion des berühmten Texts von Kant zur *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (1968 [1783]). Dieser Text sei das Gründungsdokument für einen „neue[n] Typ von Frage im Bereich der philosophischen Reflexion" (Foucault 2012a, 26): „Was geschieht heute? Was geschieht jetzt? [...] Was ist diese Gegenwart eigentlich, der ich angehöre?" (ebd., 27) Damit wende sich die Philosophie auf die Frage nach der Eingebundenheit in eine politisch, juristisch, religiös verfasste Gegenwart.

Dieser selbstreflexive Prozess heißt bei Kant *Aufklärung*. Dabei handelt es sich um einen Prozess, der an das Heraufkommen einer bestimmten Ethik öffentlicher Debattenkultur gebunden ist, an eine spezifische Diskurspraxis – man könnte auch sagen, an einen bestimmten Modus des „Wahrsprechens". In Kants Beschreibung ist das Subjekt (der Agent) der Aufklärung ein „Publikum",[7] und damit meint er die gelehrte Öffentlichkeit; eine Öffentlichkeit, in der die Begegnungen *schriftlich* – durch publizierte Artikel – verlaufen und durch das freie „Räsonnieren" und „Vernünfteln" gekennzeichnet sind. Dieses Publikum ist weder ein völlig allgemeines, noch etwa bloß ein Hochschulpublikum, sondern jene diskursive Formation, die im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert durch die Akademien und Gesellschaften und die von ihnen herausgegebenen Journale und Zeitschriften gestiftet wurde. Der Seinsmodus dieses Publikums ist der Diskurs, in dem der einzelne „in der Qualität eines Gelehrten [...] durch Schriften zum eigentlichen Publikum, nämlich der Welt, spricht" (Kant 1968 [1783], 56f.).

Zwischen den Zeilen wird die Diskursformation der (Spät-)Aufklärung

[6] Natürlich könnte aber auch eine solche unpolitische Subjektivität potenziell *politisch wirksam* sein, wenn z.B. eine Sichtweise, die sich selbst als neutral, objektiv und nicht politisch investiert empfindet, anderen aufgedrängt wird (typischer Fall diskursiver Hegemonien). Denn das Verüben – auch einer unpolitischen – Subjektivität ist stets mit Machtrelationen verwoben und trägt möglicherweise zur *Subjektivierung* anderer bei.

[7] „Es ist [...] für jeden einzelnen Menschen schwer, sich aus der ihm beinahe zur Natur gewordenen Unmündigkeit herauszuarbeiten. [...] Dass aber ein Publikum sich selbst aufkläre, ist eher möglich." (Kant 1968 [1783], 54)

somit als ein ganz bestimmtes, *mediales* und *sozio-ökonomisches* Dispositiv beschrieben. Das heraufkommende Zeitschriftenwesen und die institutionalisierte Schriftlichkeit als Leitmedium gelehrten Wahrsprechens bilden einen bestimmten medialen Kontext, der eng mit sozialen Stratifizierungen, Status- und Anerkennungsordnungen in der preußischen Monarchie verwoben ist. Und so artikuliert sich in der Denkformation der Aufklärung eine eigentümliche Spannung zwischen der relativ engen Setzung des Begriffs der Öffentlichkeit und dem expliziten Anspruch, dass ihr Diskurs *„zur Welt"* als dem „eigentlichen Publikum" spreche (ebd., 57). Es nimmt ganz offensichtlich nicht jeder an der Öffentlichkeit teil, und doch vermeint dieselbe, einen allgemeinen Standpunkt einzunehmen, sich allgemein-menschlichen Fragen zu widmen und zu einer universellen Gemeinschaft zu sprechen.

Dieser Widerspruch bildet tatsächlich den Kern der spezifischen Subjektivierungsform des aufklärerischen Diskursideals. Bei Kant wird er in der bekannten appellativen Setzung aufgelöst: Dem Ideal nach ist vermeintlich jede_r prinzipiell dazu in der Lage, sich seines_ihres Verstandes zu bedienen, freien Gebrauch von der Vernunft zu machen und damit am öffentlichen Diskurs zu partizipieren. Die faktischen, materiellen und soziostrukturellen Zugangsvoraussetzungen zu dieser Öffentlichkeit werden nicht reflektiert, stattdessen wird ihre universelle Reichweite durch die ethische Setzung eines einzig legitimen *subjektiven Modus* der Partizipation an diesem Diskurs autorisiert, den Kant als den „öffentlichen Gebrauch der Vernunft" bezeichnet. Foucault erläutert:

> Was ist nun aber der öffentliche Gebrauch? Das ist gerade der Gebrauch, den wir von unserem Verstand und unseren Fähigkeiten machen, insofern wir uns auf einen universellen Standpunkt stellen, insofern wir als universelles Subjekt gelten können. Nun ist jedoch klar, daß keine politische Tätigkeit, keine Verwaltungstätigkeit, keine Form ökonomischer Praxis uns in diese Lage des universellen Subjekts versetzt. Unter welchen Bedingungen konstituieren wir uns selbst dann als universelles Subjekt? Nun, genau dann, *wenn wir uns als vernünftiges Subjekt an die Gesamtheit der vernünftigen Wesen richten.* Bloß in dieser Tätigkeit, die gerade und schlechthin die des Schriftstellers ist, der sich an den Leser wendet, [...] begegnen wir einer Dimension des Öffentlichen, die zugleich die Dimension des Universellen ist. (Foucault 2012a, 57; Herv. R.M.)

Kein einzelnes Subjekt besitzt den Standpunkt des universellen Vernunftsubjekts, doch es gibt, so die Aufklärungsphilosophie, eine kollektive Praxis, diesen Standpunkt zu betreiben, und die besteht darin, sich „als vernünftiges Subjekt an die Gesamtheit der vernünftigen Wesen [zu] richten". Wer zu uns spricht, muss vernünftig sprechen – so lautet die implizite Weisung an das Individuum. Allerdings wird man zu diesem vernünftig sprechenden Subjekt nur als Teil eines Ganzen, als Teil einer antwortenden und urteilenden Diskursgemeinschaft. Denn die Praxis, die Kant als öffentlichen Gebrauch der Vernunft bezeichnet, ist ein relationales Phänomen: Man kann sie als eine gesellschaftliche Subjektivierungsform auffassen, in der eine mutmaßlich

sowohl soziostrukturell und medial bedingte, als auch affektiv wirkende Form des *Sprechens* kultiviert wird. Dieser Gedankengang führt auf die Frage, was es subjektiv bedeutet, den Sprech- und Wirkungsmodus des öffentlichen und freien Räsonierens einnehmen zu *können*, an welche Voraussetzungen die dafür nötige Haltung *(ethos)* intra- und intersubjektiv, affektiv und mikrosozial gebunden ist, wo seine Reibungspunkte liegen, auf welchen Kräften, Gegenkräften und Ausbeutungsrelationen er beruht.**[8]**

Bei Kant heißt es hierzu, dass der öffentliche Gebrauch der Vernunft von ihrem privaten Gebrauch zu unterscheiden sei. Während der öffentliche Gebrauch im Raum eines Diskurses stattfindet, der durch das freie Vernünfteln, Argumentieren und Räsonieren gekennzeichnet ist, bezieht sich Kant mit dem Privaten nicht einfach auf den Bereich häuslicher Intimität oder psychologischer Innerlichkeit (so wie das Wort heute oft verwendet wird), sondern auf die Sphäre, in der ein Individuum „in einem gewissen ihm anvertrauten bürgerlichen Posten, oder Amte" steht – das heißt, auf ein Individuum insofern es handelnder Teil eines gesellschaftlichen Apparates ist. Auch in der praktischen Sphäre der beruflichen, bürgerlichen und politischen Verpflichtungen ist Gebrauch von der Vernunft zu machen, doch dieser private Vernunftgebrauch „darf öfters sehr enge eingeschränkt sein, ohne doch darum den Fortschritt der Aufklärung sonderlich zu hindern" (Kant 1968 [1783], 55). Denn, so Kant,

> zu manchen Geschäften, die in das Interesse des gemeinen Wesens laufen, [ist] ein gewisser Mechanism notwendig, vermittelst dessen einige Glieder des gemeinen Wesens sich bloß passiv verhalten müssen, um durch eine künstliche Einhelligkeit von der Regierung zu öffentlichen Zwecken gerichtet, oder wenigstens von der Zerstörung dieser Zwecke abgehalten zu werden (ebd., 55f.).

Was sich hier auftut, ist eine großangelegte gesellschaftliche Formation, die auf der Institutionalisierung einer *Horizontalspaltung* zwischen einer kollektiven Praxis der freien Rationalität und einer privaten Praxis des rationalen Gehorsams beruht. Diese Horizontalspaltung prägt das *ethos* jedes Einzelnen, auf welches die Subjektivierungsweise dieser Diskursformation hinausläuft. Es entsteht eine wechselseitig bedingte Teilung zwischen den Freiheiten des diskursiven Vernunftgebrauchs, der auf der Plattform einer Öffentlichkeit durch eine bestimmte Form des Sprechens und Urteilens geführt wird, und den umso strengeren Pflichten und Zwängen, die unter dem Siegel derselben Vernunft im privaten Handeln einen *ethos* der Gefolgschaft vorschreiben.

„Vom Gesetz bewegt": Subjektivität der Vernunftverpflichtung

Es ist entscheidend, diese Horizontalspaltung ist nicht mit einer Opposition von Affekt und Rationalität zu verwechseln. Erstens steht der hier verwendete Affektbegriff nicht in Opposition zu Vernunft; zweitens behauptet die historische Beschreibung einer Horizontalspaltung die Differenz zweier Ebenen des *Vernunftgebrauchs* – des öffentlichen und des privaten. Wie ich nun zeigen möchte, ist Affektivität jedoch für *beide* diese Formen prägend, es handelt sich bei der spätaufklärerischen Diskursethik im Ganzen um ein

[8] Die Partizipation an dieser Öffentlichkeit ist allermeist den Männern der bürgerlichen Schicht vorbehalten, insbesondere den Politikern, Schriftstellern, Geistlichen und Intellektuellen. Mein Argument läuft hier darauf hinaus, dass der Ausschluss von Frauen, Kindern, Bediensteten und unterlegenen sozialen Schichten aus dem vermeintlich universellen Diskurs kein akzidentelles und vorübergehender Zwischenstadium in der Entwicklung der aufklärerischen Diskursformation darstellt, sondern inhärent in der Subjektivierungsform dieser Diskursethik und ihrer affektiven Kräfteökonomie angelegt ist.

Produkt affektiver Subjektivierung. Um dies zu erkennen, ist die scheinbar paradoxe Kombination von einerseits Freiheit und andererseits Gehorsam im Vernunftgebrauch noch eine Spur tiefer zu befragen, und zwar in Bezug auf die nicht bloß diskursive, sondern auch affektive Relation zu sich selbst und zu den anderen, die mit dieser Haltung des vernünftigen Sprechens und gehorsamen Handelns implizit verbunden ist.

Im Kant'schen Universum ist hiermit die klassische Frage verknüpft, durch welche Mechanismen die Einsichten und Urteile der Vernunft für menschliche Wesen überhaupt *handlungsleitend* werden. Dieses Problem markiert den Übergang von der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* zur *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* und von der Frage, was der Wille *ist,* hin dazu, wie er *wirkt* und somit das richtige Handeln zustande bringen kann. Zur Bestimmung dieses Verhältnisses von Vernunftgesetz und Handlungssubjekt bringt Kant den Affekt der „Achtung" ins Spiel (siehe Kant 1968 [1788]; 1968 [1798]): Achtung vor dem Gesetz bzw. *des* Gesetzes bildet das *affektiv-subjektive Strukturmodell,* nach dem das objektive Vernunftgesetz für das Subjekt zu einem subjektiven Beweggrund wird.**[9]**

Allerdings darf dieses durch Achtung geprägte Verhältnis von Gesetz und Subjekt *nicht* so interpretiert werden, dass der Affekt der Achtung lediglich eine Vermittlungsinstanz zwischen Vernunftgesetz und Handeln abgibt. Kant schreibt, dass „der objektive Bestimmungsgrund jederzeit und ganz allein zugleich der subjektiv hinreichende Bestimmungsgrund der Handlung sein müsse" (Kant 1968 [1788], 191f.), deshalb besteht zwischen Gesetz und subjektivem Handeln keine äußerliche, durch einen Affekt bloß vermittelte Beziehung. Vielmehr trägt das Verhältnis von Gesetz und Subjekt die Struktur eines ganz bestimmten *Selbstverhältnisses* des Subjekts, in dem das Vernünftigsein *als* Affekt der Achtung des Gesetzes erfahren wird: Judith Mohrmann spricht hier von einem „Affektivwerden der Vernunft" (2015, 128ff.) in Gestalt einer affektiven Relation *nicht* des Subjekts zum Gesetz, sondern zu sich selbst *in* Achtung des Gesetzes – es entsteht ein „Selbstverhältnis des Individuums als Selbstbilligung" (ebd., 145). Die spezifische Subjektivitätsform, in der das Vernunftgesetz handlungsleitend wird, erläutert Mohrmann als „Bewegtwerden durch das Gesetz", als ein „Selbstverständnis [...], in dem die Achtung diejenige Perspektive ist, in der mir das Gesetz nicht imperativ entgegen tritt, sondern in der ich zulasse, dass mich das Gesetz bewegt" (ebd., 146).

Diese Ausführungen liefern die Strukturbeschreibung einer *affektiven Subjektivierungsweise,* die der spätaufklärerischen Diskursethik des rationalen Sprechens und Handelns zugrunde liegt. Insbesondere ist hiermit ein *konstituierendes* Verhältnis von Vernunftgesetz und Subjekt angegeben, so dass dieser Ansatz als Theorie der Subjektivierung im Sinn von Michel Foucault und Judith Butler gelesen werden kann. Er nimmt die grundlegende Pointe von Butlers *Psyche der Macht* (Butler 2001) auf, die mit Foucaults Wendung gegen die „Repressionshypothese" in *Sexualität und Wahrheit I* (Foucault 1983) schon vorbereitet wird: dass nämlich keine von außen beschränkende Relation zwischen sozialen Machtstrukturen (hier dem Vernunftgesetz) und subjektiven Trieb-, Affekt- und Willensregungen vorliegt. Vielmehr ist das Vernunftgesetz, *als soziale Ordnung* begriffen, das konstituierende Apriori

[9] Vgl. hierzu die kürzlich erschienene Studie von Judith Mohrmann (2015), die für die folgenden Erläuterungen zahlreiche Impulse geliefert hat.

einer Selbstrelation *in* (und nicht des Subjekts *gegenüber*) dem sozialen Rahmen (vgl. Mühlhoff 2018, 300ff.). Der Affekt der Achtung vor dem Gesetz wird damit als spezifische *affektive Sensitivität* kultiviert, die dem impliziten *ethos* des vernünftelnden Diskurses zugrunde liegt – das Subjekt muss affektiv so gestrickt sein, dass es für den Affekt der Achtung gegenüber dem Gesetz überhaupt sensibel ist. Man wird nicht mit Achtung im Leib geboren, sondern das „Bewegtsein vom Gesetz", von dem Mohrmann im Anschluss an Kant spricht, entsteht als Modus der Teilhabe in einem politisch-sozialen Gefüge, in dem es offenbar ein relevantes Kriterium von Zugehörigkeit darstellt, vom Vernunftgesetz bewegt werden zu können. Die affektive Sensitivität der Achtung vor dem Gesetz wird somit zur sozio-historischen Signatur einer spezifischen Form *politischer* Subjektivität in der Spätaufklärung, und zwar in dem Grade, wie die Diskursform der Aufklärung ein geteiltes Bewusstsein für die Zugehörigkeit zu einem Wir und zu einer politischen Zeit hervorbringt (siehe oben).

Die Neuigkeit des Kant'schen Aufklärungsverständnisses ist demnach nicht die Aufforderung, in gelehrten Zeitschriften einen akademischen Diskurs zu führen (den hat es schon vorher gegeben). Vielmehr liefert er die Strukturbeschreibung einer kollektiven Form von affektiver Subjektivierung, nach der sich jede_r als gehorsamer Teil des Apparats verhält und zugleich frei räsonieren kann und soll. Als reale Verkörperung dieser inhärent widersprüchlichen Subjektivitätsform schließt Kant seinen Text mit einer Lobrede auf den „aufgeklärten Monarchen" Friedrich den Großen und seine berühmte Weisung: „Räsonniert, so viel ihr wollt, und worüber ihr wollt; nur gehorcht!" (Kant 1968 [1783], 61). Kant nutzt diese Ausführungen über den König für eine feine subversive Pointe: Während Friedrich diese Disputierfreiheit bisher nämlich nur in Fragen der Religionsauslegung eingeräumt hat, wird in der vernünftelnden Rhetorik Kants nun klar, dass allerdings auch „in Ansehung [der] Gesetzgebung es ohne Gefahr sei, seinen Untertanen zu erlauben, von ihrer eigenen Vernunft öffentlichen Gebrauch zu machen, und ihre Gedanken über eine bessere Abfassung derselben, sogar mit einer freimütigen Kritik der schon gegebenen" Gesetze des Fürsten in einen öffentlichen gelehrten Diskurs zu treten (ebd., 60).

So präsentiert sich hier die Vision von einer im historischen Gang der Dinge vielleicht mehr oder weniger neuartigen Form der politischen Subjektivität. Politik beruht demnach etwas weniger auf der transzendenten Autorität eines Despoten, der per Dekret von oben herab bestimmt und richtet. Denn der Despot wird zum einen ein Stück weit *innerlich* – und damit zur Vernunft. Und zum anderen rückt die Subjektivität des ‚Vernuftdespotismus' den realen Herrscher zu gewissem Grade in die *Immanenz* seines Apparats, denn die Ratio des aufgeklärten Monarchen Friedrich ist in diesem Bild keine rein transzendente Größe mehr, sondern wird selbst gebildet und korrigiert durch den öffentlichen Diskurs. Das Praxisideal der Politik bindet sich an die Subjektivitätsform des partizipativ-deliberativen Sprechens: Ein Publikum soll in einem bestimmten Sprechmodus *politisch werden* und sich an den Angelegenheiten des Staats beteiligen – und sie in einem bestimmten Disziplinmodus zugleich erledigen.

Autorität und Öffentlichkeit in totalitären Systemen

Bevor die Sprache auf die zeitdiagnostische Frage neo-autoritärer Politiken kommt, ist es im Modus einer kursorischen Gegenüberstellung erhellend, dem Diskursideal der Aufklärung noch eine zweite Extremform gegenüberzustellen. Sie findet in der Gestalt totalitärer Staatswesen ihre vielleicht bekannteste Manifestation.

In der aufklärerischen Formation des 18. Jahrhunderts wurde die Berufung auf die Vernunft zum kulturellen Fetisch: Auch wenn aus inhärenten Gründen nicht alle an ihr partizipieren konnten, strukturierte sie eine Subjektivität, die ihren medialen und ethischen Modus der Öffentlichkeit für universell *hielt*. Im Kontrast hierzu ist das Heraufkommen der totalitären Regime des 20. Jahrhunderts – in Gestalt des Nationalsozialismus und des Stalinismus – durch Intelligenzhass, Antiaufklärung und ein kulturell prävalentes Ressentiment gegen den Intellektualismus geprägt. Der „gelehrte Diskurs", in Deutschland besonders in seiner impotenten Gestalt der Spät-Wilhelminischen und Weimarer Periode, gilt als überfeinert, realitätsfremd, selbstgefällig, arrogant; sein *ethos* des freien Vernünftelns als kauzig und altbacken (Sloterdijk 1983).[10]

Innerhalb von 150 Jahren kam es somit zu einem markanten Vorzeichenwechsel in Bezug auf die subjektive Strukturfunktion des Vernunftbezugs. Umso interessanter ist es nun, dass sich im Vergleich dieser beiden historischen Formationen unter *affekttheoretischen und mikrosozialen* Gesichtspunkten trotzdem deutliche Parallelen auftun. In Bezug auf die Affektorganisation der häuslichen, intim-relationalen und psychologischen Bedingungen der Subjektgenese waren diese Formationen beide *autoritär* strukturiert.[11] Im aufgeklärten Absolutismus gründete dieser Autoritarismus auf dem Prinzip von Gehorsam und Achtung einer universellen Instanz in Gestalt des Vernunftgesetzes, von dem ‚bewegt zu sein' gleichermaßen Freiheit ermöglicht und Pflichtbewusstsein schärft. In der mikrosozialen Affektorganisation der faschistischen Formation ist an diese Stelle der (ebenso fetischisierte) nationalmythologische Bezug auf Land, Volk, Ethnie, Familie, Vater und Führer getreten (Reich 1974 [1933]), von dem ‚bewegt zu sein' einen nationalen Zusammenhalt stiften sollte. Die Affektorganisation der ontogenetischen Bedingungen ist jedoch in beiden Fällen von Unterordnung und Drill im Sinne einer „autoritären Familienideologie" geprägt (ebd., 57ff.; vgl. Theweleit 1980).

