



THE 'POST-TRUTH POLITICS' DIVERSION

'What does the journalistic discourse on post-truth politics reveal in its portrayal of technology as 'disrupting the truth?'

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PREFACE

"Our civilization is premised on the conviction that such a thing as truth exists, that it is knowable, that it is verifiable, that it exists independently of authority or popularity and that at some point — and preferably sooner rather than later — it will prevail."¹

The L.A. Times Editorial Board

¹ (The Times Editorial Board 2017)

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the journalistic ‘post-truth politics’ discourse is conditioned by logocentric, positivistic and paradoxical presuppositions about (journalistic) representation, new media and the public sphere. The positivist discourse insinuates that media can uncompromisingly and logocentrically represent reality. The discourse justifies and reinforces its logocentric and positivist ideology by holding on to a false-nostalgic conception of the public sphere, presupposing its idealized existence and seeing it as a truth producing structure. Therefore, in the discourse, a disruption of the public sphere – primarily blamed on new media – is seen as a disruption of the truth, and vice versa. The corpus’ ideology and presuppositions refrain them from seeing that a truth-producing public sphere is not only an illusion, it is undesirable, as it is the opportunity of questioning truth which qualified a system as democratic. Ironically, in presupposing that there is a ‘truth-producing public sphere’ the corpus is constructing a normative discourse on truth, escalating the true/false dichotomy (in the media), paving the way for populists and demagogues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	3
ABSTRACT	4
INTRODUCTION	6
Post-truth politics	6
Ideology	8
Research outline	10
Relevance	10
JOURNALISM	11
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK	15
Derrida: Deconstruction	15
Foucault: Discursive formations	16
Baudrillard: Representation	16
Corpus	18
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	20
Nothing but the truth	20
A truth producing structure	22
The illusion of Habermas' ideal	23
Selling out on truth	26
Diversion techniques	27
A panick stricken production of the real	29
CONCLUSION	32
BIBLIOGRAPHY	34

INTRODUCTION

'Post-truth politics' and populist politicians are popular topics of debate in current journalistic discourse.² One of the press's favorite culprits of the assumed disruption of (the truthful mediation of) politics are new media technologies. An example of the critique on new media technologies can be found in an article by Katherine Viner, The Guardian's editor-in-chief, with the article being titled; *"How Technology Disrupted the Truth."*³ For - as the popular argument reads - *obviously*, social media was and is accountable for the exponential growth of untruthful representations of politics and reality, and by that the popularity of populist politicians such as Donald Trump. However, while reading The Guardian's article I wondered; 'what exactly is this seemingly self-evident 'truth' which has been 'disrupted?' If even this question on 'truth' is hard to answer, which other seemingly obvious presuppositions about reality and truth condition the popular argument that technology 'disrupted the truth?'⁴ I will analyze the post-truth politics discourse in order to find such presuppositions, challenging myself to a deconstruction of the seemingly obvious.

POST-TRUTH POLITICS

Peaking interest in the topic of truth, politics and technology among the Western press was initially the controversial presidential election in the United States and the tumultuous Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom. A recently popularized term which sums up many of the recursive aspects described in articles discussing these topics is 'post-truth politics.' In 2016, 'post-truth' was remarkably dominant in public discourse, prompting the Oxford Dictionary to name it 'Word of the Year 2016.' Casper Grathwohl, President of the Oxford Dictionary, commented by stating that *"Fuelled by the rise of social media as a news source and a growing distrust of facts offered up by the establishment, post-truth as a concept has been finding its linguistic footing for some time."*⁵ The Oxford Dictionary defines 'post-truth' as: **"ADJECTIVE: Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief: 'in this era of post-truth politics, it's easy to cherry-pick data and come to whatever conclusion you desire,' 'some commentators have observed that we are living in a post-truth age.'"**⁶