Worin sich diese Formationen allerdings deutlich unterscheiden, ist ihre Topologie von Öffentlichkeit. Dies ist ein Unterschied vor allem der Globalstruktur des Zusammenspiels der Individuen und ihrer Subjektpositionen in einer gesellschaftlichen Maschine. Im Fall des preußischen Obrigkeitsstaats wurde diese Topologie als komplexes Hierarchiegebilde mehrerer flächiger, horizontaler Sozialstrata beschrieben, die immer wieder in asymmetrischen Berührungsrelationen stehen (z.B. in jedem einzelnen bürgerlichen Haushalt), sich dabei aber wechselseitig ausschließen und somit reproduzieren. Die personelle Struktur des „Publikums" ist ein solches Stratum, aber auch die Ebenen der Diener, der Frauen, der Kinder usf. In der faschistischen Formation existieren ebenfalls soziale und politische Stratifizierungen, das autoritäre Kräftefeld der Gesamtformation ist aber zentralistisch auf eine

[10] Der Film *Die Feuerzangenbowle* (Deutschland 1944, Regie: Helmut Weiss) zeigt in affirmativer Weise diese Spannungen zwischen einem alten, in diesem Fall Wilhelminischen, und neueren, national-sozialistischen Intellektuellen-Habitus am Beispiel Schule und Lehrer. Die „Professoren" älteren Typs, überzeichnend karikiert durch „Bummeligkeit", Fahrigkeit, realitätsfernes Prinzipienreiten und abgehobenes Vernünfteln in nebenberuflicher Schriftstellertätigkeit sind allesamt bei den Schülern nicht respektiert und in der Vermittlung ihrer Inhalte kaum erfolgreich. Einzig der junge, schneidige, „harte aber faire" Oberlehrer Dr. Brett vermag es, eine Autorität zu verkörpern. Die Schüler in dieser um das Jahr 1900 rückdatierten Handlung scheinen förmlich nach der Kopplung von Wissensvermittlung, Autorität und Charisma zu *verlangen*, die in Gestalt des jungen, offensichtlich am nationalsozialistischen autoritären Männertypus orientierten (und somit historisch vorgeblendeten) Dr. Brett auftritt. Es ist markant, dass dieser Film, der seine nationalsozialistische Ideologie nur minimal hinter der Rahmenerzählung vom Typ „Die guten alten Zeiten" versteckt, noch heute in vielen deutschen Universitätsstädten (Göttingen, Heidelberg, Münster) alljährlich am 06.12. der Anlass ritualisierter *kultischer* – etwa von der Fachschaft organisierter – Versammlungen ist, bei denen der Film nicht nur auf Großleinwänden zu einer Feuerzangenbowle vorgeführt wird, sondern partiell Szenen nachgespielt, der Text mitgesprochen und einzelne Handlungselemente in Trinkspiele eingebunden werden. Siehe http://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/uni/uni-kultfilm-feuerzangenbowle-jeder-nor-einen-woenzigen-schlock-a-454719.html (19/11/2018), http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/11398/1/091223_feuerzangenbowle.mp3 (19/11/2018) und kritisch: http://feuerzangenbowle.blogsport.de/ (18/11/2018).

[11] Die philosophische und sozialpsychologische Begriffsprägung zum Thema Autorität ist vielseitig und kann hier aus Platzgründen nicht im Detail referiert werden, siehe Arendt 1970; Adorno et al. 1950; Sennett 1990; Reich 1974 [1933]; Landweer/Newmark 2017. Grundsätzlich

autokratische Instanz gerichtet und in dieser sphärischen Topologie totalisierend.
[12] Die Horizontalspaltung zwischen intellektualistischer Freiheit in der Öffentlichkeit und rechtschaffenem Gehorsam im Privaten kollabiert in der totalitären Subjektivierung. An ihre Stelle tritt die Furcht vor der autokratischen Führer-Instanz durch jede_n einzelne_n und in allen Lebensbereichen als zur existenziellen Angst übersteigerter Form der Achtung.

Zu betonen ist in Bezug auf diesen topologischen Unterschied auch die Rolle eines neuen medientechnologischen Dispositivs von Öffentlichkeit, das sich im 20. Jahrhundert durch die Verbreitung von Rundfunk- und Fernsehtechnik herausbildet. Die spezifische Bild-, Ton- und Echtzeitfunktion dieser Technologien (im Unterschied zur langsamen Zeitschriftenkultur) muss als Faktor dafür in Anschlag gebracht werden, dass es auf neue Weise möglich war, eine Führer*person* – also einen personellen Kult anstatt eines Vernunftprinzips – ins Zentrum einer affektiv-diskursiven Formation der Subjektivierung zu rücken.

Während die Diskursethik der Aufklärung das *eine,* universelle Vernunftvermögen betont, welches die Menschen im intellektuellen Agonismus vereint, wird in der Formation des Faschismus der Staat in den Landesgrenzen und in Koppelung an eine Ethnie als ein *organisches Ganzes* mythologisiert und totalisiert. Der innere Agonismus im freien Argumentieren wird verdrängt; an seine Stelle tritt die gewaltsame Beschwörung des inneren kräftemäßigen Zusammenhalts bei gleichzeitiger Aufstachelung eines äußeren *Antagonismus* gegen andere Nationen, Ethnien und Lebensformen. Hält die aufklärerische Öffentlichkeit ihrer Idee nach den Disput im Inneren aus – wobei die starke soziale Hierarchisierung, welche die Teilhabe daran reguliert, auf diese Idee einen Schatten wirft –, markiert das faschistoide Ressentiment gegen das Räsonieren und Vernünfteln gerade einen autoritären Abwehrreflex gegen interne Kritik und Disputierkultur. Die Differenzlinie zwischen jenen, die man hört und jenen, die man nicht hört, verläuft im Faschismus weniger zwischen den Ständen und vermehrt entlang der Umgrenzung des Ganzen, um im Inneren eine Gleichschaltung zu ermöglichen.

Dieser Übergang zu einer sphärischen Topologie von Öffentlichkeit hat bedeutende Konsequenzen auch für die Frage des politischen Sprechens in diesen beiden historischen Formationen. Ist das politische Sprechen in der aufklärerischen Formation an die subjektiven, habituellen und sozialen Zugangsvoraussetzungen einer Verkörperung von Intelligenz geknüpft, tritt es in der faschistischen Formation in der Tonalität des ‚Brüllens und Bellens‘ und im medialen Raum von Massenresonanzen auf. Die Autorität des politischen Sprechens besitzt eine offen gewaltförmige Affektform – mit dem Kollaps der ethischen Horizontalspaltung wird ein Gewaltmoment öffentlichkeitsfähig, das in der Subjektivierungsform der Aufklärung prinzipiell nur im Privaten seinen Platz fand. In seiner offenen Parallelisierung von Diskurs und Affekt bildet das politische Sprechen in der totalitären Formation einen Diskurs, der zugleich affektive Abfuhr und affektive Kollektivierung (durch die Konstruktion von Feindbildern) ist.

folge ich Hannah Arendt in der begrifflichen Trennung von Autorität und Gewalt (1970). Ihr Anliegen ist es, den Begriff der Autorität für eine enge idealtypische Konstellation zu reservieren, in der sich freiwilliger Gehorsam, Mündigkeit und ein Grundmoment von Freiheit treffen (in diesem Sinne auch Sennett 1990). Ich interessiere mich hier allerdings primär dafür, in welchen Affektdynamiken Autorität in situ verübt wird, und dies führt mich dazu, das Phänomen von der Gewalt-Seite dieser Unterscheidung her aufzurollen: Was macht Menschen angänglich dafür, autoritär adressierbar zu sein? Was versetzt sie selbst dazu in die Lage, autoritär zu sprechen? Diese Frage nach einer *dispositionalen Anlage* eines Autoritätsvermögens ist etwa bei Adorno et al. 1950 vorbereitet; um sie von der Frage „Was ist Autorität?" schlechthin abzugrenzen, spreche ich im Folgenden von „dem Autoritären" oder „Autoritarismus" im Unterschied zu „Autorität".

[12] Arendt (2017 [1951]) betont, dass der faschistische Totalitarismus tatsächlich weder ein hierarchischer noch ein auf Autorität begründeter Staat darstelle, weil das für Autorität und Hierarchisierung charakteristische Prinzip der Delegation eines Teils von Autorität nach unten, welches eine *freie* Verkörperung eines Aspekts der höheren Autorität ermögliche, ausgeschaltet werde. Totalitarismus beruhe, auch im Zentrum seines Apparats, auf Furcht und existenzieller Angst vor der Willkür des Autokraten, vor Bespitzelung und Intrigen (vgl. ebd., 528ff.).

4. Affekte, Medien, Öffentlichkeit im neuen Autoritarismus

Wie nun lassen sich anhand des zuvor entwickelten Begriffs- und Anschauungsapparats aktuelle populistische Bewegungen einordnen und unter den Gesichtspunkten von Affekt und Subjektivität erläutern? Um hierzu einen Ansatz zu skizzieren, werde ich entlang des in Abschnitt 2 genannten und auch in Abschnitt 3 verwendeten Dreischritts verfahren: Es sind erstens die medialen Strukturen von Öffentlichkeit und zweitens die individuellen affektiven Sensitivitäten zu benennen, die – wie sich dann drittens zeigt – in ihrem Zusammenspiel zu bestimmten Formen der politischen Subjektivität und des politischen (Wahr-)Sprechens führen.

Medientopologie von Öffentlichkeit in der *social media*-Formation

Gelegentlich wird die Befürchtung geäußert, dass es zwischen den gegenwärtigen Entwicklungen in westlichen Demokratien und dem zuvor als totalitäre Formation beschriebenen medialen und sozialen Dispositiv einige Gemeinsamkeiten gibt. So wurde etwa Donald Trumps Gebrauch von Twitter mit Hitlers „Volksempfänger" verglichen.[13] Tragfähig wird die Analogie vielleicht im Hinblick auf die darin sich manifestierende Form der politischen Ansprache: In beiden Fällen wird über ein vergleichsweise neuartiges Medium direkt zu den Massen gesprochen, anstatt sich im Diskurs der etablierten Medien vermitteln und zitieren zu lassen. Dieser Sprech- und Wirkungsmodus des Dompteurs der Massen spielt Hand in Hand mit einem Ressentiment gegen die Presse und das politisch-mediale Establishment.

Die mediale Struktur von Öffentlichkeit folgt heute allerdings weder der zentralistischen Architektur einer totalitären Formation, noch der flachen (das heißt für jeden Diskurspartner gleichermaßen einsehbaren) Struktur des spätaufklärerischen Diskursideals. Die mediale Topologie ist heute dezentral und netzwerkförmig (vgl. Münker 2009). Die Schwelle zur aktiven Partizipation daran ist niedrig, zugleich ist die Schwelle zur allgemeinen Sichtbarkeit des einzelnen sehr hoch. Mathematisch gesprochen besitzt das Kommunikationsnetz sozialer Medien, welches heute den überwiegenden Teil öffentlicher Kommunikation trägt, die Struktur eines *gewichteten Graphen:* Alle Knoten (das heißt Kommunikationsteilnehmer) sind prinzipiell verbunden, jedoch nicht gleich stark (oder gleich intensiv); nicht alle Informationen werden allen Teilnehmenden gleichermaßen sichtbar. Der mediale Mechanismus dieser Räume – oft metaphorisch als „Filterblasen" (Pariser 2011) oder „Echokammern" bezeichnet – beruht auf dem kybernetische Prinzip des verstärkenden Feedbacks: Die Gewichtung der einzelnen Kanten (der Verbindungen zwischen zwei Kommunikationsteilnehmern) wird ständig neu angepasst, und zwar so, dass zu jedem Individuum bevorzugt solche Beiträge anderer Teilnehmer durchdringen, die aufgrund statistischer Metriken als besonders ‚relevant' oder ‚interessant' für dieses Individuum gehalten werden; es kommt in vernetzten Medien dadurch zu einer *Individualisierung des Sichtfeldes*. Die Dynamik, die in dieser Medienlogik entsteht, entspricht einem

[13] https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/trump-und-die-medien-das-prinzip-der.2016.de.html?dram:article_id=379885 (19/11/2018).

Schwarmverhalten (vgl. Horn 2009), denn sie besitzt weder eine zentrale Steuerungsinstanz, noch wird sie durch ein universelles Prinzip, wie den Bezug auf eine allgemeinverbindliche Rationalität, zusammengehalten.

Heuristisch lässt sich argumentieren, dass es unter diesen Bedingungen zu einer fragmentierten und *vertikal gespaltenen Topologie von Öffentlichkeit* kommen kann – zu einer Öffentlichkeit, die keinen allgemeinen Debattenraum aufspannt, sondern sich in mehr oder weniger disjunkte Realitätsabschnitte zerlegt. Dieser Einschätzung liegt die These zugrunde, dass die spezifische technologische Machtart der sozialen Medien (Feedback-Prinzip, Individualisierung des Sichtfeldes) die Impulse agonistischen, disputierenden Austauschs schwächt, während sie die affektive Resonanz geteilter Affekte und Meinungen fördert. Der Zusammenhalt einer medialen Echokammer kommt demnach durch einen geteilten affektiven Bezug auf bestimmte Themen zustande, der durch die eben dargelegte Medienlogik gezielt verstärkt wird.**[14]** Agonistische Begegnungen, also disputierende Stimmen, die unter der Voraussetzung wechselseitiger Anerkennung als Diskurspartner für differierende Positionen eintreten, werden in diesen Medienlogiken unwahrscheinlicher gemacht; an ihrer Stelle werden *antagonistische* Kräfte geschürt, die sich gegen das Außen der jeweiligen lokalen Blase richten. Das bedeutet *nicht,* dass konträre Stimmen und Positionen in einer medialen Echokammer generell ausgeblendet werden, wie es die Metapher der Filterblase irreführend suggeriert. Abweichende Positionen sind oft sichtbar, jedoch weil sie als Zielscheiben antagonistischer Affekte herumgereicht werden. Ihnen wird dann als inhaltliche Positionen nicht zugehört, sondern sie werden im Gestus der Schmähung, des Hasses und der Mokerie angeführt, um in einer Dynamik abstoßender Affekte den affektiven Zusammenhalt der eigenen Realitätsblase zu stärken (vgl. Merrin 2019).

Neue autoritäre Sensitivitäten

Meine These ist nun, dass dieses heuristische Verständnis der Medientopologie im *social media*-Zeitalter allein nicht ausreicht, um das Heraufkommen rechtspopulistischer Bewegungen und die Sehnsucht nach neuen autoritären Politikstilen zu erläutern. Korrelativ dazu ist auch auf die Ebene individueller affektiver Reizbarkeiten und Sensitivitäten zu schauen, die in diesen medialen Räumen angesprochen und intensiviert werden. Solche Sensitivitäten – ich verwende im Folgenden auch die Begriffe der „Affektfähigkeit" oder der „affektiven Disposition" dafür**[15]** – können im Zusammenspiel zwischen mehreren Individuen unter Bedingungen konkreter medialer Funktionslogiken potenziell neue Formen der politischen Artikulation und Subjektivität hervorbringen. Auf welchen Affektfähigkeiten, die mitunter in affektiven Biographien und affektiver Subjektivierung angeeignet sind, beruht also die Angänglichkeit oder Resonabilität zahlreicher Wähler_innen z.B. für das eingangs im Fall von Donald Trump beschriebene *ethos* der autokratischen Verweigerung des Politikbetriebes?

Einfache Antworten hierauf sind kaum zu erwarten; der Hypothese nach ist davon auszugehen, dass Angänglichkeit für autoritäre Adressierungen,

[14] Die Metapher der „Echokammer" verweist auf Informationsräume, in denen Menschen technologisch bedingt mit höherer Wahrscheinlichkeit auf Gleichgesinnten treffen, so dass ihre Ansichten und Bewertungen verstärkt und nicht in einer Differenz der Positionen auf die Probe gestellt werden.

[15] Dahinter steht der Spinozistische Begriff des Affektvermögens – *potentia* –, der als spezifisches Vermögen, in einem relationalen Kontext zu affizieren und affiziert zu werden, gleichermaßen eine Sensitivität und ein aktives Vermögen umfasst (Kwek 2015; Mühlhoff 2018). Zum daran anschließenden Begriff der affektiven Disposition siehe Mühlhoff 2019.

gleichwie das Vermögen, sich selbst autoritär zu verhalten und Autorität zu verkörpern, prinzipiell in verschiedenen Varianten und Spielarten auftreten. Um diese These am Fall der Wahl von Trump zu plausibilisieren, werde ich zunächst *zwei* Formen der autoritären Sensitivität zuspitzend skizzieren, die mutmaßlich beide für die Analyse affektiv-medialer Dynamiken neu-autoritärer Politiken relevant sind. Ich bezeichne die eine als *bürgerlich-empörte* und die andere als *destruktiv-zynische* Sensitivität; sie sind an der Konzeptperson des ‚Wutbürgers‘ bzw. des ‚Trolls‘ exemplifizierbar.

(1) Die Form des *bürgerlich-empörten Autoritarismus* wird durch die Konzeptperson des ‚Wutbürgers‘ verkörpert; wobei dies keine eindeutige Bestimmung impliziert, wer demographisch oder sozioökonomisch damit selektiert ist. Eine für den US-amerikanischen Kontext hilfreiche Orientierung über diese Form einer autoritären Sensitivität gibt Arlie Hochschild mit ihrer Studie *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016), obschon ich mit ‚Wutbürger‘ nur eine Teilmenge derer meine, deren Sensitivität durch die dort präsentierte „Deep Story“ erfasst wird. Die Form des politischen Weltbezugs ist bei dieser Konzeptperson durch eine prinzipiell vorhandene, aber gebrochene und teils fetischisierte Achtung für eine verbindliche Ordnung sowie ihre legitimen Gewaltmonopole und Hierarchien im demokratischen Kapitalismus und seinen Familienstrukturen geprägt. Das führt dazu, dass diese Konzeptperson *kein* Ressentiment gegen ‚legitimerweise‘ Bessergestellte und Mächtigere (sei es qua Geld und Leistung oder qua Amt) hegt, sondern gegen die Schlechtergestellten: Wie Hochschild ausführt (ebd., 135ff.), empfinden sich die Menschen, auf die dieses Psychogramm zutrifft, selbst als ordnungstreu und ‚fügen sich ein‘. Sie tragen für ihren geduldigen Konformismus mitunter auch Kosten, ohne sich jemals beschwert zu haben. Wut entzündet sich jedoch daran, dass sie sehen, wie ‚die Mächtigen‘ in vermeintlichem Missbrauch ihrer Amtsmacht beginnen, ‚unfair zu spielen‘ und anderen willkürlich zu helfen. Damit verschieben sie eine möglicherweise selbst empfundene strukturelle Demütigung oder Prekarität auf ein Niedrig-halten-Wollen von Gruppen, die *noch* niedriger stehen.