However, there is no adequate definition of 'post-truth *politics*.' Extending the term 'post-truth' by pairing it with 'politics' does not seem particularly farfetched, considering the following research by fact-checking website PolitiFacts. PolitiFacts claims that 71 percent of the statements Donald Trump made during his presidential campaign were false.⁷ The election of Trump despite his unconventional statements has been associated with the increasing role new media technologies play in (the mediation of) political campaigns, as the title of Viner's article illustrates. **With new- and social media's ever-increasing presence in politics, it is safe to say that the Trump vs. Clinton presidential race has been the most digitally mediated presidential campaign**

² (Mantzaris 2016)

³ (Viner 2016)

⁴ (Mantzaris 2016)

⁵ (Oxford Dictionaries, Word of the Year, 2016)

⁶ (Dictionaries 2016)

⁷ (PolitiFacts 2016)

to date.^{8,9} Therefore, the focus on new media technologies with regard to current politics is not surprising. Accordingly, reports on the spread of fake news have dominated the media. Whether it is fake news farms in Macedonia producing and sharing fictional political content in order to make money through AdSense,¹⁰ or Google top-ranking news articles with fake election results.¹¹

On a linguistic level, the term *post-truth politics* seems to insinuate that there used to be truth politics. However, primarily, one cannot pretend that before the rise of new media (technologies) politics was merely a righteous, noble, truthful profession based on pure facts. Let us exemplify former US president Reagan, who stated in 1986 that *"We did not, I repeat, did not trade weapons or anything else [to Iran] for hostages, nor will we."* Months later Reagan claimed that *"A few months ago, I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that's true, but the facts and evidence tell me it is not."* A creative way to say 'I lied.'¹²

Secondly, in order to suggest a previous state of *truth* politics there has to be a certain presumption that there ever was such a thing as a fixed truth. Indeed, our history has known times in which institutions such as the church and the government provided a fixed truth and forced this truth upon people. According to a selection of these former 'fixed truths' the world is flat and centers the universe, women are not qualified to vote and racial segregation and slavery are respectable. However, these truths are often fought and overturned, exemplified by the gradual acceptance of Copernicus' heliocentric worldview by the Catholic church, by the vote being granted to women and by long fought abolitionism.¹³ These examples indicate that preaching something to be the 'only positive truth,' is mirroring suppressive religions, -social norms and -politics. For, the only politics which can be called truth-politics is politics as seen in dictatorial or fascist regimes; political systems which enforce an unfaltering, unquestionable nation-wide truth. It is the possibility of questioning 'truth' which qualifies a system as democratic.¹⁴ Accordingly, defining current affairs as 'post-truth politics' is not as self-evident as it might seem.

DEFINING POST-TRUTH POLITICS

William Davies of the New York Times¹⁵ and Katherine Viner of the Guardian¹⁶ are among the first to have written elaborate articles on the subject of post-truth politics within a specific Brexit and Trump context. Viner and Davies are conclusive in stating that we now live in post-truth times. I will define post-truth politics according to four dominant and recursive notions as found within Viner's and Davies' texts. The four notions which will henceforth function as a definition of post-truth politics are;

⁸ (Chang and Aaker 2010)

⁹ (Eilperin 2015)

¹⁰ (Alexander and Silverman 2016)

¹¹ (Cadwalladr 2016)

¹² (Schwartz 2016)

¹³ (K. S. Thomas 1985) p. 200-202

¹⁴ (Nancy 2010) p. 6-9

¹⁵ (Davies 2016)

¹⁶ (Viner 2016)

- **The commodification of communication and facts.** The articles claim that currently, facts can be bought by paying (off) the right experts, and that platforms such as Facebook, Google and Twitter have utilized our communication as a commodity.
- **The transition from traditional gatekeepers to distrusted new media gatekeepers, such as Facebook, Google and Twitter.** Both journalists use the word ‘dramatic’ to describe the rise of social media as the primary source of (political) news.
- **The trend of truthiness;** *“the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true.”*¹⁷ Viner and Davies argue that currently, to the public, what they *feel* is real is more important than what experts say are the facts.
- **The rise of populism, propaganda and polarization.** According to the articles we *now* have a political climate that focusses on appealing to the emotion of the voter, using facts – or fiction presented as facts – as mere rhetorical weapons of debate.