Wut kommt somit ins Spiel, wenn das durch Respekt und Achtung bewährte Ordnungssystem vermeintlich instabil wird und ein überschüssiger Affekt der Achtung ein umso restriktiveres Ordnungssystem zu fetischisieren beginnt. Sie trifft nur sekundär die Migrant_innen, Feminist_innen und Linken, primär die Eliten, die mutmaßlich ihre Macht missbrauchen. Aus dieser Konstellation kann eine autoritäre Gewaltbereitschaft resultieren, die sich als ‚Kampf um Recht und Ordnung‘ versteht. Wie der Kommunikationswissenschaftler Kendall Phillips argumentiert, führt dieses „Sentiment des Ärgers“ über einen Staat, der nicht mehr als schützend, sondern als Bedrohung empfunden werde, gegenwärtig zu einer „breit angelegte Verschiebung in der affektiven Struktur amerikanischen Lebens“ (Phillips 2018, 86; Übers. R.M.). Das sei auch an der starken Konjunktur der Heldenfigur des kurzentschlossen selbst zur Tat schreitenden Bürgers erkennbar, der sich aus fataler Pflicht einem „gleichgültigen, inkompetenten, bösartigen und manipulativen Staat“ (ebd., 88; Übers. R.M.) selbst-justiziell entgegenstellt. Diese Figur sei aktuell das Motiv zahlreicher populärer Filmproduktionen wie *Divergent* (2014), *The Giver*

(2014) oder *Maze Runner* (2014) (ebd.). Entscheidend für die vorliegende Auseinandersetzung ist, dass die Gewaltbereitschaft des empörten Bürgers, der sich nach hartem Durchgreifen sehnt, für diesen subjektiv mit dem Affekt einer als angemessen empfundenen ‚Notwehr' oder ‚Selbstverteidigung' einhergeht; es handelt sich subjektiv nicht primär um eine sadistische Lust, sondern um Selbstbehauptung im Namen einer vermeintlichen politischen Gemeinschaft.**[16]**

(2) Dagegen wird eine *destrukive und zynische Form des Autoritarismus* exemplifiziert durch die Akteure der Alt-Right Troll-Kultur in Online-Untergrundsphären wie dem Meme-Portal 4Chan.org. Eine aktuelle Studie von Angela Nagle (2017) vermittelt ein detailliertes Bild dieser weniger bekannten Diskursräume und analysiert ihren reaktionären politischen Einfluss auf die US-Politik der letzten zehn Jahre. Die medialen Taktiken dieser anonymen Community sind durch das koordinierte Verbreiten diffamierender Bild- und Textinhalte, sowie von Verschwörungstheorien und Falschmeldungen auf sozialen Medienplattformen wie YouTube, Twitter und Reddit gekennzeichnet (diese Tätigkeit wird „trollen" genannt); sie sind während des Präsidentschaftswahlkampfes zu einer zentralen Medienstrategie der Alt-Right-Bewegung und einer diskursprägenden Gewalt herangereift (ebenso Schreckinger 2017; Strick 2018; Merrin 2019). In der Anonymität des Online-Raumes bezeichnet sich die affektive Sensitivität und eine darauf aufbauende Form der Subjektivität dieser Subkultur selbst als „Toll-Spirit". Sie wird getragen durch Schadenfreude und Lust am Quälen in kollektiv orchestrierten Mobbing-, Shit Storm- und Doxing-Kampagnen, nicht nur gegen politische Gegner (darunter: Feministinnen, Tier- und Umweltschützer_innen, Frauen in der Computerspielszene, Hillary Clinton), sondern z.B. auch gegen zufällig ausgesuchte, arglose Teenager, die über koordinierte multimediale Diffamierungen und Belästigungen in den Selbstmord getrieben werden (Nagle 2017, 14ff.). Obsessionen mit Themen wie Suizid, Vergewaltigung und sexueller Belästigung, Schulmassakern, verkappter Homosexualität oder Schusswaffenbesitz verraten Brüche und Fragilitäten der Trolle im eigenen Selbstverhältnis. In einer (anonymen) Selbstbeschreibung des „Random"-Boards /b/ auf 4Chan heißt es:

> /b/ is the guy who tells the cripple ahead of him in line to hurry up. /b/ is first to get to the window to see the car accident outside. /b/ is the one who wrote your number on the mall's bathroom wall. /b/ is a failing student who makes passes at his young, attractive English teacher. [...] /b/ is a hot incest dream that you'll try to forget for days. /b/ is the only one of your group of friends to be secure in his sexuality and say anything. /b/ is the guy without ED who still likes trying Viagra. /b/ is the best friend that tags along for your first date and cock-blocks throughout the night. The decent girl you're trying to bag walks out on the date, /b/ laughs and takes you home when you're drunk, and you wake up to several hookers in your house who /b/ called for you. /b/ is a friend that constantly asks you to try mutual masturbation with him. /b/ is the guy who calls a suicide hotline to hit on the advisor. [...] /b/ is the voice in your head that tells you that it doesn't matter if she's drunk. /b/ is the friend

[16] Vgl. auch die Debatte zum „Vigilantismus" (Gewaltform der Selbstjustiz), dazu exemplarisch Schmidt-Lux 2013.

who constantly talks about your mom's rack. /b/ is the only one who understands what the hell you saying. /b/ is someone who would pay a hooker to eat his ass, and only that. /b/ is the uncle who has touched you several times. [...] /b/ is the pleasure you feel guilty of when you tried playing with your anus during masturbation. /b/ is wonderful. (anonym; zit. nach Nagle 2017, 32f.)

Der anonyme Internet-Troll als Konzeptperson einer zynisch-destruktiven autoritären Sensitivität wäre vielleicht marginal und politisch irrelevant, wenn er nicht den Kreis der direkten und ursprünglichen Unterstützer von Donald Trump und eine einflussreiche *anti-wertekonservative,* ultra-rechte Bewegung in den USA bilden würde (Schreckinger 2017; Nagle 2017). Er ist im Allgemeinen intelligent und computeraffin, männlich, weiß, Middle Class, einsam. Dieser Typus des Autoritären fühlt sich zu Trump weder durch Charisma hingezogen noch durch furchtbasierten Gehorsam oder Überich-Einsetzung, vielmehr erblickt er in Trumps Destruktionstrieb und seinem Troll-Verhalten eine kleine Version seiner eigenen affektiven Sensitivität der zynischen Destruktionslust.

Trump, der Troll

Welche Rolle spielen diese beiden Sensitivitäten nun im Kreis der Unterstützer_innen von Donald Trump? Meine These ist, dass insbesondere die zweite (destruktive) Dimension autoritärer Sensitivität für ein Verständnis der *Attraktivität* von Trump herangezogen werden muss. Denn zynische Destruktionslust steht unverkennbar hinter dem populistischen Stil Trumps, „der routinemäßig die Normen der Deliberation und des Anstandes überschreitet und nun in einer Regierung seine Fortsetzung findet, die alle Erwartungen, Protokolle und lang etablierten Politiken zerschlägt" (Phillips 2018, 86; Übers. R.M.). In der Einleitung hatte ich dieses spezifische *ethos* als Impuls des Politischen beschrieben, der nicht *im* Tableau politischer Positionen zu lokalisieren ist, sondern als störende und zerstörende Kraft vertikal aus dem etablierten Praxisrahmen der Politik hinausweist.[17] Doch wie kam es dazu, dass sich dieser Stil im Zuge der Trump-Kampagne so weitreichende Resonanzen verschaffen konnte?

Als Trump am 16. Juni 2015 unter dem fingierten Beifall bezahlter Statisten seine Kandidatur bekannt gab, erschien dies dem anonymen Kollektiv auf 4Chan und Reddit wie ein „Geschenk des Troll-Gottes". Der Journalist Ben Schreckinger (2017) zitiert im Politico-Magazin einen 4Chan-Insider mit den Worten:

> For a lot of people, on the first day it was like, 'This would be fucking hilarious', and then when he started coming up with policy stuff—the border wall, the Muslim ban—people on the boards were like, 'This can't be real. This is the greatest troll of all time'.

Die Trolle auf dem 4Chan /pol/-Board, die sich schon seit längerem fest in einem Alt-Right-Sentiment eingerichtet hatten, mögen Trump als

[17] Vgl. zur begrifflichen Unterscheidung des „Politischen" und der „Politik" etwa Bedorf/Röttgers 2010; Marchart 2010.

Präsidentschaftskandidaten initial nicht einmal besonders ernst genommen haben. Doch die Tatsache, *dass* er kandidierte, und *wie* er es tat, war resonanzfähig mit ihrer Troll-Sensitivität. Das hat innerhalb weniger Tage den sog. „Great Meme War" angefacht, in dem die Trolle durch Produktion von Memes, Verbreitung von Verschwörungstheorien und Falschnachrichten sowie durch koordiniertes Agieren auf Mainstream-Plattformen wie Facebook und Twitter ungefragt in Trumps Wahlkampf eingestiegen sind (Schreckinger 2017; Nagle 2017; Merrin 2019).

Innerhalb weniger Monate ist hiervon ausgehend ein alternatives Medien-Ökosystem der Alt-Right-Bewegung entstanden (Nagle 2017): Das Momentum, welches die Troll-Aktivitäten öffentlichkeitswirksam entfalten konnten, zog auch Akteure der organisierten Neo-Nazi-Szene wie „The Daily Stormer", Verschwörungstheoretiker und rechte Populisten an. Z.B. hat Breitbart News, insbesondere in der Zeit bis Februar 2016, als Milo Yiannopoulos dort noch Tech-Redakteur war, mehrfach enthusiastisch über die Chan-Kultur und ihre Politisierung berichtet. Die rechtspopulistische Nachrichtenplattform hat es damit als eines der ersten großen Media Outlets verstanden, die Troll-Subkultur als wirkungsvollen Akteur einer neuen rechten Kommunikationsstrategie zu entdecken und für ihre eigenen Zwecke zu vereinnahmen. Schließlich hat Steve Bannon, der ab August 2016 Trumps Wahlkampfleiter wurde, dieses Wissen direkt in die Trump-Kampagne eingebracht. Dies führte unter anderem dazu, dass das Kampagne-Team systematisch den *social media*-Untergrund auf 4Chan und Reddit beobachtete und Inhalte aus diesen Sphären weiterverwendete; nicht selten wurden ihre Verschwörungstheorien oder Memes auch von Donald Trump selbst retweeted (Merrin 2019).

Dieses Beispiel zeigt, wie eine bestimmte affektive Sensitivität (die sadistische Lust der Tolle) unter dem Einfluss eines historischen Ereignisses (Trumps Kandidatur) und unter den Bedingungen bestimmter medialer Resonanzeffekte (Teilen und retweeten ihrer Beiträge z.B. durch Trump selbst; verstärkender Einfluss von Breitbart News) zu Verschiebungen des politisch-medialen Wahrheitsspiels und der Herausbildung einer neuen Bezugsweise auf Wahrheit überhaupt geführt hat. Hier ist eine Form politischer Subjektivität entstanden, deren charakteristisches Verhältnis zu Wahrheit sich medial durch den Einsatz von Tabubrüchen, Provokationen und Falschnachrichten manifestiert. Sie hat damit nicht nur den Inhalt des politischen Diskurses nach rechts verschoben, sondern den affektiv-subjektiven Umgang mit Wahrheit an sich transformiert und sich so als wirksame Gegenkraft gegen eine als heuchlerisch empfundene deliberative Diskursethik und ihr Politikverständnis positioniert. Im Zuge der Kandidatur Trumps wurde die Sensitivität des Trollens, die vorher in ihrer Verbreitung mutmaßlich marginal und in ihrer Sichtbarkeit gering gewesen ist, *politisch aktiviert;* diese Aktivierung hat durch mediale Resonanzen eine relativ neue, nun öffentlich wirksame Affektform des politischen Wahrsprechens etabliert. Im Kern der politischen Subjektivität, die sich in diesem Wahrsprechen konstituiert, steht ein zynisch-überlegenes, instrumentelles Verhältnis zu Wahrheit als etwas, an das man selbst nicht zu glauben weiß, das jedoch unter „Normies" – so die Bezeichnung der Toll-Kultur für unbedarfte weiße Normalbürger_innen – leicht verbreitet, fingiert

und politisch instrumentalisiert werden kann.

In der Gestalt des Zynikers zeigt sich dabei eine Figur der neuen Rechten, die keineswegs aus Dummheit, sondern aus einer Position der draufgängerischen Überlegenheit handelt. Ihm sind die Lehren der Dekonstruktion, der Postmoderne und der Aufklärung grundsätzlich bekannt; er hat diese Lektionen „gelernt, jedoch nicht vollzogen", wie Sloterdijk (1983) es formuliert. Darum kann es ein gut gemeinter bürgerlicher Mediendiskurs der „fact checkers" und Entlarvungsbeiträge mit diesem Sentiment kaum aufnehmen: Der destruktive Stil von Trump als Troll wirkt für Menschen mit einer destruktiv-zynischen Sensitivität desto attraktiver, je mehr seiner Äußerungen im Establishment als deliberative Sachbeiträge missinterpretiert und alarmistisch besprochen werden. Während sich viele Kommentator_innen im liberalen Milieu also an der Inkompetenz des Präsidenten abarbeiten, macht ihn das bei seiner primären Wählergruppe – den Destruktionslustigen – nur weiter interessant. Denn die neue autoritäre Sensitivität richtet sich nicht gegen einzelne inhaltliche Positionen, sondern direkt gegen das *ethos* und die politische Subjektivität, die einer Praxis wie dem „Fakten Checken" zugrunde liegen. Sie stellt sich gegen das deliberative Selbstverständnis des vermeintlich nicht-affektiven, nicht-investierten rationalen Disputierens und gegen die von ‚Achtung vor dem Gesetz' und ‚Anstand' geprägte Sensitivität, die z.B. bei Enthüllungen über den Kandidaten Trump im Spiel ist.

Diese Interpretation der affektiv-medialen Genese des Phänomens Trump widerspricht der nach der Wahl häufig geäußerten Ansicht, dass es in erster Linie die „Abgehängten" und „normalen Leute" der Mittel- und Arbeiterklasse gewesen seien, die Trump gewählt hätten. Doch schon rein chronologisch betrachtet ist die vorgebliche Solidarisierung der Alt-Rights mit der „white working class" erst relativ spät erfolgt (Nagle 2017, 101ff.). Über lange Zeit ist die Bewegung als distinkt snobbistisch, sozial abgehoben und indifferent gegenüber Themen wie Armut und ökonomische Prekarität aufgetreten. Angela Nagle spricht von „einer bemerkenswerten Verschiebung von subkulturellem Elitismus zu plötzlicher proletarischer Rechtschaffenheit" (ebd., 101; Übers. R.M.). Trump war ursprünglich und in erster Linie der Kandidat einer ultra-rechten Minderheit, die sich nicht nur gegen die liberalen Demokraten wendete, sondern vor allem innerhalb des eigenen Lagers der Republikaner gegen den christlich-werteorientierten Mainstream stellte (ebd., 59; vgl. Schreckinger 2017).

Wie kommt es also dazu, dass Trump, um überhaupt eine Mehrheit erringen zu können, schließlich doch Stimmen im Lager der konservativen, christlich-werteorientierten und evtl. „abgehängten" *ordinary people* gesammelt hat? Die Erklärung, die ich vorschlagen möchte, besteht in einem verstärkenden Wechselspiel zwischen den beiden genannten Formen autoritärer Sensitivitäten: Die Trolle im Medienmilieu zwischen 4Chan und Breitbart, die von Schadenfreude, sadistischer Lust und destruktiver Langeweile getrieben sind, haben es verstanden, Menschen einer bürgerlich-empörten Sensitivität für ihre Zwecke einzuspannen, das heißt, als Destruktionswaffe gegen das ‚Establishment' zu mobilisieren. Die scheinbar paradoxe Komplizenschaft einer destruktiven Sensitivität, die den gewachsenen Apparat (zer)stören möchte,

mit jener bürgerlich-empörten Sensitivität, die in ihrer Beziehung zu Recht und Ordnung frustriert ist, funktioniert über die Konstruktion gemeinsamer Feindbilder und Bedrohungsszenarien, z.B. in Gestalt der ‚Eliten‘, der externen ‚Eindringlinge‘ und der Bedrohung durch einen unterwanderten Staat. Es spielt dem zynisch-destruktiven Impuls der Trolle also instrumentell in die Hände, die Wut der ‚Abgehängten‘ und Konservativen gegen ein ‚Establishment‘ aufzustacheln, das mit Obama vermeintlich durch eine liberale Verschwörung unterwandert wurde. Durch diese Wut wurden nicht nur destruktive Energien gebündelt, sondern dadurch konnte die Trump-Kampagne überhaupt erst eine zahlenmäßige Mehrheit für das gewinnen, was als ein elitäres und eben „subkulturelles“ politisches Unternehmen der Alt-Right begann (Nagle 2017).

So zeigt sich im Zuge der politischen Umbrüche seit 2015 also auch in Bezug auf die bürgerlich-empörte autoritäre Sensitivität ein Prozess der politischen Aktivierung bzw. Politisierung von Subjektivität. Denn die Trump-Kampagne hat nicht nur neue Deutungsangebote, ‚alternative Wahrheiten‘ und Feindbilder an die Hand gegeben, sondern auch einen bestimmten affektiven Stil des Bezugs auf solche diskursiven Elemente und ein Wahrheitsspiel etabliert, in dem dieser Stil politisch ausgespielt wird. Auf diese Weise geht jene Sensitivität, die vom Bedürfnis nach einem starken Mann, nach Recht und Ordnung und hartem Durchgreifen geprägt ist, in einer bürgerlich-empörten Form des politischen Sprechens und der politischen Subjektivität auf. Entscheidend ist, dass diese empörte Subjektivität trotz aller Synergien von der zynischen grundverschieden ist: Beide spielen unterschiedliche Rollen in einem gemeinsamen Wahrheitsspiel. Die zynische Subjektivität hat dabei jederzeit ein abgefeimtes, gebrochenes, spöttisch-humorvolles Verhältnis zu „Wahrheit“ – die bürgerlich-empörte dagegen ein ernstes und verbohrtes.[18]

Danksagung

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[18] Das Verhältnis dieser beiden Sensitivitäten zeigt auf eindrückliche Weise die Verschwörungstheorie unter dem Hashtag #pizzagate: Kurz vor der Präsidentschaftswahl als Falschnachricht auf 4Chan erfunden, mobilisierte sie zahlreiche empörte Bürger_innen, die FBI-Ermittlungen zu einem vermeintlichen Kinder-Prostitutionsring forderten, den Mitglieder der Clinton-Kampagne in Washingtoner Pizzarien angeblich unterhielten. Die Affäre gipfelte am 5. Dezember 2016 im bewaffneten Angriff eines kurzerhand selbst zur Tat schreitenden 28-Jährigen auf einen Pizza-Imbiss. Mit Waffengewalt wollte er erreichen, dass die Kinder freigelassen werden, die seiner Meinung nach im (nicht vorhandenen) Keller des Restaurants festgehalten werden. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pizzagate (19/11/2018); Silva 2018; Schreckinger 2017.

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Forms of Veridiction in Politics and Culture:

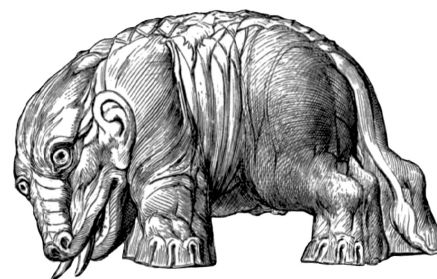## Avowal in Today's Jargon of Authenticity

Mariana Valverde

Abstract

The forms of political populism that are flourishing around the world, in extreme right-wing versions, but also in left-wing versions, are often dismissed as ignorance, fake news, and demagoguery. However, those analyses often focus only on the content of the claims made by populist leaders rather than on the forms of 'veridiction' and the ethical practices and forms that constitute 'populism'. In this article some theoretical tools borrowed from Foucault's diverse work on 'veridiction' and truth-telling, and also from Adorno's 1960s critique of existentialism, are deployed to try to understand the forms and techniques that constitute populist leaders as 'authentic' and thus as close to the people and as not contaminated by discredited institutions. Authenticity is created through very specific forms of truth-telling, as is shown with the example of the late mayor of Toronto, Rob Ford—in analysis with broader implications.

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Introduction

Current debates amongst journalists, intellectuals and activists about truth, post-truth, and forms of political subjectivity rarely draw on the plentiful and varied resources of European philosophy's long and unresolved struggles with the same topics. This article will endeavour to show that Theodor Adorno's little-known polemic against both philosophical and populist forms of existentialist talk in postwar Germany—the sarcastic little book entitled *The Jargon of Authenticity* (Adorno 1973)—contains many insights that can be turned into useful contemporary tools. Journalists today often note that populist leaders lie openly and with impunity; this is undoubtedly true, as a political fact, but here I argue that Adorno's little book can help us get beyond the stale journalistic binary of 'real facts' vs 'fake news'.

While reflecting on possible current uses of Adorno's polemic, the article's methodological starting point is Foucault's insistence that instead of trying to weed out falsehoods in order to uncover truth—as European philosophy and European science have always done, in different ways, and as today's journalists are professionally obligated to do—scholars would do better to instead document the co-existence, even in the same place and time, of a variety of truth regimes and a corresponding plurality of modes of power. I will not be using Foucault's own classification of modes of power/knowledge here, however. Instead, I borrow his approach to illuminate how some contemporary forms of 'veridiction' compare with one another, while treating 'authenticity' in Adorno's sense both as a form of 'veridiction' and a practice of the self within mainstream political discourse and popular culture and journalism.

Foucault's scattered work on 'veridiction' (which was not published in his lifetime or indeed for a long time afterwards) brought the interest in the government of the self most systematically developed in the *History of Sexuality* volumes together with Nietzsche-inspired reflections on the history of practices of truth. The term 'veridiction' was most fully elaborated and used in the lectures delivered to a criminal law and criminology audience at Louvain in 1981, only published in French in 2012 and in English in 2014— a set of lectures entitled, by Foucault himself, *Wrong-doing, truth-telling: the function of avowal in justice* (2014). But there is a significant amount of overlap between the Louvain lectures and those given in Rio de Janeiro years earlier (published in English under the title *Truth and juridical forms* in volume III of *The essential works of Michel Foucault* (2000)). The Louvain lectures and the Rio lectures contain similar readings of the same ancient Greek texts—most notably, the *Oedipus Rex* tragedy. As is well known, classical literary texts were used by Foucault as resources to think about the genealogy of European truth practices, for instance 'the inquiry', which Foucault argues developed in pre-legal and legal contexts well before it was adopted for scientific and philosophical purposes in the 17th and 18th centuries (Foucault 2000). In addition, there are many echoes between the lectures on the history of truth-telling in quasi- or pre-judicial contexts delivered in Rio and at Louvain, on the one hand, and on the other hand the lectures given at Berkeley towards the end of his life published in English under the title *Fearless Speech* (2001). In

particular, the reflections on Greek *parrhesia* articulated before the Berkeley audience do not talk explicitly about 'avowal' or 'veridiction', but they also focus attention on practices of truth that, in contrast to both rationalist and empiricist traditions, depend crucially on and help to constitute particular in-person relationships. *Parrhesia* takes different forms, but what these speech acts share is an embodied and interactive basis for truth-telling, and one that frequently exposes the speaker to risks, since the truths being told are often unpleasant or unflattering.

Nowhere in these various sets of lectures does Foucault provide a clear contrast between these in-person truth telling practices and the scientific and philosophical truth regimes previously studied in his earlier, immensely influential work on the history of European sciences of 'man'. But we who have had the opportunity to reflect, years later, on the relations or lack of relations between Foucault's heterogeneous studies of 'truth' can say that the later work on truth telling draws attention to embodied truth-telling practices that create risks for the speaker. These practices include not only 'avowal', a capacious category that includes 'confession' as well as the acknowledgement of one's deviant identity, but also the 'speaking truth to power' speech acts that honest self-aware rulers ought to demand of their close friends, according to Foucault's interpretation of *parrhesia* and similar Greco-Roman truth practices. If such a comparison were ever to be systematically elaborated, a key point would be that scientific truth claims are supposed to be quite independent of the particularities of the in-person relationships that scientists might have with their colleagues or fellow citizens, whereas the kind of truth-telling that is relevant for political life, ethical practice, and criminal law purposes is definitely not independent of the character of the individuals involved, nor is it independent from the relationships they have with one another.

Foucault did not seek out or comment on current-day analogues to ancient Greek truth-telling. But it is obvious that there are many. For example, in today's criminal courts one still sees 'character witnesses', personages charged with telling not what facts they saw with their own eyes (those are eyewitnesses) but rather how they judge the inner character—the honesty or dishonesty, bravery or cowardice—of someone that they personally know. The character witness of common-law criminal courts is just one figure that highlights the continued existence and effectivity of modes of truth telling that are not only different from, but quite incommensurable with those of science. But as we shall see, it is not necessary to look to the admittedly antiquated truth machinery of the common law (Valverde 2003) for evidence that truth-telling in Foucault's sense wields great power despite—or perhaps because of—its incompatibility with scientific rules for objective fact gathering and fact checking. Indeed, political discourse today seems to be largely characterized by a growing influence of forms of 'veridiction' and modes of truth-telling that revolve around such non- or anti-scientific categories as 'authenticity'. The particular forms of 'veridiction' that are deployed today, internationally, in order to construct and validate particular political figures—and not only politicians—as 'authentic' is the main interest of this essay.

Since bringing together Foucault and Adorno is an unusual move, to say the

least, and this choice of theoretical inspiration seems especially unsuited to study popular forms of political discourse, it is worth noting at the outset that Foucault did not reject or demonize the popular culture of his day, as Adorno famously did. Nevertheless, even though Foucault avoided voicing European high-culture snobbery in an explicit manner, it is risky to use Foucault to examine current-day journalistic and popular discourses, since he eschewed commenting on emerging popular practices of truth and power in his own present (except in a few interviews and in-person discussions, which despite being published, have a different, less scholarly status than his published books and his formal lectures). When looking for resources to address the question of 'how could our present have turned out otherwise?', the question that all of his work addresses, Foucault ignored anthropological research on non-European cultures as well as sociological inquiries into subversive folk or alternative subcultures, preferring instead to gesture in a vague manner, and only occasionally, towards 'submerged' knowledges. As is well known, to put the present in question he drew on his Jesuit education and on the work of classicist colleagues to reflect on possible uses, in the present, of ancient European sources. It is thus perilous for anyone today to use Foucault's work to understand popular political discourse. In doing so it is necessary to warn that the present author is by no means providing a Foucaultian account but only using Foucault's (and Adorno's) work as a resource to undertake her own inquiries.

Personal Truth Claims

If claims (made by the speaker or made about the speaker by someone else) about authenticity—rather than expertise or other rationalist sources of epistemological authority—are the specific interest of this essay, it has to be first acknowledged that authenticity exists or acquires meaning in a larger network or collection of loosely related modes of 'veridiction', which I will call the realm of 'personal truths'. The word 'personal' is not ideal, because it might seem to connote the modern psychological 'inner self' whose genealogy Foucault, and later Nikolas Rose, carefully documented (Rose 1989, 1999). But I have not been able to find a better word; and I am reluctant to invent a neologism when there is already a term that, despite some unwanted baggage, can serve, for purposes of a short essay, to roughly indicate the boundaries of my object of study.

'Personal truths', as the term is used here, includes a wide range of claim-making exercises that frequently overlap with other modes of 'veridiction'. Some, perhaps most, personal truth claims appear to be factual and hence verifiable (I was born in a log cabin; my mother was on welfare etc.). However, even when presented as empirically verifiable statements, grammatically identical to analytic philosophy's favourite example 'the cat is on the mat', personal truths are not primarily empirical or scientific claims. A birth in a log cabin would suggest, in North America, hardy pioneer virtues, self-sufficiency, the absence of a state, strong family bonds, a willingness to work hard, a rejection of luxury, and so forth: the log cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was supposed

to have been born was not really a physical building. Another example would be Richard Nixon's famous declaration "I am not a crook." Semantics matters. Whether one has committed theft or fraud is, in principle, empirically verifiable via criminal records; but the 'crook' designation actively blurs the supposedly sharp line dividing matters of fact from matters of concern, to use Latour's language (Latour 1999, 2004). To that extent, the 'crook' category is not really modern, not really empirical, despite its overlap with the 'offender charged with theft or fraud' legal, empirically verifiable category. Whether or not they contain empirical or quasi-empirical claims, therefore, what I am here calling personal truth claims also, and crucially, deploy and rely on notions of honesty/dishonesty, courage/cowardice, destiny, fate, honour, and, most centrally, justice/injustice.

Given the eternal recurrence of these 'matters of concern' in Western culture, from Homer's account of Patroclus' chariot race (analyzed at length by Foucault (2014)) to the Oprah Winfrey television show, it is not surprising to find, as many political commentators have done in recent years, that 'personal truths' are the truths that matter the most to most ordinary people. Scientists care deeply and even personally about the empirically based modes of 'veridiction' developed since the scientific revolution; but scientific epistemologies do not have much influence in everyday lay contexts. And on their part, moral judgements that depend on particular religious dogmas have a limited audience. Beyond both science and organized religion, therefore, or perhaps blurring this supposedly binary opposition, political capital is today arguably accumulated more through popular assessments of politicians' inner character (often invoked not directly but by deploying mythical tropes, like the log cabin) than through known facts about a politician's previous experience (as Hillary Clinton found out to her dismay in the 2016 U.S. presidential election).

One can shed some light on the admittedly murky boundaries of 'personal truths' by contrasting that realm with the realm of religious belief. The genre of religiously based claims has in recent years undergone a revival in many parts of the world—a revival or re-invention that could not have been predicted in Foucault's Cold-War lifetime, and one that poses serious challenges to the standard European story about secularization and bureaucratization as virtually unstoppable modernizing forces. The religious truth regime underpins or contains a wide variety of epistemological rules, governing myths, and discursive practices—such as declaring some texts to be sacred, declaring certain everyday practices as polluted or polluting, classifying whole peoples as saved or damned, and validating certain forms of speech as divinely inspired and hence impervious to verification through other epistemologies.[1] There are also a whole range of techniques of the self, such as confession, that accompany religious epistemological practices, as is the case for all other truth regimes.

Before going on to analyze the practices of self that produce populist authenticity, it is helpful to distinguish religious truth claims from personal truth telling. Personal truth telling (and the verification, citation and contestation practices that inevitably follow, in personal truth telling as in both religious and scientific truth claiming) can certainly coexist with and overlap with

[1] When documenting and studying truth regimes, it is important, in my view, to distinguish between practices used to first present 'facts' or other truth claims, on the one hand, and the multifarious techniques that serve to test, confirm, audit, cross examine, and/or verify those claims, on the other hand. Foucault's account of practices such as confessing, witnessing, and issuing verdicts (2014) does distinguish these two dimensions of truth regimes—for example, by remarking that the chorus in a Greek tragedy plays a role that is similar to that of a jury in modern trials; but he does not name these two phases as I do here.

religion as well as with objective facticity; but personal truth telling does not require that the participants share a particular dogma. Personal truth telling can succeed in the absence of a shared set of religious beliefs and rules— probably a major reason for the popularity of this genre in contemporary multicultural societies.

There are a range of strategies for engaging in personal truth claiming. Some of these deploy collective, often national or ethnic, practices of solidarity and memory. The evocation of semi-historical, semi-mythical victories and defeats, told for nationalistic purposes, insightfully analyzed in Slavoj Žižek's work on the survival of the ideological form in the post-Cold-War era (1991), is an excellent example of collective personal truth telling. It is hardly original to point out that backward-looking nostalgic narratives of blood and soil provide today much of the content for various forms of populism, including in Northern Europe (Rose 2017)—but there are plenty of other forms of personal truth telling that take a collective form but are less ideological or less imbued with national narratives, such as the performances of the diehard fans of professional sports teams.**[2]** And there are also progressive forms of collective personal truth telling, as in the anti-imperialist nationalisms of the 1950s and 1960s (and perhaps also Hugo Chavez's invocation of the sacred anti-colonial figure of Simon Bolivar in his effort to build a 'bolivarist' new socialist republic).

But here I will focus on one type of personal truth telling that does not explicitly feature one's lineage or nation or any other collectivity, but works strictly at the scale of the individual. When claiming authority for this type of individual truth, whether for oneself or for a leader or other personage, a fuzzy notion that wields a great deal of power is that of 'authenticity' (Adorno 1973). An example might illustrate this point. When a television talk show declares that a guest was chosen because h/she represents an authentic voice—a common trope in journalism as well as in politics—that designation constructs the guest not as a statistically representative member of a group or as the group's official designated leader, but rather as someone who may be speaking about a collective experience but is doing so in a 'personalized' and spontaneous manner. And because this type of authority is deeply personal, it is also necessarily embodied. One's gestures, clothes, hair, and gait become read as signifiers (successful or not) of an authenticity that is inward but is easily readable by a casual observer.

The 'authentic voice' trope is constituted by contrasting a supposedly unique individual—speaking to us from the heart, without artifice or mediation, a true individual who lacks any official sanction—with the highly managed performances of official and bureaucratic voices everywhere, including experts, professional politicians, and official representatives of a religion. One need not be a full-fledged Hegelian to recognize (as Adorno did) that claims about personal authenticity depend on the persistent Romantic myth of wholly spontaneous and original speech—a myth of course long debunked in the academy by poststructuralist thinkers from Jacques Derrida to Judith Butler, but which has not been debunked in popular culture.

Importantly (and this is a Latourian-Foucaultian point that Adorno does

[2] Of course there are often political or regional or ethnic or class overlays at work in the construction of professional sports team fandom, but it would be reductionist to read fan rivalries as merely or solely reflecting class or other interests. In retrospect, it is unfortunate that neither Laclau nor Hall (to my knowledge) pondered the relationship between populist politics and football fandom.

not take up), authentic individuals do not threaten or contest the authority of science, and neither do they directly oppose or challenge any religion or even religion in general: they simply operate at another scale and use different criteria of what counts as truth.

One contemporary figure who exemplifies personal authenticity is the young Pakistani woman Malala.**[3]** I have not studied the career of Malala's representations; if one were to do so no doubt Islamophobia would emerge as a key factor in her fame. But for purposes of this essay, one can plausibly argue that Malala's political capital has a great deal to do with the fact that she is considered a 'grassroots' individual rather than an expert or an official in a government or any other formal organization. Her odes to the virtues of educating non-Western girls consist of nothing but liberal feminist and development-industry platitudes; but despite the fact that her speech is wholly trite and unoriginal, she is famous because, as Adorno would say, she is herself. The combination of wholly trite content with a claim to and a promotion of personal uniqueness is what characterized postwar existentialism, especially at the more popular level, according to Adorno's 1964 polemic (Adorno 1973). But in a completely different context, one can see the same combination of almost contentless platitudes and claims about unique individuality constituting today's jargon of authenticity.

In North America, the '#Me Too' movement has thrown up a whole army of female voices that have also been hailed for their authenticity—one characterized by the articulation of apparently unique individuality and general statements that descend into platitudes ('men must respect women' etc.). Like Malala, the women of the '#Me Too' movement have become 'authentic' by simultaneously displaying the 'structural' harms they have suffered and narrating their unique struggle to overcome the harms—as is also the case for the myriad of less famous Malalas that NGO's feature in their fundraising materials. Adorno would say that it is not coincidental that the '#Me Too' movement features 'me' rather than 'we, the female people'.

In the case of both Malala and the women of the '#Me Too' movement, the harms whose narration produces performances of authenticity are highly gendered; but this need not always be the case. The specific moral authority conferred by the authenticity produced through the personalized narration of collective suffering is also visible in less gendered contexts. Examples of this would be Amnesty International's political prisoners, or refugees as represented by human rights and humanitarian organizations.

Authenticity and Populist Politics

Adorno's polemic argued that high-culture writers such as Martin Buber, Karl Jaspers, and Martin Heidegger, who idealized face-to-face 'authentic' interactions and cultivated pastoral and arguably anti-historical sensibilities, provided a philosophical elaboration of a middle-class postwar German mainstream culture intent on avoiding difficult discussions about historical responsibility by turning to the realm of inward truths. The emphasis on personal conviction rather than evidence (historical or scientific) and the

[3] Malala Yousafzai is the famous Pakistani activist for female education and the youngest person who ever receive the Nobel Peace Prize. With only 11 years, she had kept an anonymous diary about her life under Taliban rule, which was published first on BBC Urdu before receiving more global attention. In 2012, she survived an assassination attempt by a Taliban gunman in retaliation for her activism. In 2013, she published her autobiography *I am Malala*, which became a global bestseller.

cultivation of individual subjectivity for its own sake, according to Adorno, seemed at first sight to be opposed to mass consumer culture—especially in Heidegger's laments about technology and his romanticization of the pre-urban German forest. But Adorno argues that both 'high' and popular existentialism in fact promoted an extreme individualism that could only have arisen with capitalism (Adorno 1973, 89–93). The authentic subject is the individual of the Lockean social contract, the individual who owns himself (127) and who imagines himself as a-social and a-historical. And in relation to Heidegger's claim that personal authenticity is achieved insofar as one privileges that most individual of all events, namely one's 'own' death, Adorno bitterly states: "Only a solipsistic philosophy could acknowledge the ontological priority of 'my' death over and against any other" (150)—a comment that of course draws attention, in a not so subtle way, to Heidegger's well-known Nazi sympathies.

The emphasis on thinking from the point of view of one's 'own' death is peculiarly Heideggerian; but what is not unique is Heidegger's penchant for appearing to promote concreteness and 'artisanal' life as against mass consumer capitalism. We can add that one thing that Heidegger has in common with currently popular exaltations of personal authenticity is the way in which highly abstract, almost contentless language is used to validate truth claims that are said to arise from personal experience rather than from scientific or historical accounts. Existentialism has more or less vanished from philosophy departments, but what one might call vulgar existentialism reigns supreme in popular culture. The bland generic odes to individualism in the abstract that Adorno critiqued can be readily found today in mass-produced graduation cards: 'Be true to yourself', 'Live your dream' etc.

Authenticity is an effect that can be produced through rhetorical and other semiotic means at many levels and scales. For instance, in the global South as well as in the North one can today purchase 'authentic' foods, artisanal products whose Benjaminian aura is generated by implicit or explicit contrast with over-processed and over-travelled mass-produced supermarket foods. In this context, Adorno's argument seems plausibly relevant: authentic experiences appear to challenge mass capitalist production but are in fact Sunday supplements that quietly support mass consumer culture by providing limited relief. Certainly, Heidegger's preference for craft products and his contempt for technological innovations has its contemporary analogues. But in order to focus on truth games that have particular relevance to subjectivity, in keeping with this issue's call for papers, it is useful to concentrate not on authentic commodities but rather on authentic political selves, in line with the Malala example given above.

An Authentic White Male in a Multicultural Cosmopolitan City

One example—among many—of current-day politicians whose rise depended on generating an image of authenticity is the late mayor of Toronto, Rob Ford, who gained world-wide attention in 2013 when he publicly admitted (after many denials) that he had smoked crack cocaine, and then proceeded to

explain his drug taking by saying: "Yes I have smoked crack cocaine… probably in one of my drunken stupors."[4] This astounding statement was widely ridiculed worldwide, for obvious reasons; but it can also be seen as a particular performance of authenticity. It might seem that Ford's openly outrageous statements undermine Adorno's argument that the jargon of authenticity is characterized by bland and even contentless odes to individualism. But one could argue that, especially in the age of celebrities, bland performances of mainstream liberal authenticity à la Malala may be unable to compete on the Instagram arena with more striking, even shocking, performances of extreme individuality. Arguably, in the case of Rob Ford, his visually striking overweight and inelegant body served as materialized authenticity, in the same way that Trump's frequent downright rude gestures appear to amplify rather than undermine his claim to be a representative of the ordinary 'true' American people.

The contrast in the social positions of the two examples (Malala and Rob Ford) is important. Ford was a barely educated white male whose career was built on battling and dismissing the cosmopolitan Torontonians labelled by him and his supporters as 'downtown elites'. He had no time at all for the locally popular genre of Malala-style odes to education, multiculturalism, tolerance, and gender equality. His figure, and in particular his body, as constantly shown (and parodied) on television screens, represented a particularly risky form of authenticity (risky in the pre-Trump age, at any rate), generated by openly committing both verbal and non-verbal faux-pas including many acts classified as illegal, immoral, or extremely impolite. This is where avowal in Foucault's sense enters the analysis, though used here in combination with a feminist reflection on gender and authenticity.

Only recently, acknowledging vices and moral flaws generally resulted in political exile: Bill Clinton barely survived sexual scandals that would have been easily swept under the rug or ignored in the 1960s but that by the 1990s had become political minefields. That standard still applies to women: one cannot imagine any female leader, even Marine LePen, surviving politically if a sexual scandal were made public.

The old gentleman's code still governs mainstream liberal leaders. However, populist leaders seem to find it possible to successfully perform an *extreme masculinity* that distances itself not only from liberal political correctness but also from basic courtesy. The leaders of the *Five Star Movement* in Italy, for instance, seem to have abandoned the usual rules of liberal democratic political discourse. A performance of *extreme masculinity* is often praised in populist contexts because it is regarded as speaking and acting from the heart, instead of deferring to PR professionals and image consultants. And what could be a better example of *extreme masculinity* than admitting, almost as an aside, that one gets drunk on a regular basis? Certainly, no woman leader could survive such an admission—and neither could liberal democratic mainstream party leaders (imagine what would have happened if Obama had been regularly seen drunk in public).

But neither populism nor authenticity exist in general; they exist only in particular performances. Thus, additional details are necessary to sketch the

[4] For this and other statements see "Rob Ford's most unforgettable quotes", *City News* [Toronto], 22 March 2016. https://toronto.citynews.ca/2016/03/22/rob-fords-most-unforgettable-quotes/ (11/11/2018).

specificities of Ford's particular form of authenticity, even as compared to other privileged male public figures in the global North. The background that matters is as follows. Rob Ford had served for many years as a city councillor in a system that is highly individualistic—in Ontario, political parties are not allowed, by law, to formally operate at the municipal level, and councillors are elected in a specific district, so they need not show much concern for larger-scale issues.**[5]** This is important, since it is very doubtful that in the 1980s and 1990s the Conservative party would have supported Ford, and if for some reason they had supported him, some party discipline would have been brought to bear to regulate his performances of authentic, populist masculinity. But as it was, he could get re-elected without deferring to the local ethic of diversity or local norms about political speech, by doing nothing more than being himself, as Adorno put it, that is, presenting himself as a lone individual who owns himself and defers to nobody.