Both articles specifically address the ‘populist threat’ behind the possibility to explicitly or implicitly ‘shape your media consumption around your own opinions and prejudices.’¹⁸ Viner specifically addresses a structure in which this fear of one-sided media consumption can be understood; the public sphere.

According to G. Houser – Professor of Communication at the University of Colorado – the public sphere is *“a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them.”*¹⁹ Sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas – quoted in Viner’s article – has written a popular account on the matter. Habermas described the former bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century and the public opinion this sphere labored as the ideal; defining opinions as normative convictions, judgments, prejudices and culturally produced values. To Habermas, public opinions can only be formed when there is a public which engages in rational debate.²⁰ Habermas states that a debate can only aspire to be rational when its participants – in this case the public – are informed.²¹ What remains are the questions; when is a public properly informed, and who decides what is good or bad and true or false information? This brings us back to my initial question; ‘what exactly is this ‘truth’ which has been ‘disrupted?’

IDEOLOGY

As the post-truth politics discourse centers around ‘truth,’ it is essential to emphasize that there are multiple claims to what truth is. Where some see truth as a static and accessible presence, others see the truth as constructed, allowing for a variety of truths to co-exist. We would call the first ‘claim on truth’ a positivist perspective and the second ‘claim on truth’ a relativistic perspective. Positivist theory states that positive – certain – knowledge can only be produced by measuring all that can be observed through the five senses. Positivism does not necessarily reject metaphysics and the theological worldview, it simply holds the realist view

¹⁷ US talk show host Steven Colbert popularized and defined the term truthiness in 2005. Colbert even called the term ‘post-truth politics’ a rip-off of ‘truthiness.’ (American Dialect Society 2016)

¹⁸ (Davies 2016)

¹⁹ (Hauser 1999) p. 61

²⁰ (J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* 1989) p. 175-177

²¹ (J. Habermas, *On Society and Politics* 1989) p. 231-232

that these beliefs and theories are not or less positive. Mathematics would, therefore, be the most positive of all the sciences, with social sciences being the least positive of all.²²

A term which further clarifies positivism is the term 'logocentrism,' a term coined by Ludwig Klages, a German Nobel Prize nominated philosopher. Logocentrism refers to the way science and philosophy regard the logos – in this case broadly meaning 'logic word' – as a tool to portray or represent reality with.²³ Jacques Derrida, literary critic and philosopher is "*one of the most influential, controversial and complex thinkers*" of the 20th century.²⁴ Derrida's publication 'Of Grammatology' contains a critique of logocentrism as used in writing, metaphysics and science.²⁵ Derrida argues that it is problematic to assume that there always is an irreducible and original object (the signified) that the logos (the sign) can represent.²⁶ The sign herein is the *means* of representing 'basic reality.' A means of representing reality could be written and spoken word, an image, a tweet or a piece art. For instance, the word 'tree,' is used to describe all trees, though no two trees are identical. Accordingly, it is problematic to consider the logos to be epistemologically superior and to assume that we can objectively and irreducibly represent reality with words.

Raymond Williams – critic, academic and novelist credited for "*virtually inventing the interdisciplinary field known as cultural studies*"²⁷ – presents us with a relativistic account of 'social constructivism.' In contrast to positivism, Williams argues that everything around us – and therefore also our truth and reality – is socially constructed. I will use specifically Williams technology orientated account of social constructivism because technology is a dominant subject in the post-truth politics discourse. Williams challenges the 'technological deterministic' idea that technology is the driving and determining force behind cultural and societal change or development, exemplified by Viner's insinuation that technology is disrupting 'the truth.' Williams argues that the influence of social (but also of political and economical) factors is dominant over the influence of technology on the shaping of reality.²⁸ Accordingly, the construction of one's perception of truth and reality is subjective, and could, for example, depend on one's culture, social environment, choice of news media, political system and profession. Some of these constructions – such as the male/female dichotomy – are largely alike for entire continents or social groups, where some of these constructions – such as etiquette of behavior – are more fragmented throughout society. Therefore, someone's 'reality' and 'truth' is constructed. **Accordingly, no two people's realities can ever be the identical.** It is therefore not possible to bring the post-truth politics discourse down to terms such as 'true' of 'false,' 'fake' or 'real.' We need a far deeper understanding of truth.