For many years, Ford prided himself on spending most of his time personally answering phone calls from constituents, rather than acquiring knowledge about city-wide issues, and making gut decisions rather than listening to experts. Throughout his often lonely years on council he consistently practiced an ultra-populist form of right-wing politics that differed markedly from the polite, well-educated and moderate forms of conservatism that had long prospered in Canada. And while other local politicians make a point of keeping in good physical shape and praising cycling if not actually riding bikes, Ford went out of his way to alienate journalists and pundits as well as progressives by proclaiming that if he became mayor, the "war on the car" would cease. Although data on increases in pedestrian and cyclist deaths regularly appeared in local news reports, with much hand-wringing on the part of experts, the fat guy driving the large ostentatious car was clearly an 'authentic' figure, for many Torontonians.**[6]**

The local creative classes and the national political establishment smugly dismissed Rob Ford as a 'buffoon', someone who might belong in a remote corner of the American South but not in sophisticated, multicultural Toronto (Valverde 2008). But he did get elected as mayor in 2010. This is not the place to delve into the details of local or Canadian city politics; but Ford's rise to power depended on his deployment of a highly masculine, racially privileged and specifically right-wing form of authenticity. Here, being 'oneself' amounts to being contemptuous of social democratic values and evidence-based truth claims; one appears as an individual by contrast to the sheep-like homogeneity of educated elites. And sure enough, Ford spoke his mind without clearing it with his media people first; he used words not heard in polite society (including a very vulgar reference to sex with his wife, made in public and in her presence); he did not seek counsel from experts or PR people and he ignored advice from staff and from his own deputy mayor.

While polite cosmopolitan Toronto society alternatively laughed at and was shocked by Ford, he managed to accumulate a specific kind of political capital, defined precisely by contrast with the well-briefed, well-spoken, in-good-physical-shape presentations of self favoured by mainstream Canadian politicians (such as Justin Trudeau).

[5] See journalist Robyn Doolittle's (2014) detailed account *Crazy Town: The Rob Ford Story*.

[6] My book *Everyday law on the street: city governance in an age of diversity* (2012) contains several vignettes, drawn from the field notes of research assistants, featuring Ford when he was still a city councillor, between 2004 and 2008. Since he is no longer among the living I think there is no research ethics breach in stating here that the purposively badly anonymized 'Councillor Chevy' of the book was actually Rob Ford.

The power of populist right-wing performances of a type of personal authenticity whose content is largely provided by old-fashioned, working-class-looking, anti-intellectual masculinity (and even a parody of popular masculinity) notoriously became a factor in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, as everyone knows. It has also been highly visible in the U.K. amongst UKIP politicians and some anti-European Tories, although of course Boris Johnson manages the uniquely British feat of combining an unkempt, anti-expert, anti-equity masculinity with all manner of posh signifiers.

The cultural-political forces that Rob Ford managed to either conjure up or simply bring together ('articulate', Laclau and Hall would say) have not ceased to be significant in Canadian politics, and indeed such politics have been seriously amplified. In June of 2018, two years after Rob Ford's untimely death from a rare cancer, his older brother Doug Ford (whose physical appearance and consumer habits are uncannily similar to his brother's, though he is not as spontaneously outrageous) became the premier of Ontario, Canada's largest province, and with a majority government—despite the fact that many established Conservative figures openly opposed Doug Ford's nomination as party leader.

Like his younger brother, Doug Ford has made his career by opposing both 'sissy' expert advice and 'bleeding heart' welfare-state compassion, in keeping with right-wing masculine populism everywhere. While serving as city councillor Doug Ford famously dismissed local author Margaret Atwood's efforts to save public libraries from his brother's cutbacks by saying that Toronto had more libraries than donut shops anyway—and he added that he did not know who Margaret Atwood was, quite a bravura performance in the local context, where she is a true icon.

Masculinity is crucial here: no female politician, right-wing or left-wing, in any country, could possibly survive if the public became aware of behaviour such as excessive drinking and flying into a rage in public. And race is important too, since it is doubtful that any male politician of African descent could survive rumours, never mind facts, about illegal drugs, especially crack.

What can be learned from the globally publicized but locally determined political career of Rob Ford about current practices of personal truth telling? As the extended account by journalist Robyn Doolittle explains, while admitting to consuming illegal substances and being seeing drunk in public did ultimately lead to his downfall, nevertheless, his open disregard for bureaucratic rules and fact-filled briefing papers struck a certain chord, especially amongst working-class Torontonians—of all races, one needs to add (Doolittle 2014). It is not possible to know whether the 'authentic' label that many observers attached to Rob Ford accurately describes their reason for affiliating themselves with the Ford family and Rob Ford in particular. But for corroboration of my analysis of Ford's popularity we could look to male leaders in various countries in both the global South and the global North where a hypermasculine form of right-wing populism has succeeded, though in countries other than Canada hypermasculine performances of populist politics are often deeply intertwined with extreme racism (e.g. Rose 2017).

Avowal: Practices of Truth, Practices of Self

The most famous statement made by Ford while he was mayor was undoubtedly the previously cited 'it must have been in one of my drunken stupors'-explanation for having smoked crack cocaine. Among other things, the logic of the statement defies mainstream views of drinking. While fifty years ago being drunk while doing something often resulted in a less harsh judgement by both judges and ordinary people, in this day and age excessive drinking, especially by a public official, is a huge problem by itself, even when no further 'bad' acts are committed. The double acknowledgement (that he not only smoked crack, but did so while in one of many drunken stupors) looks like the worst political performance ever—unless one reflects on a form of truth-telling that Foucault labelled 'avowal'.

The lectures on avowal and truth-telling given at Louvain (Foucault 2014) begin with a psychiatric situation, in which a mid-nineteenth century asylum patient, a M. Leuret, is pressured and coerced into 'avowing' that he is indeed mad and that his visions are the product of his imagination—not by clever treatment strategies but by means of repeated icy showers administered by the asylum doctor. Foucault's opening example makes it clear that avowal is not always voluntary: people can be cornered into avowing their crime or their madness (as indeed happened to Rob Ford, who only admitted the cocaine taking when a video recording of the event in question had surfaced). That is one interesting feature of avowal: it is a revelation of a truth about the self that exposes oneself to contempt or to risk, but whether it is wholly voluntary or coerced does not seem to affect its basic dynamic or the validity of the 'truth'.

Avowal is also always embodied and site-specific. M. Leuret avowed his madness to his doctor, not to the world at large; and similarly, the paradigm instance of avowal explored by Foucault in Louvain as in the Rio lectures, the story of Oedipus, also proceeds through specific interactions among the characters and between characters and audience.

In ancient Greek tragedies, the chorus plays the same role (according to Foucault) that juries would later come to play in European criminal justice: acting as one, the chorus acknowledges and validates the 'confession' or avowal made by the main character. Thus, in Foucault's account, Oedipus' long and twisted path to avowing that he is the very criminal he is pursuing is a process that goes on within his own self but is then validated by the chorus, a verification which can only take place after the avowal has been spoken. The chorus recognizes and verifies the juridical truth (Oedipus did it) but that truth also has to be avowed by the criminal himself. It would not have been enough to send a proto-detective to find out who killed Laius, therefore—or at least it would not have been enough to generate a memorable tragedy. Oedipus, somewhat like the M. Leuret in the French asylum, has to be brought around—by his own discoveries, though, not by the forceful words of an expert with superior knowledge—to the point of avowing that he is himself the perpetrator of the crimes he set out to investigate.

The purely factual truths that M. Leuret is diagnosed as insane; that Oedipus

unwittingly killed his father are not the important truths in either story. The important truth claims emerge at the personal, not the factual, level as the characters in question avow who they really are, in their own words. Personal truths, unlike factual truths, bind the subjectivity of the offender or deviant person to the truth of 'the case'. And the binding of practices of self to practices of truth cannot happen in private. The avowal has to be certified or validated in and by a particular audience.

In this context, and more directly relevant to the Rob Ford story, the Alcoholics Anonymous insistence on people who join AA groups having to avow their vice or disease to their peers is a very relevant example of contemporary avowal—one that dispenses with the high and mighty medical authority of M. Leuret's time in favour of a more democratic situation. As I have discussed elsewhere, AA insists that recognizing one's alcoholism inwardly is insufficient; the personal recognition of one's problem needs to be immediately followed by a semi-public avowal in the specific context of an AA group. 'Hi, I am so and so, and I am an alcoholic' is the mandatory first greeting at AA meetings. Indeed, saying 'I am so-and-so and I am an alcoholic', but in an AA meeting, not just anywhere, is far more important, for purposes of AA membership, than believing any factual claim about alcohol. In other words, AA practices of self are embodied, interactive, and site-specific: only these in-person, face to face practices of self can bind the subjectivity of drinkers to the 'truths' about alcoholism in general that are proclaimed in AA texts (Valverde 1998, chapter 5).

Gender and Geopolitics in Avowal: Different Paths to Authenticity

To return now to Rob Ford and the questions of gender and race raised earlier. Today, avowals by public figures about drug and/or alcohol consumption are common. There is no one form of avowal, however: drug and alcohol avowals (and sexual misconduct avowals) differ according to the presence or absence of certain practices of self and of certain relations between the speaker and his/her audience. In the absence of an established inventory of contemporary forms of avowal, however, it is possible to draw out some distinguishing features of Rob Ford's 'cocaine-drunken stupors'-avowal. The most obvious point is that Ford's avowal did not take the more common form of acknowledging one's identity as an addict, as so many American public figures have done when caught in embarrassing situations. In keeping with his pre-modern epistemology of drink and male behaviour, Ford consistently refused the label 'addict', even as, when forced into treatment, he publically spoke about his "problems with alcohol" being inborn, like the colour of his hair.

His consistent refusal of the term 'addict' was likely rooted in a culturally specific and generation-specific theory of addiction, whereby 'addict' means drug addict. Getting drunk regularly is a behaviour that someone like Ford, brought up in a working-class Irish Catholic Canadian household in the postwar period, would see as a weakness or flaw but not as a symptom of a total deviant

identity. We do not know the extent to which the belief that actions such as consuming illegal drugs are less blameworthy or at least more forgivable if one is drunk is shared by the people who vote for right-wing populist embodiments of old-fashioned masculinity. But whatever public opinion research might show, the argument about excessive drinking as a common flaw that might excuse acts committed while intoxicated was accepted in mainstream circles for many decades, possibly centuries (Valverde 1998).

Ford was a figure who became popular despite or perhaps because of his open defiance not only of 'politically correct' diversity discourse but also of cosmopolitan middle-class notions of 'healthy choices' and self-control—as seen in his persistent obesity problem, which he refused to address even when his older brother Doug publicly challenged him to lose a certain amount of weight each week and shamed him by bringing a scale to city hall for public weigh-ins.

We can see, therefore, that Ford's 'drunken stupors'-avowal contained a whole theory of the relationship between vice, identity, character, and responsibility, a theory sharply at odds with current expert knowledge but which has venerable antecedents in both criminal law and older expert as well as popular discourses on drinking.

Researchers interested in the rise of masculine populist politicians could perhaps undertake systematic inquiries into the discourses and practices of self deployed by these men when they are cornered into publicly accounting for 'everyday' forms of conduct (including sexual misconduct). It could be interesting, for instance, to compare Silvio Berlusconi's 'avowal' of his 'bunga bunga'-parties with Rob Ford's accounts of his alcohol and drug consumption. Avowal, or rather the successful, felicitous utterances of personal flaws and faults could perhaps be acting—at least for white men—so as to create links between disparate political interests and projects and desires, such that groups with very different economic interests and collective biographies temporarily come together to support a single populist figure. He/She is able to create, however fleetingly, the kind of 'historical block' that Stuart Hall long pointed out was the basis of that pioneering form of Western European populism, Thatcherism (Hall 1979, 1980).[7] As Hall claimed in a series of highly influential articles written during the birth of Thatcherism, certain public performances that are meant to both interpellate and voice 'the people' can play that crucial horizontal linking function—namely, connecting otherwise completely separate groups of people. Hall's analysis certainly applies to Ford's penchant for somehow juxtaposing the interests of older blue-collar white men and those of Asian and African immigrants with university degrees and conservative moral and fiscal views, groups successfully included within 'Ford Nation'.

To conclude, then. When morality, vice, and character are at stake, the truth regimes deployed by liberal educated politicians and experts often fail, or are simply ignored. Instead, performing 'true to oneself', supposedly unmediated and spontaneous political conduct relies on an apparatus of personal authenticity that (as Foucault (2001, 2014) showed) predates Christianity as well as science, and which seems to resonate amongst those

[7] Stuart Hall's analyses of Thatcherism were never collected in a book. Most of the important articles were published in the now defunct magazine *Marxism Today*, in 1979 and 1980. Hall also spoke frequently at conferences and public gatherings. Some of these 'real-time' analyses are currently available online; many public appearances and interviews are also available on open access videos. In addition, many thoughtful reflections on Hall's analysis of Thatcherism were produced after Hall's death in 2014.

groups that are likely to vote for such masculine populist right-wing figures.
[8] It may be that more mainstream politicians such as Bill Clinton cannot easily mobilize older ideas about forgivable sins that do not indicate a deviant identity but merely a common flaw; but populist leaders, by contrast, or highly masculine white populist leaders at any rate, are always already operating outside the framework of the ethic of politeness, diversity and inclusion that has become the truth of the left in recent decades. They operate on a different epistemological plane.

Pardoning his own cocaine consumption, as it were, by invoking the well-known disinhibition effects experienced during bouts of drunkenness was thus a more political act than it may have seemed at the time. The moral truth regime that sees drunkenness as a forgivable sin rather than a symptom of a deep deviant identity may well be internally connected, and strongly, to the populist public policy truth regime, which relies on gut feeling and folk mythologies. And if one can avow one's sin rather than label oneself with a more or less expert-produced deviant identity, then perhaps some avowals, with all the political and personal risks that avowal carries, can further the populist political project, a project where the ordinary rules of evidence-based policymaking are in any case suspended, for other reasons.

This concluding point can be further illuminated if we return to our initial figure of a 'female global South authenticity', Malala. It is abundantly clear that in her case, achieving fame through personal authenticity would have been impossible if she had become known as possessing serious vices or flaws. People representing a marginal racial, geopolitical, and/or gender position have to be paragons of virtue to claim authenticity—perhaps because of the historical baggage of the philanthropic tradition, a tradition which consistently portrayed its (usually mute) objects not only as wholly innocent but as positively virtuous. By contrast, the practices of self that produce personal authenticity for right-wing highly masculine populist politicians, therefore, seem to allow for a great deal of (forgivable) sin.

The realm of personal truth claims is an epistemological field with certain features that can be made visible mainly by contrast with both science and organized religion. But whether certain personal truth claims will in fact work to enhance or to diminish the political capital of the speaker depends not only on personal skill, the vagaries of the context, and sheer luck but also on the kinds of factors that we used to call structural. Populist politicians the world over are overwhelmingly male, so it is difficult to garner a large enough sample of women to draw any conclusions, but it is telling that the few anti-expert, anti-cosmopolitan right-wing politicians who are female (e.g. Marine Le Pen) seem to walk the path of righteousness in their personal life. Or to put it differently, avowal of sins and vices may help add points to one's authenticity score only for certain groups.

We have long known that in late capitalism, there is no such thing as an economic level playing field; but the reflections about avowal and authenticity presented here suggest that there is no such thing as a level ethical field either.

[8] Canada has no left-wing populism similar to Spain's 'Podemos'. It is thus not possible to compare Rob Ford to local left-wing populism. But researchers elsewhere could supplement and perhaps correct the account presented here by pondering the differences and similiarities between the practices of the self of left-wing populists and those of right-wing populists.

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Information as Truth
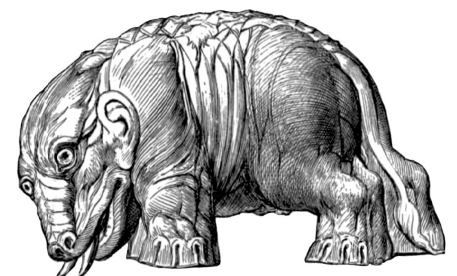## Cybernetics and the Birth of the Informed Subject

Janosik Herder

Abstract

What is the specific subjectivity of the computer age? Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles suggested that the spread of computers and the post World War II discourses of cybernetics and information theory enabled us to construe subjects as cyborgs or posthumans. This paper offers another perspective that regards subjectivity in relation to the central conceptual innovation cybernetics introduced—information. Cybernetics and information theory first of all enabled a new understanding of humans as informed subjects—subjects, for whom the feedback of information is a specific way to manifest truth. By help of Michel Foucault I will conceptualise subjectivity and its relation to information as a specific regime of truth. This regime presently gains enormous momentum as is evident by practices such as self-tracking but also the growing importance of information or data in general.

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It is readily possible to construct a machine which will manipulate premises in accordance with formal logic simply by the clever use of relay circuits. Put a set of premises into such a device and turn the crank and it will readily pass out conclusion after conclusion. We may some day click off arguments with the same assurance that we now enter sales on a cash register.

— Vannevar Bush, 1945

To live effectively is to live with adequate information.

— Norbert Wiener, 1950

Introduction

Michael is a long-time self-tracker who identifies with the California born 'Quantified Self' movement. He uses small computers and sensors to log his daily routine, his movements, heart rate, moods, weight, and habits. "He is particularly concerned", Dawn Nafus and Jamie Sherman (2014, 1788) recall in their study on the movement,

> with his morning routine: 'If I don't do it, I'm off for the rest of the day.' It starts with weighing himself, then doing some pushups, followed by a meditation, and then a writing exercise using a program called 750 Words, in which he writes the first 750 words that come to mind. It acts as a meditative exercise that comes with an analytical bonus: algorithms scan the contents for mood, mindset, and current preoccupations.

Obviously, it is easy to see Michael's behaviour as a cry for control, or to disregard it as some absurd practice of self-surveillance or neoliberal optimisation. However, Nafus and Sherman conclude, his approach is much more subtle: "He tracks things when he needs to cultivate a particular habit, or when he is trying to understand what is happening with his body." (ibid.) For Michael and for scholars of self-tracking, the advent and success of this practice indicates a more general transformation of subjectivity in relation to information technology. How, then, can we understand the form of subjectivity articulated by this peculiar practice?

Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles have put forward the most important and most influential proposals for understanding the transformation of subjectivity through information technology—and both remain pivotal in the debate on self-tracking (see i.e. Lupton 2016a). Haraway and Hayles's theories allow us to understand how subjectivity was disrupted by the spread of computers and the post World War II discourses of cybernetics and information theory. [1] Both take this disruption to be about transgressed boundaries and the possibility to envision new subjectivities. Still, there is another, presently more crucial way to understand this disruption. One that takes into account the central conceptual innovation that cybernetics introduced—the concept of

[1] I will use the terms cybernetics and information theory more or less interchangeably because they are when seen from the history of the idea of information. However, it is important to acknowledge fundamental differences between information theory and cybernetics. Information theory proper proposed by Claude Shannon is mainly an engineering theory of communication (Nahin 2012). Cybernetics proper proposed by Norbert Wiener and others is a general system theory (Galison 1994; Hagner/Hörl 2008; Kline 2015; Rid 2016). For a comprehensive overview on the history of the concept of information as developed by information theory and cybernetics see Aspray 1985; Lash 2002; Day 2008.

information. Cybernetics and information theory have enabled us to envision the transgression of boundaries between humans, machines, and animals. But they also allowed a new understanding of humans as informational beings. This cybernetic reformulation has important consequences to this day. Tellingly, Nafus and Sherman (2014, 1792) conclude that self-tracking is ultimately about making sense of oneself by collecting and processing information. Self-trackers establish a relation to their true self by help of information—information, in other words, allows them to become subjects in the first place. This indicates a profound transformation of how subjects are able to relate to truth and it presupposes the emergence of what I will call an informational regime of truth in which the feedback of information becomes the measure of truth. Accordingly, the subjects of these practices are not cyborgs or posthumans but *informed subjects*.

To bring this argument forward, I will proceed in three steps: *First*, contrary to usual readings of Haraway and Hayles, I will show how both understand contemporary subjectivity to be essentially characterised by information. Both acknowledge the central role of information—as proposed by cybernetics and information theory—for understanding the present. However, both ultimately take information as a prerequisite of any contemporary form of theory or politics and appropriate it for their own ends. This rereading of Haraway and Hayles allows me, *second*, to analyse genealogically how information and subjectivity have been linked in the tradition of cybernetics. To engage with this question, I use Michel Foucault's concept of 'regimes of truth'. Foucault introduced this concept to think of different ways in which truth may be produced. For example, the institution of confession is not just an ecclesiastic regime of power but also a specific regime of truth that produces a certain (in this case, moral) truth about the subject. Similarly, we may use Foucault's concept to analyse the relation between subjectivity and information as a specific informational regime of truth that evolved with information theory and cybernetics after World War II. Indeed, the specific relation of information, subjectivity, and truth can be traced back to the earliest texts of cybernetics. *Third*, to elaborate on this idea and show how it presently gains momentum, I will discuss the phenomenon of self-tracking. Self-tracking exemplifies the main characteristics of informed subjectivity: it fundamentally relies on the assumption that information is a way to manifest truth about the self. Self-trackers are subjects that gain their status as subjects through the feedback of information—they establish a relation to truth by constituting themselves as information systems.

By returning to the very roots of the debates about cyborgs and posthumans we may be able to actualise Haraway and Hayles's assumption that cybernetics and information theory play a fundamental role in the history of the present. However, it is important to acknowledge that any attempt to appropriate the cybernetic and information theoretic narrative may today be in vain. We have—in a sense—become thoroughly cybernetic subjects enclosed in a world where the use of information technology is ubiquitous and inevitable, where, as Richard Brautigan dreamed in 1967, we are 'all watched over by machines of loving grace'. Our best hope is to critically return to the beginning of the

cybernetic narrative. And for that, we need to first understand where and why Haraway and Hayles decided not to pursue the question of subjectivity as a critique of cybernetics and the concept of information itself.

Donna Haraway, Cyborgs and a Critter Called Information

Donna Haraway's famous cyborg is a hybrid subject not made up of one substance. A cyborg is a mixed being that fundamentally relies on prostheses to be able to act, speak and think.[2] Obviously, someone who is relying on a cardiac pacemaker can be understood as some kind of cyborg, since she needs a machine to survive and ceases to be an autonomous human subject. We could also think of a typewriter or a computer as a prosthesis that enables us to speak or think in a certain way. The figure of the cyborg provides a perspective on the ways in which subjects essentially rely on things outside of themselves to be subjects. Cyborgs are at once expressions of technological progress and timeless, they provide an understanding of the subject of the present and an ontological understanding of the human condition in general. William Mitchell (2003, 39), following Haraway, characterises himself as a cyborg in this way:

> So I am not a Vitruvian man, enclosed within a single perfect circle, looking out at the world from my personal perspective coordinates and, simultaneously, providing the measures of all things. [...] I construct and I am constructed, in a mutually recursive process that continually engages my fluid, permeable boundaries and my endlessly ramifying networks. I am a spatially extended cyborg.

Mitchell's stance perfectly illustrates the ontological understanding implied by the figure of the cyborg. Following Mitchell, humans are not and never were clearly bound entities in time and space but rely on things outside of themselves to be subjects in the first place. In this regard, humans are essentially cyborgs. However, when Haraway in her famous *Manifesto for Cyborgs* declares the "cyborg is our ontology" (Haraway 1991, 150) she explicitly makes a twofold argument.

The first argument is strategic. One reason her manifesto was greeted with so much attention and enthusiasm can be found in the strategic potential she ascribes to the cyborg. Before Haraway's intervention, the growing power and ubiquity of technology was in most cases simply read as a form of domination by critical theorists and feminists. Herbert Marcuse in his *One Dimensional Man* clearly saw technology as a process of domination (Marcuse 2013 [1964], foreshadowed in Marcuse 1941), as did ecological and green feminists who found refuge with the idea of paganism and harmonious relations with nature. Haraway disagrees and suggests we may likewise see the cyborg as a figure of liberation. If cyborgs have indeed become our ontology, we can—at the very least—utilise their hybridity to question the concept of the male, liberal subject. For Haraway, cyborgs articulate the potential to enact new social relations.

The second—and more important—argument of her *Manifesto* is historical. What enables Haraway's strategical argument is a specific account of the

[2] Especially in her later works, Haraway loses interest in the question of the melding of humans and machines and focuses primarily on the relation between humans and animals, or what she calls 'companion species' (Haraway 2003, 2007, 2016).

history of the present. If cyborgs are our best chance to produce new social relations, they actually have to become the 'last resort' of politics. Accordingly, Haraway describes the cyborg as "the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (1991, 150). In this regard Haraway somewhat accepts the analysis of critical theory of technology as dominance and simply opts for a strategic appropriation. She both accepts the idea of domination associated with the cyborg and it's liberating potential:

> From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final im-position of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defence. [...] From another perspective, a cy-borg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of partial identities and contradictory standpoints. (Haraway 1991, 154)

Her strategic point therefore relies on the historical assumption of a technologically dominated world inhabited by cyborgs.**[3]** Even though the idea of humans as hybrid subjects may be understood as timeless—and, certainly, is understood so by Mitchell and many others—Haraway herself does not frame the cyborg ahistorically. Especially in her works on the epistemic shifts in the discipline of biology, she presents a story on how the cyborg came about.

Haraway analysed and criticised how sociobiology, as well as other life sciences, incorporated cybernetics and information theory in their studies. Between 1955 and 1970 the famous sociobiologists Stuart Altmann and Edward Wilson established cybernetic discourses in their field and by this changed the way we think about the social life of animals. "Biologies of animal behavior", Haraway asserts, "were deeply transformed in this complex process; it was all a question of the reproduction of communication" (Haraway 1981, 246). Altmann and Wilson basically theorised life as "essentially a military/game problem, in which the organism became a complex cybernetic device characterized by its communications functions" (249). In this regard, the newly established paradigm was "highly political—it produced", Haraway goes on to argue, "a discourse about and technology for the exercise of power as domination by producing particular kinds of objects of knowledge; i.e., command-control systems ordered by the probabilistic rules of efficient language and work, information and energy" (246). Haraway ultimately reads cybernetics as a new technology of power which treats machines, humans, and all living organisms as command-control systems ordered by the communication of information. In this cybernetic view humans, machines, and animals are basically the same—they are systems radically open to the exchange of information.

The concept of the cyborg accepts the cybernetic view of the human and utilises it for specific ends. Haraway's cyborg does not fight the cybernetisation of the world but tries to appropriate its positive aspects. In so doing Haraway concedes that humans actually are constituted by the control and communication of information. In order to utilise the cybernetisation she has to accept that humans are thoroughly informational beings.

"Cyborgs have to do with this interesting critter called information", Haraway

[3] A few years before the *Manifesto* Haraway opted for a more 'naturalist' solution in her paper *Signs of Dominance* where she argued it may be now "historically possible to craft a nature not structured by principles of dominance and practices of domination, to know something other than the natural order of command-control systems" (Haraway 1983, 197). Interestingly, she here understands nature to exist of command-control systems but sees the possibility to craft another nature that does not rely on these cybernetic fundamentals.

therefore concludes in an interview with Nicholas Gane, "and you really can't treat that ahistorically—as if 'information' refers to something existing all the time, everywhere. That's a mistake because you don't get at the ferocity and specificity of now" (Haraway/Gane 2006, 146). Information is a historically contingent concept but that does not mean we can easily escape its grasp. "This is not", she insists,

> a relativist position. This is about those objects we non-optionally are. Our systems are probabilistic information entities. It is not that this is the only thing we or anyone else is. It is not an exhaustive description but it is a non-optional constitution of objects, of knowledge in operation. (139)

The cyborg is the historical product of the informationalisation of the world performed by cybernetics, information theory, and computerisation. Irritatingly, even though critical towards cybernetisation, Haraway ultimately accepts this idea of information as non-optional and develops her figure of the cyborg from this historical vantage point without trying to undermine the validity of the cybernetic and information theoretic assumptions. Still, what constitutes the cyborg is not hybridity but this interesting 'critter' called information.

Katherine Hayles, Posthumans and Bodies of Information

Katherine Hayles analyses this 'critter' called information in her version of the posthuman. For her, the 'human' was the specific subjectivity of the industrial age, of steam, manufacturing, and mass production; the 'posthuman', by contrast, is the specific subjectivity of the computer age, of silicon chips, micro-electronics, and robotic factories. Hence, "the posthuman appears when computation rather than possessive individualism is taken as the ground of being" (Hayles 1999, 34). The posthuman is produced by interaction with machines and is open to encounters with machines. It is defined by its relation to technology—a relation not of domination but of interaction and mutuality (Hayles 2005, 243).**[4]** Posthumanism urges us to accept this new subjectivity and search for its critical potentials. Hayles—as Haraway—and likely for the same reasons, embraces the potential of posthumanism in decentering the disembodied, liberal, male subject (see Kroker 2012).**[5]**

It is important to acknowledge that Hayles's version of posthumanism is primarily a critique to naïve or overly enthusiastic versions of the posthuman. Her main concern with this 'other' version of posthumanism is the "illusion of erasure" (Hayles 1999, 28) of the body performed by ideological notions of information. While we—following Hayles—should embrace being posthuman in a certain sense, we should likewise be careful not to reproduce these ideological notions. "If my nightmare", she warns us,

> is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality (5).

[4] On the discussion about posthumanism see Badmington 2004; Braidotti 2013; Herbrechter 2013; Wolfe 2010.

[5] Hayles criticises Haraway for neglecting the technological question of the cyborg and the posthuman in her later works (Hayles 2006). With the focus on companion species, Hayles argues, Haraway loses sight of the more crucial question of the computational era.

The main problem when engaging with the idea of posthumanism is that we may be tempted to think of human subjectivity as essentially informational. Hayles explicitly states that her main concern with most approaches to posthumanism is that they accept an immaterial version of subjectivity. She is not interested in questioning cybernetics or information theory in itself (12). She wants to write the story of how information lost its body—of how we came to accept the idea that information is "a kind of bodyless fluid that could flow between different substrates without loss of meaning or form" (XI). For her, this ideology of information is problematic because it devalues the body and allows for a disembodied view of the posthuman.

Hayles is especially put off by the ideas of an artificial intelligence researcher and transhumanist called Hans Moravec. In his influential 1988 book *Mind children* Moravec suggested it may one day be possible to upload subjectivity into a computer or robot in order to gain immortality. "A kind of portable computer (perhaps worn like magic glasses)", he writes,

> is programmed with the universals of human mentality, your genetic makeup, and whatever details of your life are conveniently available. It carries a program that makes it an excellent mimic. You carry this computer with you through the prime of your life; it diligently listens and watches; perhaps monitors your brain and learns to anticipate your every move and response. Soon it can fool your friends on the phone with its convincing imitation of you. When you die, this program is installed in a mechanical body that then smoothly and seamlessly takes over your life and responsibilities. (Moravec 1988, 110f.)

For Moravec, subjectivity is simply an informational pattern computers may one day be able to reproduce. Like any information, subjectivity may be transferred to a different medium without loss (from brain to memory, from body to machine). From a feminist perspective this disembodied view of information is nothing short of an updated version of the liberal, male subject, feminist theory disposed of. Hayles here claims, as did Friedrich Kittler or Marshall McLuhan, that we cannot think of information apart from the medium that is used to communicate it. While she does criticise the idea of subjectivity as bodyless information, she also accepts that we cannot escape computerisation and the disruption caused by cybernetics and information theory. She believes "that our best hope to intervene constructively in this development is to put an interpretive spin on it" (Hayles 1999, 49).

Hayles concludes that information is a problem we have to criticise when understood as a bodyless fluid abstracted from the bodily reality. But at the same time she does not question information theory and the concept of information itself, she does not critique the cybernetic assumptions about humans being merely very complex forms of information systems. Instead, she develops an embodied version of the posthuman and ultimately a better version of cybernetics. Yet, if we have indeed become posthuman the task at hand may not be to formulate a better version of cybernetics. Rather, the task is to begin to understand how these posthumans—we apparently are—are constituted and what role cybernetics and information theory play in this

process apart from ideological notions of bodyless information.

In a paper from 1987—one year before Moravec laid out his dream of informational subjectivity—Hayles asserted that the "first, and perhaps the most crucial, move in the information revolution was to separate text from context" (Hayles 1987, 25). In order to be quantifiable, the idea of information had to neglect the meaning of a message. Information measures the amount of information of a message not its 'level' of meaning or its social relevance. Subsequently, Hayles interprets this separation as one of text from context, or as she later puts it, immaterial information from embodied reality. For her, information theory and cybernetics allowed separating text from context, information from meaning, patterns from embodied reality. However, it is not primarily the separation itself we should be concerned with. What is interesting about Moravec is not that he reframes subjectivity as bodyless information and separates subjectivity from embodiment. More importantly, information for him ultimately allows the articulation of a true version of subjectivity unrestrained by bodily needs. By separating text from context cybernetics first of all introduced a new relation to truth.

Towards an Informational Regime of Truth

What Haraway and Hayles both assert but not further analyse is, indeed, a very profound insight: information is a historically contingent concept whose introduction into scientific debate after World War II caused a fundamental disruption. The transformation cybernetics brought about were so radical that—for them—it seemed pointless to try to question this transformation itself. Instead, both tried to strategically appropriate the informational discourse for other ends—this is precisely the function of the theories of cyborgs and posthumans. Regrettably, in so doing they essentially accept and reproduce the fundamental assumptions of cybernetics and information theory about the world being fundamentally structured by the communication of information. As I indicated in the beginning, we may be able to avoid this reification by analysing cybernetic subjectivity from the perspective of 'regimes' or 'games' of truth. What does that mean?

In his later work Michel Foucault drops the terms of power-knowledge-relations (Foucault 1995, 1998) in favour for the concept of 'regimes' or 'games' of truth (Foucault 1987, 1988). In his lecture *On the Government of the Living* Foucault reminds us that in Descarte's famous 'I think, therefore I am' "between the 'I think' and the 'I am', you have a 'therefore' that is theoretically unanswerable" (Foucault 2014, 98). If 'I think' is the articulation of a certain truth, and 'I am' is the subject's pledge to be bound to this truth, then 'therefore' stands for the moment of submission to the truth. Hence, Foucault translates the Cartesian 'I think therefore I am' as: "It is true, therefore I submit" (96). In this reading of Descartes' proposition it is not truth itself that is interesting, but the act of submission allowing truth to manifest. Foucault argues, it is not because of some external power that I am bound to a certain truth (i.e. Descartes literally forcing me to adhere to his *ego cogito, ergo sum*). Likewise, I am not bound to a certain truth by

truth itself (i.e. I do not submit just because it is true, even though Descartes claimed exactly that). Following Foucault, I am bound to the truth at the moment that I am constituting myself or have been invited to constitute myself as a *specific* subject. The 'therefore' between the 'truth' and the 'I submit' introduces a fundamental political problematic into the question of knowledge. For Foucault, truth is always the truth of a specific subject. This subject is by its subjectivation—by its becoming a subject—bound to this truth. Something may only meaningfully be considered as true to the extent that there is a subject who is for some reason or other bound to it. For Foucault, truth and the production of subjectivity are two sides of the same coin, and the concept of regimes of truth translates this insight for historical analysis.

Foucault gives the illuminating example of a logician who submits to a certain truth. In logics, and in science in general, the submission to truth seems to stem from truth itself (because it is true). The logician and the scientist seemingly submit to the truth of science because it is true. Yet, Foucault argues, it is not because of the truth of a certain proposition that the logician submits to it. He submits to it because "he is doing logic, that is to say, because he constitutes himself, or has been invited to constitute himself as operator in a certain number of practices or as a partner in a certain type of game" (98). The logician doesn't submit to the truth of logics because it is true (although he might believe that it is), but because and insofar as he constitutes himself as the subject of logics. So when the logician is saying 'this is true, therefore I submit' he is enacting the truth of logics by becoming the subject of logics.

The logician can only be a logician insofar as he submits to the truth of a set of knowledges and therefore constitutes himself as a subject in a specific game. The truth of logics has to be manifested by a subject according to a specific set of rules, which are not part of the truth of logics itself, but of a regime of truth that binds subjects to a specific truth. A regime of truth, then, is "the set of processes and institutions by which, under certain conditions and with certain effects, individuals are bound and obliged to make well-defined truth acts" (94). Foucault urges us to analyse how and why subjects are able to speak the truth in a specific historical situation. The underlying question is: What had to happen that this particular truth could be articulated by this particular subject? In that effect: What had to happen that information became a way for subjects to manifest truth?

Behaviour and Purpose: A Brief Genealogy

In 1948 Norbert Wiener famously wrote, that "information is information, not matter or energy" (Wiener 1961, 132). Information, he—and cybernetics in general—claimed, is a distinct reality, and to understand this reality is to undertake the "general study of communication and the related study of control in both machines and in living beings" (Wiener 1950, 2). Analysing how systems communicate and process information for cybernetics meant to analyse how the world actually works—information is the central concept that made cybernetics possible. In the same year Claude Shannon, the founding father of information science, declared that information had nothing to do with

meaning by famously claiming that the "semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem" (Shannon 1948, 379).**[6]** For information theory and cybernetics, information was henceforth understood to be an objective and quantifiable measure and its study was deemed crucial for the understanding of the world.

What cybernetics and information theory introduced was not just an objectivist and abstract idea of information which Hayles rightly criticises as ideological. What cybernetics from its first articulations as a science presented was a new—and for many scandalous—understanding of subjectivity. One of the core assumptions of cybernetics is that when seen as systems, humans, animals, and machines are basically the same: all of them communicate and process information. For cybernetics, humans are very complex systems of communication indeed, but systems nevertheless. While this was a very shocking assumption, it was not the only and maybe not the most important reformulation of subjectivity cybernetics undertook. Another reformulation is already apparent in the 1943 paper *Behavior, Purpose, and Teleology* by Arturo Rosenblueth, Norbert Wiener and Julian Bigelow. This paper retrospectively received the status as *the* foundational paper of cybernetics (Mead et al. 1976, 33; Bowker 1993, 109). It presents a 'cybernetical' solution to the age-old problem of purpose by defining it as a form of behaviour that relies on the feedback of information.**[7]**

Rosenblueth et al. introduce the concept of purpose in order to classify behaviour. They define behaviour very broadly as any "change of an entity with respect to its surroundings" (Rosenblueth et al. 1943, 18). First, they distinguish active from passive behaviour. Active behaviour is, secondly, distinguished into purposeless and purposeful behaviour. "The term purposeful", they argue, "is meant to denote that the act or behavior may be interpreted as directed to the attainment of a goal. [...] Purposeless behaviour then is that which is not interpreted as directed to a goal." (18) For Rosenblueth et al., purposeful behaviour has a very important characteristic that distinguishes it from other forms of behaviour: it relies on negative feedback. "All purposeful behavior may be considered to require negative feedback. If a goal is to be attained, some signals from the goal are necessary at some time to direct the behavior." (19) This suggests that purposeful behaviour relies on signals from the goal or the environment to control the behaviour and direct it at the goal. A clock can thus be understood to be purposeless, since its behaviour is not directed towards the attainment of a goal and it does not rely on feedback from its surrounding for its behaviour. While a clock may have a purpose for someone, Rosenblueth et al. argue, it is not an intrinsically purposeful mechanism. By contrast, a thermostat can be understood to behave purposeful. It's behaviour (the regulation of the temperature in a room) is directed towards a goal (a selected temperature) and relies on feedback from its surrounding (the actual temperature of the room) for its behaviour. A cat chasing a mouse may also be understood as purposeful behaviour on part of the cat, since the cat relies on feedback from its goal (the mouse) in order to reach its goal—to catch the mouse (20). Purpose here is generally reframed as behaviour that relies on feedback from its goal to attain that goal. Without the feedback of information,

[6] Contrary to this, in an influential commentary on Shannon's paper Warren Weaver asserted it will only be a matter of time before the problem of meaning is solved mathematically (Weaver 1949). The philosophy of information is trying to handle this complicated relation of information and meaning ever since (see i.e. MacKay 1969; Dretske 1981; Floridi 2013).

[7] Both, feedback and information, were concepts without any substantial significance before cybernetics. On the history of the concept of feedback that is omitted in my paper see especially Bröckling 2017, 197ff.

behaviour cannot be purposeful.

When Rosenblueth et al. made this proposition in 1943 many people considered it outlandish, some found it fascinating—and gathered to conduct what later were called the 'Macy Conferences on Cybernetics' (Pias 2016)—but most scholars didn't notice. It was only after the surprising success of Norbert Wieners 1948 book *Cybernetics* that the journal who originally published the paper of Rosenblueth et al. printed a harsh reaction by a philosopher named Richard Taylor, a response by Wiener and Rosenblueth, and eventually a final reply by Taylor. This debate provides a highly instructive account of what was actually at stake in this reframing of purpose. And it allows us to reconstruct what this reframing meant for the relation of subjectivity and information.