For one, different takes on truth clarify that any assumed description of post-truth is ideological. Therefore, views such as social constructivism, logocentrism and positivism can be understood as ideological. University of Cambridge sociologist John B. Thompson gives a critical conception of 'ideology,' stating that phenomena which make up an ideology – the collection of (subconscious) beliefs, goals, motivations and expectations held by groups, individuals or societies – can be one-sided, misleading or illusory. Ideological

²² (Larrain 1979) p.197

²³ (Klages 1929) p. 121, 129–30, 511

²⁴ (Beardsworth 1996) p. ii

²⁵ (Derrida, Of Grammatology 1976) p. Excergue

²⁶ (Derrida, Of Grammatology 1976) p. 12-13

²⁷ (Cole 2008)

²⁸ (R. Williams, Television, Technology and Cultural Form 1974) p. 132-134

discourses – and discourses on ideology – are therefore always discourses of *truth*, as Jean Baudrillard – renown theorist and critic of contemporary society, culture, media and thought – stipulates.²⁹ Accordingly, the post-truth politics discourse is inherently ideological. Thompson argues that grouping phenomena such as beliefs, goals, motivations and expectations together and presenting them as an ideology allows for critical reflection; such as the uncovering of possible power relations and problematic paradoxes which are produced by or which condition an ideology.³⁰

RESEARCH OUTLINE

A presupposition is an implicit assumption about a subject or the world, relating to statements or utterances that are implicitly presumed to be true within discourse. When taking into account ideology as previously discussed and the term post-truth politics as previously defined, I argue that; **The journalistic ‘post-truth politics’ discourse is conditioned by logocentric, positivistic and paradoxical presuppositions about representation, new media and the public sphere.** In defending this statement I intend to uncover; **(1)** which ideology conditions the ‘post-truth politics’ discourse; **(2)** which problematic presuppositions condition – and are conditioned by – the discourse’s ideological statements with regard to (journalistic and political) representation, technology and the public sphere; **(3)** what the presuppositions in the discourse reveal about the construction of the true/false dichotomy in the media and in politics. In order to defend my statement, I will perform a deconstructive analysis on a selection of articles from the journalistic post-truth politics discourse.

RELEVANCE

Taking on the post-structuralist idea that we only know reality as experienced through language makes the way the world is presented to us by the media crucial for the construction of our reality. The idea that language can shape reality is retractable to the concept of the ‘performativity’ of language. According to Jacques Derrida, language inherently enables actions, language *does*. Words and phrasings have effect, whether this effect is intentional or unintentional, explicit or implicit.³¹ By analyzing which ideologies and presuppositions condition the post-truth politics discourse, possible effects of the discourse can be anticipated or questioned. Additionally, there is a plethora of research focused on *how* technology might disrupt the truth.³² The academic relevance of this paper is that it will answer a more primal question, one severely overlooked in current discourse. This thesis will read back from the presupposition that ‘the truth’ is something which journalists can represent; a presupposition which conditions the idea that technology can disrupt the truth. **In conclusion, I will set out for a deconstruction of the seemingly obvious.**