Taylor's reaction first of all shows a latent astonishment about the apparent significance and popularity of what he considers a mechanistic and mostly absurd appropriation of the classical philosophical concept of purpose. Therefore, he insists "that the term 'purpose' as thus used, bears no similarity whatever to the meaning which is ordinarily attached to it" (Taylor 1950a, 310). Taylor argues that Rosenblueth et al. actually reduce purpose to observable behaviour and therefore allow not just humans, but animals and machines, to be purposeful. While he admits in his final reply to Rosenblueth and Wiener's response that observable behaviour is probably "the best evidence we can have" (Taylor 1950b, 328) about the purpose of an agent, he asserts that only humans should count as purposeful beings. In order to behave purposeful, he says, we need to assume that the object in question does not just display purposeful behaviour but also possesses the ability to desire and believe. Rosenblueth and Wiener ferociously concluded their response by insisting that their "main reason for selecting the terms in question was to emphasize that, as objects of scientific enquiry, humans do not differ from machines" (Rosenblueth/Wiener 1950, 326). This is precisely what Taylor finds disturbing. While he is eventually not at odds with the research programme laid out by Rosenblueth et al., he strongly argues against the core assumption of cybernetics, namely, that as systems which communicate information animals, machines, and humans are basically the same.

This debate obviously foreshadows a whole strand of humanistic criticism towards cybernetics that sees humans reduced to machines. Seen from the cybernetic point of view, the exclusivity of human subjectivity is lost and what counts as subjectivity becomes an open question. This is precisely where Haraway, Hayles, and other theories enter the picture and appropriate the cybernetic narrative for their own ends. But if we shift our focus from the rather distracting proclamations about the similarity of humans, animals, and machines, we see another way in which this early paper of cybernetics reframes the relation between the subject and information. Indeed, what is at stake here is not just a mechanistic reframing of purpose and an insult to human subjectivity similar to those formulated by Darwin and Freud (Bowker 1993, 111). This reframing also implies a whole new 'economy' of truth centred around the idea of information. Taylor already suspected this in his critique as he was baffled what actually led Wiener and Rosenblueth to their conclusions. "Apparently", he wondered, "the authors utilize here an

unnamed criterion of purposiveness." (Taylor 1950a, 314) They indeed did. Because what eventually allowed them to undertake this reformulation of purpose was information, a wholly different measure of truth.

Cybernetics and the Informed Subject

"All purposeful behavior", Rosenblueth et al. argued, "may be considered to require negative feed-back." (Rosenblueth et al. 1943, 19) In other words, action can only have a purpose if information is at some point 'fed back' into the action itself in order to steer it towards the goal. Consequently, we should judge action based on whether it relies on information or not. Another way to put this is to say that purposeful behaviour should be understood as *informed behaviour*. However, regarding subjectivity the question of purposeful behaviour may also be understood more generally as the question of true behaviour or true action. In terms of subjectivity we are generally interested in behaviour that is in some way purposeful or intentional and not accidental. Information in this regard becomes the measure of true behaviour, since whether behaviour is truly purposeful, is decided by it being informed or not. Rosenblueth, Wiener, and Bigelow's point is not just that the communication of information is the central element for understanding the world. Information is a new way to decide the truth of behaviour.

The radicality of this idea becomes clear when we return to Taylor's critique on Rosenblueth, Wiener, and Bigelow. His perspective shows a fundamentally different way to decide the truth of purposeful behaviour. In his last reply to the debate, Taylor lays out his own conception of behaviour. As said before, Taylor argues that we cannot assume any entity to act purposeful without granting it desire and belief. Desire and belief are features of human subjectivity that cannot be dissolved in information and separated from the human body. Taylor admits that with desire and belief he may invoke "dubious or occult entities" (1950b, 331) but posits that "everyone knows perfectly well, in one clear sense, what it is to desire something" (332) and that there is thus "nothing at all dubious or occult about them" (332). Taylor utilises what we could call a humanistic regime of truth were the truth of purposeful behaviour is deeply connected to human reason hidden somewhere in the human body. Since we cannot assume a clock to desire and we cannot reasonably assume a cat to believe, purposeful behaviour remains a fundamentally human matter. The truth of action here is ultimately decided by the presence of the human body and our acknowledgement that it's presence likewise implies the presence of such 'occult and dubious' entities as desire and belief. The truth of action for Taylor resides hidden away in human reason, as a matter for philosophers and psychoanalysts to discover.

When asked about the significance of the paper of Rosenblueth et al., Gregory Bateson enthusiastically recalls how he and his former wife Margaret Mead immediately thought that it "was a solution to the problem of purpose" reminding us that from "Aristotle on, the final cause has always been a mystery" (Brand et al. 1976, 33). Instead of invoking some occult and dubious entity of desire or belief to explain purposeful behaviour, Rosenblueth et al. simply

declare all behaviour that relies on negative feedback as purposeful. A purpose can only be pursued when an entity relies on feedback from its environment and the goal it wants to achieve. Purpose is not a mystery hidden away in human consciousness. It is a form of behaviour that relies on information. Importantly, this implies that information and not reason, or the presence of human bodies, becomes the measure of truth. For Taylor the question of purposeful behaviour was ultimately decided by the presence of desire and belief in human bodies. This is exactly what Rosenblueth, Wiener, and Bigelow put into question. The truth of behaviour is "recognizable from the nature of the act, not from the study of or from any speculation on the structure and nature of the acting object" (Rosenblueth/Wiener 1950, 323). With cybernetics, the problem of truth generally becomes a problem of information.

This does not sound as outlandish today as it did for Charles Taylor and others in 1950. As the example of self-tracking in the next part will show, today we would basically agree that our actions and decisions are based on information, and we would assume that how we act and decide depends on the information we gather and process. To assume that true action or true behaviour depends on information seems almost arbitrary today. This indicates a very fundamental transformation. Cybernetics did not merely question the boundaries between humans, machines, and animals. It also reformulated truth into a problem of information. This informational reformulation envisions a specific procedure for the production of truth through feedback of information as we have seen in the case of purpose. Foucault described a regime of truth as "types of relations that link together manifestations of truth with their procedures and the subjects who are their operators, witnesses or possibly objects" (Foucault 2014, 100). The informational regime of truth reframes truth as the product of procedures of feedback of information between entities and their environment. This regime envisions subjects as operators as well as objects that are restrained by relations of feedback of information. The truth-value of actions—as seen in the example of purpose—but also of propositions in general depend on procedures of feedback of information, not on the existence or presence of human consciousness, belief, or desire. In Foucault's words the procedure of feedback of information acts as a 'therefore' in the sentence 'this is true, therefore I submit'. The procedure envisioned by cybernetics as negative feedback of signals stands between the manifestation of truth ('this is true') and the subjects pledge to be bound to this truth ('I submit'). This procedure is not part of the truth itself, but it is the condition that enables subjects to manifest truth as information. What the informational regime of truth does is to restrain the manifestation of truth to subjects who essentially consider themselves information systems. In order to 'see' the truth in a piece of information or data, subjects have to become informed subjects, subjects that relate to truth by feedback of information.

We could therefore conclude that cybernetics introduced not just a general theory of systems, but from the very beginning put forward a theory of subjectivity. Ronald Kline has asked why there are so few cyborgs in the history of cybernetics. In his reconstruction Kline shows that while today we tend to believe that cybernetics was always about cyborgs and posthumans,

in actual fact early and also later cybernetics was not overly interested in the merging of humans and machines (Kline 2009, 351). Cyborgs became the iconic subjectivity of cybernetics only by help of Haraway and Hayles's popularisations. While this is an important point and certainly true, this does not imply that cybernetics did not put forward a concept of subjectivity. Rather, this proves that the characteristic form of cybernetic subjectivity is not that of cyborgs or posthumans, but of *informed subjects*. What characterises this form of subjectivity is not its openness to meld with machines and animals, and not its potential to transcend the humanistic version of subjectivity. The informed subject is the subject for which the feedback of information has become the procedure to manifest truth.

From Quantified Selves to Informed Subjects

To elaborate on this idea, it is instructive to look at the recent phenomenon of self-tracking. As we have seen in the beginning, self-tracking is usually understood as the collection and use of information on the own body and habits with the help of small wearable computers and sensors. These computers for example record your number of steps taken, monitor your heart rate, log your location, log if you're standing or sitting and help you to monitor your moods or your weight. What this practice produces is some kind of informational double of the self. This double is used to improve or change the behaviour of the actual self, which is why self-tracking is generally understood and sometimes criticised as a tool of optimisation, as Minna Ruckenstein (2014, 69) pointed out:

> With the aid of digital technology, particularly the tracking and monitoring of the self, optimization becomes not only possible, but also desirable. It is not enough to have a more transparent view of oneself, one needs to respond to that knowledge and raise one's goals, thereby framing the 'natural' body as incomplete, as failing the demands and potentials of the information age. With new data streams, the body may be increasingly controlled by reason; it can be transformed and improved in order to attain happiness and excellence.

This is an important point, especially when considered as a practice of neoliberal conduct of the self or a subtle way to discipline labour (Moore/Robinson 2016). However, there is something more peculiar about the practice of self-tracking.

When people set out to improve their selves by the help of self-tracking, they assume this practice gives them an insight into themselves that could not be gained through deliberate reflection. Self-tracking is assumed to allow an insight into what Phoebe Moore calls the "autonomic self" that was before "seen to be largely out-of-bounds for the layman and woman's knowledge and understanding" (Moore 2018, 2). In this regard, self-tracking is sometimes even considered a practice of emancipation that allows access to the true self and therefore helps to counter attempts of 'formal' authorities like the state and 'informal' authorities like the family to impose false identities to the self

(O'Hara et al. 2008, 165). The informational double is taken as a glimpse at the true self, and this glimpse is utilised to optimise the actual self or to defend it against attempts to impose false identities on the self. In this sense, self-tracking is a practice not of optimisation or self-surveillance but of truth.

This is a crucial point. One way to assess this is obviously to look at the history of quantification and try to explain why people put so much trust in numerical representations of the world—Joseph Porter called this the 'calculative' or 'quantitative' mentality (Porter 1995, 118; also Mau 2017). As communities grow bigger and more anonymous, it becomes more practicable to rely on impersonal, quantified accounts of the world instead of people and their personal evaluation. It is, in other words, easier to trust an universalised representation in the form of numbers than to trust someone you do not know and may never hope to meet. While this holds true, it is—as Porter (1995, ix) himself pointed out—a rather weak argument when it comes to truth and does not explain why people actually think of these numbers as *true* representations of the world. Yet, self-tracking shows that people indeed assume numbers and graphs about their steps taken, or moods logged to be manifestations of their true self. It may help to see that it is not the numbers and quantified representations of the world themselves that manifest truth, but the whole procedure cybernetics introduced as negative feedback of information. The quantified representations produced by computers through self-tracking are considered to be true, because in the procedure information is collected and fed back into the system. As Rosenblueth, Wiener, and Bigelow argued, feedback of information is a way to decide whether behaviour is purposeful, and thus, whether it manifests truth.

Let us, then, return to Michael, the self-tracker with whose account we started out with. In their study, Nafus and Sherman were especially interested in how he understood the role of self-tracking in his life. Michael, they write (2014, 1789),

> uses a Buddhist framework of mindfulness and awareness to describe the role that data plays in his life. Tracking introduces purposefulness and intention into his everyday actions ('so I don't go on autopilot' he says). For him, data is a technology of noticing, not that different from the Buddhist meditation practices he draws on, which are not just about calming the mind but about taking note of what is going on inside the body.

While this sounds somewhat like new age mythology, there is a rational core to Michaels approach when considered from the idea of an informational regime of truth: what the constant feedback of information actually establishes in his daily life is a relation to truth. He assumes that self-tracking allows his actions to become purposeful actions. The idea of feedback as a relation of truth is evident in self-tracking, "in which people knowingly and purposively collect information about themselves, which they then review and consider applying to the conduct of their lives" (Lupton 2016b, 2). The idea of optimisation is grounded in the belief that the information that is fed back by the devices actually shows the true self. And it is by applying the information back into

their daily actions—to guide their behaviour—that it becomes true or proper behaviour. Self-tracking has effectively turned Michael into an informed subject.

Conclusion

In the early 2000s the American military agency DARPA funded a program called *LifeLog*. This program essentially foreshadowed the practice of self-tracking as it envisioned the total capture of information about someone's life (in DARPA's version primarily for military purposes). Myriads of sensors were pictured to track all raw and metadata available: location, heart rate, breathing, video, images, sound, written words, conversations, credit card information, e-mail messages, phone calls, and so on. The program which was officially discontinued in 2004 had the goal to comprehensively gather "both the flow of the user's physical experiences in the world and the stream of his or her interactions with other entities in the world" (DARPA 2003). The idea of *LifeLog* was to gather all information available and to allow computers to make sense of them in ways that humans could not. The ultimate aim was to find a way to accomplish the process of automatically "'telling the story' of the user's experience" (DARPA 2003). However, this automatic story should not be confused with the story the user tells himself. It is another story, one that is true because it is manifested in information. The *LifeLog* is astonishingly similar to Moravec's ideas about gaining immortality through information without the transhumanist vigour. In both cases, the underlying idea is the total capture of information for the production of a true version or story of yourself. Still, in all cases the question remains: Why should anyone engage in self-tracking or lifelogging if not for the underlying assumption that information allows a relation to truth?

LifeLog and self-tracking in general are thought to address a difficult problem: "how individuals might capture and analyze their own experiences, preferences and goals" (DARPA 2004). Therefore, self-tracking is usually understood as a kind of advanced diary helping people remember what they experienced or thought. While this is somewhat correct, it is generally overlooked that self-tracking presupposes a wholly different regime of truth. When we write in a diary and after some time read our entries to remember or evaluate what we thought or did last month we consider the locus of truth to be, as Taylor argued, our conscious and unconscious desires and beliefs. We are then practically engaging in a sort of self-psychoanalysis. When we engage in self-tracking we do not seek to understand our desires or beliefs, we want to gain access to the truth about ourselves manifested immediately in the form of information in relations of feedback. Truth is, then, not established by the conscience looking at itself. It is established by the introduction of feedback of information into the equation. The informational regime produces an immediate, deictic relation to truth.

It is important to insist on the central role of information in the production of truth and to frame the characteristic subjectivity of information theory and cybernetics as informed subjectivity. This is important not merely because it may be a more adequate description of cybernetic subjectivity and the

specific regime of truth cybernetics introduced. More importantly, to frame the problem in this way allows a different form of critique. If we stick with the notions of cyborgs and posthumans, the example of self-tracking may be recognised as either being about the melding of machines and humans or about the use of information technology to transcend the humanistic subject. But self-tracking is not about merging, and it is not primarily about transcending or optimisation. It articulates a fundamental shift in how we think about truth and how we rely on notions of information and feedback in the constitution of truth in general. The problem is not the widespread use of computers, and the collection and processing of information. The problem is the underlying idea that all of this somehow allows us to establish a relation to our true selves or gives us a glimpse at the true world.

The practice of self-tracking may allow specific forms of emancipation from 'imposed' identities, and it may allow everyday behaviour that seemed arbitrary and meaningless to become purposeful. But the price for this is the comprehensive integration of the subject into the cybernetic world of information systems. The entities Taylor called 'occult and dubious' also indicated that the humanistic subjectivity was something unpredictable and, ultimately, indeterminable. This is precisely the quality the informed subject loses as its very thoughts and actions become a transparent matter of the feedback of information, and computation takes the place of imagination. The informed subject is a calculable subject—a subject whose thoughts are predictable, and whose actions are always already integrated into the proper relations of feedback. Freed from indeterminable desires and beliefs, the informed subject leads a life of joyous integration governed by relations of feedback of information.

Why are, then, we tempted to say 'this is true, therefore I submit' when we consider information or data? To think about it this way urges us to be critical about the ways in which we rely on information, data, and relations of feedback as seemingly neutral ways to manifest truth. After all, cybernetics had a clear and simple message that has successfully penetrated scientific and everyday discourse: We are basically information machines. What enabled this assumption has not disappeared when cybernetics lost its hegemonic appeal in the 1970s. We still rely on information—the central conceptual innovation of cybernetics. And this brings with it a specific subjectivity and a specific procedure for the manifestation of truth. We need to start asking whether we really want to be informed subjects, ultimately a kind of advanced thermostat, controlled by the feedback of information, enmeshed in a world of communicating systems—or if we'd rather be something else. What Haraway and Hayles indeed showed is that Taylor's humanistic version is no alternative. But this should not tempt us to be satisfied with the answer cybernetics provided.

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Rezension
Review

Ute Tellmann: *Life and Money. The Genealogy of the Liberal Economy and the Displacement of Politics* New York: Columbia University Press 2017

Es gibt Bücher, die leisten einen mehr oder weniger wichtigen Beitrag zu einem etablierten Forschungsfeld, während andere durch die bestehenden Raster fallen. Und dann gibt es Bücher, bei denen die Schwierigkeit sie zu verorten, die Armut gängiger akademischer Unterscheidungen offenbart. Ute Tellmanns hervorragend geschriebenes und luzide argumentiertes Buch *Life and Money* – über die Voraussetzungen, Inhalte und Effekte des ökonomischen Denkens von Robert Malthus und John Maynard Keynes – gehört in die letztere Kategorie. Es ist weder theoretisch noch empirisch im herkömmlichen Sinne, sondern das produktive Aufeinandertreffen von historisch gesättigter Gelehrsamkeit und starkem Denken. Ebenso bereitet die Verortung in einem soziologischen Bindestrichbereich Schwierigkeiten. Ist es ein wirtschaftssoziologischer Beitrag, weil es sich mit ökonomischen Grundbegriffen und Theoretikern beschäftigt, oder eine politische Soziologie, weil es um die politische Performativität ökonomischen Denkens für die Regierung moderner Gesellschaften geht? Weder noch bzw. beides zugleich, weil Tellmann die Unterscheidung zwischen Ökonomischem und Politischem selbst zum Gegenstand der historischen Untersuchung macht. Damit unterläuft sie nicht nur die gesellschaftlich und soziologisch üblichen Grenzmarkierungen zwischen den Bereichen, sondern auch die gegenwärtig so wichtigen kultur- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Ansätze wie das *performing markets*-Programm (etwa bei Michel Callon und Donald MacKenzie) und die Kulturökonomie (etwa bei Paul Du Gay und Michael Pryke). Statt zu zeigen, wie die Ökonomie kulturell oder sozial eingebettet ist bzw. durch ökonomisches Wissen hervorgebracht wird, zeigt sie, wie das, was überhaupt als ökonomisch verstanden werden kann, einem grundlegenden historischen Wandel unterliegt.

Um diesen Anspruch zu verfolgen, führt Tellmann – in Abgrenzung zu der „Ökonomie" – das Konzept des Ökonomischen ein, das sich am Vorbild der Theorien des Politischen orientiert. Während die Ökonomie eine jeweils historisch institutionalisierte Form des ökonomischen Geschehens bezeichnet, steht das Ökonomische für einen offeneren Raum möglicher Institutionalisierungen wirtschaftlicher Vorgänge. Das Konzept hat dabei mindestens zwei Funktionen: Zunächst einmal fungiert es als heuristische Vorüberlegung, die es erlaubt, die Pluralität von Ökonomien im historischen Verlauf

nachzuvollziehen. In diesem Sinne bereitet es eine „historische Ontologie" (3) vor, die aufzeigt, wie sich die Grundannahmen ökonomischen Denkens so substanziell verschieben, dass nicht mehr von der Identität eines einheitlichen Gegenstands ausgegangen werden kann. Entsprechend zeigt das Buch, wie grundlegend sich die (Lebens-)Ökonomie nach Malthus von der keynesianischen Vorstellung der (Geld-)Ökonomie unterscheidet.

Malthus' ökonomisches Denken basiert auf einer Biopolitik der Bevölkerung. Bekanntlich hat er argumentiert, dass das exponentielle Wachstum der Bevölkerung langfristig nicht mit dem linearen Wachstum landwirtschaftlicher Produktion mithalten kann. Der Grundbegriff von Malthus' politischer Ökonomie ist folglich Knappheit. Zwar war der Begriff der Knappheit auch schon vor Malthus zentral (und ist es bis heute), aber erst dieser verortet deren Ursache in den vermeintlich expansiven Tendenzen der Bevölkerung. Es ist für ihn nicht die Erde und ihre begrenzte Fruchtbarkeit, sondern vielmehr die exzessive Fruchtbarkeit des Gattungslebens, die Knappheit in die Welt bringt. Knappheit geht laut Malthus aus einer ursprünglichen Situation des Überflusses hervor, die sich nur deshalb in einen Mangel verkehrt, weil die Bevölkerung unfähig ist, vorrausschauend mit den verfügbaren Ressourcen zu haushalten. Die Knappheit ist insofern nichts, was im Hier und Jetzt der Bevölkerung physische Grenzen setzt, sondern etwas, das erst mit einer gewissen Verzögerung einsetzt. Deshalb braucht es die Gesetze der Ökonomie, um die zukünftige Knappheit in der Gegenwart auf eine Weise geltend machen, die zwar katastrophische zukünftige Mangelsituationen verhindert, dafür aber stets einem Teil der aktuellen Bevölkerung seine Existenzgrundlage entzieht. Deswegen darf die Politik nicht auf eine Weise in das ökonomische Geschehen intervenieren, die diese ökonomische Funktion der Vergegenwärtigung zukünftiger Knappheit stört.