²⁹ (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations* 1992) p.160

³⁰ (Thompson 1990) p. Introduction

³¹ (Derrida, *Limited Inc* 1972) p. 13 -15, 124

³² Take for instance an abundance of research on the subject of ‘online echo chambers’ and ‘the filter bubble,’ as initiated by chief executive of news site *Upworthy* Eli Pariser in 2011. (Pariser 2011) Or, consider the range of claims that the internet is extending or disrupting the public sphere, such as Massey University’s Media Studies Lecturer Lincoln Dahlbergs’ 2001 publication on “The Prospects of Online Deliberative Forums Extending the Public Sphere.” (Dahlberg 2001) Then there is the assortment of inquiries into the distorting effect of new media on political polarization of the public, such as Postdoctoral Fellow at NYU’s Data Science departments’ Andrew M. Guess, who researched ‘Media Choice and Moderation.’ (Guess 2016)

In this thesis I will analyze which problematic presumptions about (journalistic and political) representation, new media and the public sphere condition the post-truth politics discourse. However, before I can analyze these presumptions with academic theories, I need to establish a baseline for my analysis. For instance, before asking if the expectations journalists have of journalism and the public sphere are reasonable, I need to know what these expectations are to begin with. Therefore, I will now critically introduce the journalistic standards (of representation) and the concept of the public sphere.

Throughout this thesis I will use the Foucauldian notion that history is not a linear teleology but rather a genealogy; a network of causality and an interplay of correlation.³³ History is hereby defined as everything that has already occurred and is yet to occur. The notion of history as a genealogy enables me to reflect on the past and uncover recursive events, in order to put conceptions about journalistic standards (of representation), new media and the public sphere in perspective throughout this thesis.

Firstly, I would like to address misguided nostalgia with regard to journalism and journalistic representation. The journalistic code was founded by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1926 and reformulated by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). The journalistic code urges journalists to seek the truth and report it, to minimize harm, to be accountable, fair, thorough, transparent and to act independently. Accordingly, to the SPJ, the truth is something which journalists can and should represent in their work. The SPJ defines 'ethical' journalism as striving towards the enlightenment of the public. Public enlightenment is then described as the very foundation of democracy and justice.³⁴ The SPJ argues that democracy and the enlightened public are founded on the accuracy of journalistic representations of reality, thereby defining the standards by which journalism is supposed to operate. Journalist Eric Alterman illustrates certain expectations of these standards. In his 2005 publication 'When Presidents Lie' Alterman discusses a long list of lying presidents, from Roosevelt and Truman to George W. Bush. In the chapter titled "*Bush and the Post-Truth Presidency*" Alterman states that previously, American presidents could depend on the powers invested in the press as inscribed in the First Amendment, in order to "*keep them honest.*"³⁵ The power of the press is hereby seen as an ideological '4th estate,' with Alterman insinuating that previously, journalists represented the truth.

However, how reasonable are the expected standards of representation that journalism is supposed to uphold? Did, for example, journalism formerly play the idealized heroic part of 'keeping the ones in charge honest' by representing reality in their work? Certain articles can be described as; 'having fear sowing and misleading headlines; using pictures in a wrong or misleading context or using manipulated images; using fake information (such as made up interviews and pseudoscience) accompanied by a misleading use of 'experts;' and presenting sympathy with an underdog who takes a stance against the system, or taking a stance against the system in general.' These characteristic are consistent with Viner's and Davies' critique of our current news

³³ (Foucault 1971) p. 9

³⁴ (Society of Professional Journalists 2014)

³⁵ (Alterman 2005) p. 305

environment. However, it was historian, journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner Frank Luther Mott who defined these characteristics to describe the ‘yellow journalism’ of the 19th century.³⁶ Yellow journalism – or yellow press – refers to the sensational press.³⁷ According to Hochschild, Harvard’s professor of government, the idea of a nonpartisan and fair media is a recent one, as during the 18th and 19th century media was severely polarized.³⁸ Historian William E. Gienapp retraced an 1854 interview with a journalist, in which the journalist states that “the power of the press consists not in its logic or eloquence, but in its ability to manufacture facts, or to give coloring to facts that have occurred.”³⁹ It appears as if Alterman’s statements on ‘the press heroically keeping the powerful honest’ are nostalgic and misguided. Accordingly, upholding journalists to standards which are constituted on false nostalgic presuppositions about journalism is problematic.