Auch bei Keynes spielt Zeitlichkeit eine zentrale Rolle. So problematisiert er die temporalen Eigenschaften des Geldes, weil diese den „Fetisch der Liquidität" (127) nähren. Die besondere Rolle des Geldes als Medium, das die Zukunft in Form unspezifischer Potentialität offenhält, hemmt die Investitionsfreudigkeit der Kapitalist_innen. Schließlich bindet eine Investition das Geld an ein spezifisches materielles Projekt und engt den schillernden Möglichkeitshorizont auf einen konkreten Pfad ein. Entsprechend besteht ein Element aus der Werkzeugkiste makroökonomischer Steuerung, für die das Keynes'sche Modell der Ökonomie steht, darin, die Attraktivität des Haltens von disponiblen liquiden Mitteln zu reduzieren, indem Geld verbilligt und damit Investitionsanreize erhöht werden. Tellmann bespricht Keynes aber nicht nur als Vertreter einer bestimmten Version liberaler Regierungskünste, sondern auch als (verkappten) Theoretiker des Ökonomischen.

Und darin besteht die zweite Funktion des Konzepts des Ökonomischen: nicht nur als heuristische Vorüberlegung für eine historische Analytik der Ökonomie, sondern auch als alternative Ontologie für ein Denken ökonomischer Prozesse. Im zentralen fünften Kapitel „The Economic Unbound" entfaltet Tellmann mit Keynes über Keynes hinaus eine Theorie der „material temporalities of money" (142–165). Die Frage der Temporalität ökonomischer Prozesse ist in jüngerer Zeit in soziologischen Debatten bekanntlich sehr

ausführlich diskutiert worden (u.a. von Elena Esposito, Jens Beckert und Andreas Langenohl). Aber Tellmanns Interpretation von Keynes' Geldtheorie kann diese Debatten substanziell bereichern, indem sie die Frage der Zeitlichkeit und Zukünftigkeit nicht allein ausgehend von subjektiven oder kollektiven Erwartungen, sozialen Imaginationen oder der Performativität ökonomischen Wissens adressiert. Vielmehr zeigt sie, wie die Temporalität des Geldes von einem Dispositiv aus Konventionen, Messvorrichtungen und der Eigenzeit ökonomisierter Gegenstände abhängt.

Tellmann verlässt dafür die Beobachterperspektive zweiter Ordnung einer Gouvernementalitätshistorikerin, um eine geradezu dekonstruktive Lektüre von Keynes zu entwickeln. Dieses Vorgehen ist durchaus riskant. Es gilt nämlich zwischen zwei Extremen hindurchzunavigieren: einem zu unbestimmten und einem zu engen Anschluss an Keynes. Auf der einen Seite droht eine Fortsetzung des Fetischs der Kontingenz, die gerade aus den Theorien des Politischen bekannt ist. Diese ergehen sich – analog zu dem von Keynes identifizierten Fetisch der Liqudität – in der Feier der Potenzialität des Politischen, weil sie sich nicht auf ein konkretes politisches Projekt festlegen wollen. Das Ökonomische, das laut Tellmann vor allem einen Sinn für die historische Kontingenz ökonomischer Formationen generieren soll, wäre dann zu unbestimmt, um konkreten ökonomischen Analysen Halt zu geben und Alternativen zu hegemonialen ökonomischen Formationen aufzuzeigen. Auf der anderen Seite droht eine allzu starke Fixierung an Keynes' Zentralstellung des Geldes in der Ontologie des Ökonomischen. Das ökonomische Denken bliebe dem Horizont liberaler Ökonomievorstellungen verhaftet. Zudem könnte sich der Verdacht aufdrängen, dass die Betonung der Materialität des Geldes nicht ausreichend die Abstraktion der keynesianischen Ökonomie von der Natur kritisieren kann. So hat etwa Timothy Mitchell jüngst argumentiert, dass in der keynesianischen Ökonomie die Wirtschaft auf die Zirkulation von Geldflüssen reduziert wurde und so die Vorstellung unbegrenzten Wachstums ohne physische Grenzen ermöglichte. Vor diesem Hintergrund wäre es interessant gewesen, eine ähnliche anspruchsvolle dekonstruktive Lektüre von Malthus präsentiert zu bekommen. Zwar ist es verständlich, dass Tellmann vor einem solchen Schritt auf Grund der politisch fatalen Effekte, die Malthus' Denken bis heute hat, absieht. Gleichzeitig steht Malthus für einen ökonomischen Ansatz, in dem die Materialität der Natur noch als wirksamer Faktor verstanden wurde und der sich noch nicht im Formalismus „reiner" ökonomischer Transaktionen verzettelt hatte. Schließlich besteht heute vielleicht mehr denn je eine zentrale Herausforderung darin, wie zukünftige (ökologische) Knappheit – etwa des begrenzten Abfallraums für CO_2-Emissionen – (ökonomisch) vergegenwärtigt werden kann. Diese Risiken schmälern gleichwohl keineswegs den intellektuellen return von Tellmanns materialistischer Geldtheorie, die sich noch – wie sie andeutet – in der Analyse vielfältiger ökonomischer Sachverhalte bewähren kann. Wer ausreichend disponibles intellektuelles Kapital zur Verfügung hat, dem sei eine Investition in *Life and Money* deshalb wärmstens empfohlen.

Andreas Folkers

Rezension
Review

Rainer Mühlhoff: *Immersive Macht. Affekttheorie nach Spinoza und Foucault*
Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag 2018

In Carmen Losmanns Dokumentarfilm *Work Hard Play Hard* (2011) stellt sich ein Unternehmensberater den optimalen Gemütszustand bei der Arbeit so vor: „Ein Mensch, der im Flow ist, geht voll in seiner Tätigkeit auf. Er vergisst, was um ihn herum geschieht. In diesem Zustand macht ihm eine Tätigkeit, zum Beispiel Arbeit, am meisten Spaß. Er lernt dann am schnellsten und ist am leistungsfähigsten." Was einen solchen „Flow" auszeichnet und wie er entsteht, damit beschäftigt sich Rainer Mühlhoffs Studie zu *Immersiver Macht.* In post-industriellen Kontrollgesellschaften, so die These, walte ein *neuer Geist des Kapitalismus* (Boltanski/Chiapello)*,* der Mehrwert nicht mehr durch Disziplinierung generiert, sondern in „Biotop[en] stimulierender Potentiale" (13) intrinsische Antriebe moduliert, steigert und vereinnahmt. Um die subtile Wirkweise dieses Machttypus greifbar und der Kritik zugänglich zu machen, entwickelt Mühlhoff eine Affekt- und Subjekttheorie als *„strategisch-politische* Setzung einer ‚Gegen-Ontologie'" (24).

Dazu verknüpft er im ersten Teil seines Buches die Affektenlehre Baruch de Spinozas auf luzide Art und Weise mit der physikalischen Resonanztheorie zu einer Sozialontologie *affektiver Resonanz* (Kap. 1–3). Diese bezeichnet einen dynamischen Vorgang, bei dem verschiedenste soziale Entitäten – Subjekte, Dinge, Räume etc. – reziprok aufeinander wirken und sich in diesen Wechselwirkungen überhaupt erst als Entitäten konstituieren. Ein Affekt ist dabei die Relation zwischen diesen sozialen Elementen, die bestimmt sind durch ihr Vermögen zu affizieren und affiziert werden zu können. Affizierungen können dabei durch Sprache, Gedanken oder körperlichen (Selbst-)Kontakt geschehen, und sie sind stets zweiseitige Prozesse aus aktivem Bewirken und passivem Erleiden. Wie ein Individuum denkt, handelt und fühlt, ergibt sich aus den situativen Affizierungsverhältnissen, in denen es durch sein Vermögen und durch die gegenwärtige Aktualisierung seiner *„virtuell sedimentierte[n] Vergangenheit"* (135) auf spezifische Weise resoniert.

In den folgenden Kapiteln (5–8.1) entwickelt Mühlhoff eine gouvernementalitätsanalytische Perspektive auf immersive Macht*:* Als in Kontrollgesellschaften wirksamer *modus operandi* verdichtet und schließt dieser Machttypus Affizierungsgefüge im Sinne gesteckter Verwertungsziele, um die darin enthaltenen, individuellen Vermögen optimal auszubeuten. Anders als in Disziplinargesellschaften wird die Steuerung hierbei nicht

primär über Normen und Zwang vollzogen, sondern über die erfolgreiche Vereinnahmung intrinsischer Motivationen, die in strategisch angeordneten Umgebungen erfasst, gesteigert und moduliert werden. Indem Mühlhoff den Überlegungen Michel Foucaults und Judith Butlers ein sozialontologisches Fundament gibt, sind Diskurse mitsamt ihren Subjektivierungsformen, Identitäten und Normen selbst keine Ursache, sondern „*Effekte* und *Gerinnungsfiguren*" (347) affektiver Wirkungsgeschehen – sie sind wirksam, weil eben *auch* Wörter affizieren. Macht wird damit aus diskursiven Formationen in Mikrodispositive und ihre Träger_innen verlegt.

Die auf den ersten Blick widersprüchlich anmutende Verknüpfung zwischen Ontologie und poststrukturalistischer Theorie verteidigt Mühlhoff als strategisch (Kap. 4): Ihm gehe es nicht darum, mit affektiver Resonanz eine metaphysische Wahrheit zu benennen, sondern unter Voraussetzung eines historischen „*Apriori der Ontogenese*" (249) die dominierenden Herrschaftstechniken zu kritisieren. Er reflektiert die Gültigkeit seiner eigenen Theorie am Beispiel der Säuglingspflege: Ausgehend von den Transformationen der Wickelpraktiken und den parallelen Umbrüchen in der Entwicklungspsychologie zeichnet er die Entstehung eines Dispositivs affektiver Resonanz nach, das es plausibel werden lässt, Säuglinge oder Kleinkinder als prinzipiell aktive und affizierende Akteure zu betrachten. Hier könnten vertiefende genealogische Untersuchungen anschließen, die danach fragen, ob und inwieweit staatspolitische Maßnahmen oder auch die Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften auf dieses Dispositiv Bezug nehmen.

An zwei Fallstudien zu Teamarbeit in typischen *white collar* Büroberufen und zur „Immersion des Selbst" (390) in den Arbeitsumgebungen der *New Economy* führt Mühlhoff das Erkenntnispotential seiner Affekttheorie aus (Kap. 8.2, 8.3). So greift er die Studie *Work's Intimacy* von Melissa Gregg (2011) auf und zeigt, dass im Fall der hier untersuchten Arbeiterin einer Marketingabteilung das persönliche Streben nach Anerkennung und ihr Verpflichtungsgefühl gegenüber dem Team gezielt vereinahmt werden, sodass die Frau auch in ihrer Freizeit Arbeitsaufgaben erledigt. Am Beispiel von *Google* legt er dar, wie sich emotionale Involviertheit in die Arbeit herstellen lässt: durch Begeisterung für technologische Innovationen und Trends oder durch Visionen der Weltverbesserung. Flache Hierarchien, Wohlfühloasen mit Nerd-Spielzeug und Minderwertigkeitskomplexe gegenüber den visionären Guru-Chefs formieren eine immersive Sphäre, in der die spielerisch-kreative Selbstentfaltung der Arbeitssubjekte kultiviert und die daraus entstehende innovative Produktivität abgeschöpft wird.

Der politische Anspruch Mühlhoffs besteht darin, in der Analyse affektiver Mikroszenen gouvernementale Subjektivierungsstrategien aufzuzeigen und zugleich die involvierten Individuen selbst in die Pflicht zu nehmen. Weil vereinnahmenden Arbeitsumgebungen gerade so gestaltet werden, dass die Subjekte sie als Steigerung der eigenen Kräfte erfahren, ist es Aufgabe „einer kritischen Onto-Genealogie seiner selbst" (452), die je eigene Gewordenheit und Verstrickung in Affizierungsverhältnisse zu reflektieren. Somit soll erkennbar werden, wie „die Disponierung des eigenen Lustempfindens […] allererst durch den Machtapparat hervorgebracht wurde" (473) und die Subjekte sich

damit der Fähigkeit zur praktischen Veränderung bestehender Verhältnisse bemächtigen können. Dass dies in vielen gegenwärtigen Berufsfeldern immaterieller Arbeit bedeutet, „nicht mehr *derart zu affizieren und affiziert zu werden*" (475) – um nicht dermaßen regiert zu werden –, das ist die überzeugend dargelegte Erkenntnis der Studie. Ob Mühlhoff mit seinem Fokus auf spezielle Arbeitsfelder und lokale Mikrosituationen das Versprechen einlösen kann, mit affektiver Vereinnahmung einen allgemein waltenden Machttypus eines sich wandelnden Kapitalismus zu beschreiben, bleibt zu diskutieren. Dazu könnten seine Überlegungen zu einer neuen Form des Führerkults in Tech-Unternehmen für die Analyse einer – Affekte mobilisierenden – internationalen Rechtsentwicklung fruchtbar gemacht und das makroskopische Potential einer Theorie immersiver Macht damit weiter ausgelotet werden (siehe Mühlhoff in dieser Ausgabe, 74–95).

Felix Fink

Rezension
Review

Karsten Schubert: *Freiheit als Kritik.*
Sozialphilosophie nach Foucault
Bielefeld: transcript Verlag 2018

Wie frei ist das Subjekt? Wird es von außen determiniert oder konstituiert es sich auf der Grundlage freiheitlicher Praxis selbst? Diese Diskussion wird rund um die Werke Michel Foucaults breit geführt. Während die einen Foucault als pessimistischen Machtanalytiker lesen, bei dem Subjekte nur die Endpunkte von Diskursen und Dispositiven darstellen, betonen andere unter Verweis auf sein Spätwerk die Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten und die daraus abzuleitende Freiheit des Subjekts. Diese Debatte um die (Un-)Freiheit bei Foucault bildet auch den Ausgangspunkt der vorliegenden Studie. In der Auseinandersetzung mit sozialtheoretischen Interpretationen der Subjektivierung rekonstruiert Karsten Schubert einen Freiheitsbegriff, der Freiheit als Kritik begreift und der seiner Ansicht nach „demokratietheoretisch verstanden werden kann" (312). Mit der Überführung des nach Foucault gebildeten Freiheitsbegriffs in die Politische Theorie verfolgt er das Ziel, diese auf eine postfundamentalistische Basis zu stellen.

Diesem Vorhaben widmet sich Schubert anhand der Analyse von vier Rezeptionslinien, die er in den Debatten um Foucault identifiziert. In diesen wird zum einen das Macht-/Freiheitsproblem verhandelt; zum anderen wird es in Bezug zur (In-)Kohärenz des foucault'schen Gesamtwerks gesetzt: Ist Foucaults Machtbegriff kohärent? Hat er ihn innerhalb seines Werkes korrigiert? Schubert wählt vier exemplarische Vertreter*innen der von ihm kategorisierten Rezeptionslinien: für die Kohärenz Foucaults Paul Patton, für die Korrektur innerhalb des foucault'schen Werkes Thomas Lemke, für die Kohärenz des Werkes im Sinne eines Kritikmodus' Martin Saar und für die Feststellung, dass Foucault nicht ausreiche, um das Macht-/Freiheitsproblem zu lösen, Amy Allen. Schubert macht von Beginn an deutlich, dass die Problematik der Freiheit für ihn aus zwei verschiedenen Problemen besteht, nämlich dem *„Freiheitsproblem der Machtdetermination"* einerseits und dem *„Freiheitsproblem der Subjektivierung"* (18) andererseits. Beim ersten gehe es darum, ob dem Subjekt überhaupt Handlungsmöglichkeiten zukommen, beim zweiten um das scheinbar freie und selbstreflexive Subjekt des Neoliberalismus, bei dem unklar bleibe, inwiefern es *wirklich* frei sei, da seine freiheitlichen Eigenschaften doch erst vom neoliberalen Subjektivierungsregime hervorgebracht werden würden. Kriterium für Freiheit müsse demnach die Fähigkeit zur Kritik der eigenen Subjektivierung sein. Für Schubert ergeben sich daraus zwei Freiheitsbegriffe, einer, der sich in prinzipieller Handlungsfähigkeit ausdrückt und damit ontologisch ist, und ein sozialtheoretischer, bedingter: Freiheit als Kritik.

Das Freiheitsproblem der Subjektivierung können die von Schubert rekonstruierten Autor*innen seiner Auffassung nach nicht lösen. Patton setzt die Fähigkeit zur Kritik in den Subjekten voraus, statt sie als bedingt zu begreifen (Kap. 2), während Lemke die Bedingtheit zwar erkennt, sie aber mithilfe einer emanzipatorischen Ethik lösen will, deren Richtlinien und Codes unklar bleiben (Kap. 3). Anhand der Interpretation Saars wird deutlich, dass das Freiheitsproblem der Subjektivierung gerade die Bedingung für eine Genealogie Foucaults darstellt, sodass diese das Freiheitsproblem zwar nicht lösen kann, sich dafür aber selbst als Praxis der Freiheit als Kritik bezeichnen lässt (Kap. 4). In einem Zwischenfazit konstatiert Schubert, dass jede Subjektkonstitution Machtwirkungen und Selbsttechniken kombiniert und Freiheit als Kritik damit durch Subjektivierungsregime bedingt ist. Diese Regime müssen demnach danach differenziert werden, ob und in welchem Ausmaß sie die Subjekte zur Kritik der eigenen Subjektivierung befähigen. Hierfür überführt Schubert das Freiheitsproblem der Subjektivierung ins Register der Politischen Theorie (Kap. 5) und rekapituliert – im Vergleich zu den anderen Autoren sehr knapp – die Argumentation Amy Allens, die Foucault mit Habermas zusammenbringt. Dabei kritisiert er, dass Allen Freiheit als Kritik in sozialen Bewegungen und nicht in Institutionen verortet. Nur hier könnten nach Ansicht Schuberts Reflexivität und Kritik der eigenen Werte auf Dauer gestellt und somit Freiheit als Kritik für *alle* – jenseits partikularer Interessen – hervorgebracht werden (Kap. 6). Da er seinen Beitrag als Begründung für eine Politische Theorie auf der Basis von Foucaults machtkritischer Analyse versteht, gibt er an dieser Stelle lediglich einen Ausblick auf Anschlussmöglichkeiten, anstatt seine Konzeption einer solchen vorzulegen (Kap. 7): Er nennt die Vorstellung des *comprehensive pluralism* von Rosenfeld sowie die Idee, dass Freiheit als Kritik in Bildungsinstitutionen etabliert und gewährleistet werden könne, indem dort „genealogische (und andere) Machtgeschichten diskutiert werden" (316).

Die ‚Lösung‘ Schuberts erscheint am Ende der detaillierten und akribischen Rekonstruktionen ernüchternd. Zwar ist eine Politische Theorie wünschenswert, die ihre eigenen Begriffe und Institutionen reflektiert. Sie als Lösung des komplexen Zusammenspiels von Macht und Freiheit bei Foucault zu präsentieren, birgt aber eine Reihe von Problemen: Zum einen werden gerade diejenigen Möglichkeitsräume systematisch geschlossen, die Foucault durch seine Analysen geöffnet und mit denen er für ein anderes Denken plädiert hat. Mit der Institutionalisierung von Freiheit wird dieser ein Ort zugewiesen, der wenig Spielraum für Emergenz lässt. Schubert betont zwar, dass die Institutionen der permanenten „Hermeneutik des Verdachts" (310) ausgesetzt sein sollen, unterschätzt dabei aber deren Reproduktionsmechanismen. Zusätzlich wird Freiheit als Kritik damit ein ‚von oben‘ konzipiertes Programm akademischer Eliten. Die Selbsttechnologien, auf denen der Freiheitsbegriff basiert, entspringen Reflexionsprozessen gesellschaftlicher Eliten von der Antike bis in die Spätmoderne – andere Formen des Selbstbezugs bleiben unberücksichtigt. Freiheit als Kritik sollte dementsprechend als eine *spezifische* Form von Freiheit begriffen werden und den Blick dafür schärfen, dass sie weder in der Antike noch in der Spätmoderne die einzige Form freiheitlicher Praxis ist. Die

Institutionalisierung, die Schubert vorschlägt, wäre dann eine Möglichkeit, Bewusstsein für die Vielfalt von Subjektivierungsprozessen zu schaffen. Sie zu verabsolutieren, lässt jedoch ihr kritisches Potenzial ungenutzt und schließt andere Formen oder Orte von Freiheit – wie beispielsweise soziale Bewegungen, in denen Amy Allen Freiheit verortet hatte – kategorisch aus.

Janina Ruhnau