Secondly, I would like to address the commodification of facts, which Viner and Davies state to have signaled. Their critique on the effects of the commodification of communication is reflected by Jodi Dean, an American philosopher known for her works on political, media and feminist theory. Dean argues that networked communications and specifically new media do not strengthen the role of the population as a political entity within a democracy, as the SPJ desires and expects of journalism. Dean argues that instead, networked communications recursively strengthens the value of communication as a commodity, achieving ‘communicative capitalism.’⁴⁰ While I agree with Dean’s theory, it would be misleading to assume that the development of communication into a commodity is recent. Take for instance the 19th century circulation war, with newspapers fighting over subscriptions and advertisement revenues.⁴¹ Also, think of town criers or bellmen, who, next to making public announcements as imposed on them, proclaimed advertisements.⁴² Even in the time of Gutenberg authors had to convince a publisher not only of the quality of their book but also of the marketability of their book. ‘Does it sell’ is therefore not merely a question of late as even back then, books – and other entertainment such as comedic or pornographic prints – were already sold as a commodity.⁴³ As it seems, our communication culture has long been influenced by consumption, riddled with ads, and financed through second or third parties.

Thirdly, I would like to address the partisan voice of the post-truth politics discourse. We currently see a vast amount of articles imposing a normative notion of truth on their readers. An example of such a normative discourse can be found in the current political debate on global warming; some media represent the issue as being a hoax, other media represent the issue as a factual environmental issue. Take, for example, a *Breitbart News* article headlining “Climate change: the Hoax that Costs Us \$4 Billion a Day”⁴⁴ and a contrasting *New York Times* article titled “Donald Trump, Help Heal the Planet’s Climate Change Problem.”⁴⁵ In line with the journalistic global warming discourse, the post-truth politics discourse also appears to be divided in two camps

³⁶ (Mott 1962) p. 539

³⁷ The term ‘yellow journalism’ was initially coined to describe the late 19th century circulation war between ‘New York World’ (Joseph Pulitzer) and the ‘New York Journal’ (William R. Hearst), with both papers occasionally using yellow ink. (Mott 1962) p. 526-530 (Campbell 2001) p. 32–33

³⁸ (Pazzanese 2016)

³⁹ (Gienapp 1982) p. 41

⁴⁰ (Dean 2003) p.102

⁴¹ (Campbell 2001) p. 32-33

⁴² (Sampson 1874) p. 35

⁴³ (Darnton 1982) p.75-78

⁴⁴ (Delingpole 2016)

⁴⁵ (Friedman 2016)

which vocalize their respective normative vision of truth. I will illustrate the ‘counter journalistic post-truth politics discourse’ by exemplifying Breitbart News. Founding board member and former Breitbart top executive Steve Bannon defines Breitbart as “a platform for the alt-right”.⁴⁶ Breitbart has one item on ‘post-truth,’ in contrast with numerous in-depth articles on the matter by the New York Times and The Guardian. In the item Breitbarts’ news anchors discuss post-truth as being ‘boring,’ asking ‘who uses this word?’ and stating ‘let’s move on.’ The comment section of the item clarifies that, if anything, the Breitbart readership feels like these times are truer than ever. User Silent_Pilot comments; “*Post-truth(v) Post-truth is a verb describing what Breitbart and their readership does. Post lies (v) Post lies is what the lamestream media and their readership do.*”⁴⁷ This reply neatly summarizes the body of comments the item received. It seems like there are two sides to the post-truth politics discourse; a side which believes these are *post-truth* times and a side which believes these are *truth* times.

It would seem evident to divide the discourse in two sides; left and right. However, this brings me to the adjoining and final point; classifying the discourse into (partisan) categories is problematic. As explained earlier, logocentrism is the idea that words can be reduced to an original object. According to this idea a public would be definable by classifying divisions, such as *left* and *right* or *libertarian*, *democrat* or *republican*, *neutral* or *conservative*. However, the annual trust monitor performed by public relations company Edelman found that “*attitudes to institutions are no longer defined by left and right, but by a political realignment around those who have “faith in the system” and those who don’t.*”⁴⁸ The Edelman research illustrates social scientist Ruyters argument that classifying divisions in politics are no longer sufficient in these complex modern times, or that, perhaps, they never were or possibly could have been sufficient to begin with.⁴⁹

In the Introduction you can read that Habermas’ theory of the public sphere insinuates that a population can be defined as a public, or a definable public. In contrast with Habermas, Jodi Dean argues that there is no such thing as a public.⁵⁰ This is an argument reflected by Baudrillard, who argues that ‘the masses’ (the public) can no longer be represented. The masses are merely surveyed, polled, tested, and provided with referenda –in which the media is seen as a constant referendum, presenting questions and answers – that has replaced the political referent.⁵¹ To Baudrillard, the masses are merely an empty concept, as there is no longer any social signified to give force to the political signifier ‘the public.’⁵² More broadly speaking, the critique on the definition of a public describes the illusion of having a society which easily falls into a few political convictions. Instead, as Dean argues in ‘Why the Net is not a Public Sphere,’ the public can be seen as made up of interest groups.⁵³ This notion divides people not based on their gender, ethnicity or social class but based on subjects that represent their specific interest. This critique indicates that even in its fundamental definition of the public, the theory of the public sphere is problematic; therefore, not just the journalists’ presuppositions

⁴⁶ (Posner 2016) (Steve Bannon is currently president Trump’s White House Chief Strategist)

⁴⁷ (Edmunds 2016)

⁴⁸ (Edelman 2017)

⁴⁹ (Ruyters 2005) p. 56

⁵⁰ (Dean 2003)

⁵¹ (Baudrillard, *Strategy of the Real* 1992) p. 19

⁵² (Baudrillard, *Strategy of the Real* 1992) p.4

⁵³ (Dean 2003) p. 96-97

about the public sphere but also the concept of the public sphere itself must be approached critically throughout this thesis.

This brief introduction into journalistic standards and the public (sphere) indicates that there are high but misguided expectations concerning journalistic representation. It was found that journalism and news have always been conditioned and constituted on consumption and capital. I illustrated that the post-truth politics discourse appears to be considerably partisan. However, classifying the discourse in categorical divisions is a risky and problematic enterprise. Additionally, it can be concluded that the notion of the public sphere comes with debatable conceptions. Therefore, I will be on the lookout for manifestations of problematic expectations and presuppositions concerning journalistic standards of representation and the public sphere in the post-truth politics discourse. The following chapter describes which theories will enable me to analyze these presuppositions.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I will explain which theories enable me to analyze the ideologies and presuppositions in the journalistic post-truth politics discourse. The discourse is brought down to a manageable corpus. The corpus will be presented later-on in this chapter. First, I will elucidate the combination of complimentary theories that are mobilized to critically analyze the selected corpus.

DERRIDA: DECONSTRUCTION

According to Derrida, deconstruction is reading backwards from seemingly obvious and universal presuppositions, which condition our views, statements, arguments and ideologies. For, presuppositions are not natural but constructed, they have a reason for being so. I will argue that certain statements in the discourse are based on presuppositions that render its conclusions problematic or paradoxical.⁵⁴ As discussed earlier, discourses on truth are inherently ideological, which automatically makes the post-truth politics discourse ideological. **Therefore, in the first chapter of the discourse analysis, I will identify the ideological ‘starting point’ of the discourse. Once the ideological starting point is identified I can ‘read backwards’ and uncover and analyze the structures and presuppositions which condition this ideological starting point.**

Deconstruction can be seen as a type of discourse analysis. However, Derrida has shown a certain reluctance of defining ‘deconstruction,’ making statements such as “*What is deconstruction? Nothing, of course.*”⁵⁵ Therefore, deconstruction is most likely not intended to be used as a methodological tool. Still, the idea of deconstruction allows us to open up texts that are in themselves convinced to be simply stating it ‘as it is.’ Psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, described as one of the cornerstones of the post-structuralist movement, theorized that there is always a tension between statements and their enunciation, through internal contractions.^{56 57} Take the following sentence; ‘I swear to god; religion is bogus.’ One of the internal contradictions in this sentence is that one can ask; ‘what value does swearing to god hold if one claims religion is a sham? Does this person subconsciously value certain aspects of religion?’ What I intend to exemplify is that you say more than you intend to say by using certain metaphors, adjectives phrases and themes, such as binary terms. As exemplified in Derrida’s ‘Dissemination,’ male and female are metaphysically binary opposites, each definition shaped by the definition of the other. Though, what is male is not necessarily not female.⁵⁸ In this thesis, I will focus on the true/false, real/fake binaries, finding value in their opposites as well as their overlap. For instance, in writing about ‘truth,’ an author unavoidably gives the reader an insight into how he considers ‘untruth.’ Derrida emphasizes that in these binaries opposites are not considered as simply equal but contrasting entities, but that rather, the opposing entity is seen as undesirable, or a lesser version, dependent on the discourse. For instance, good versus *evil* and – exactly – true versus *false*.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ (J. Derrida, *Dissemination* 1981) p. xv

⁵⁵ (J. Derrida, *Letter to a Japanese friend* 1991) p. 275

⁵⁶ (Lacan 1966) p. 18, 28, 834

⁵⁷ (Stavrakakis 2002) p. 13

⁵⁸ (Derrida, *Dissemination* 1981) p. ix-xiii

⁵⁹ (J. Derrida, *Limited Inc* 1972) p.124

As there is always tension between the statement and the enunciation, it is inevitable that there are tensions and internal contradictions in my own writing.⁶⁰ However, fortunately, there is also a wealth of tensions and contradictions to be found in the corpus. Accordingly, this thesis does not necessarily intend to expose what statements in the corpus *mean*, but instead intends to expose what statements in the corpus explicitly but also largely implicitly *presuppose*, and retrace which structures enable these presuppositions. In order to uncover certain structures and presuppositions, statements in the corpus will be grouped, allowing for a more specified and applied deconstruction of the texts. I will group statements by mobilizing Foucault's theory on discursive formations, in order to strengthen the deconstructive analysis of the post-truth politics discourse, as I will elucidate in the following paragraph.

FOUCAULT: DISCURSIVE FORMATIONS

I will group statements in the corpus according to Foucault's theory on discursive formations. Discursive formations are constituted by a regularity between objects, subjects, concepts, modes *and* thematic choices of statements, which are often based on seemingly universal assumptions. The theory of discursive formations takes away the 'natural' or immediate urge to group statements based on one criterion – such as subject, theme or discipline – opening up the possibility to find and describe new inter-categorical relations.⁶¹ **By defining discursive formations I can expose new relations between statements in the corpus, indicate which formations are dominant and analyze how certain formations relate to other discursive formations in the text.**⁶² Additionally, with regard to the before mentioned performativity of language, I will describe how the discursive formations in the text are able to shape the objects of which they speaks, such as 'truth,' 'the public (sphere),' 'journalism,' and 'technology.'⁶³ This, however, is a two-way street; it will also be analyzed how discursive formations are shaped by the structures their composers are exposed to, asking which structures condition the corpus' statements. I will add value to the definition of discursive formations through a system of deconstruction, illustrating and uncovering the manifestation of (constituting) ideologies, presuppositions and structures in the corpus.⁶⁴

BAUDRILLARD: REPRESENTATION

Baudrillard's theory on simulation will help me to identify and analyze (problematic) presuppositions regarding representation in the corpus. As exemplified in the introduction, a word can never be fully reduced to an

⁶⁰ (J. Derrida 1981) p. 158

⁶¹ (Foucault 1971) p. 29

⁶² (Foucault 1971) p. 31

⁶³ (Foucault 1971) p. 38

⁶⁴ Foucault adds value to his identified discursive formations by analyzing them throughout time, scrutinizing *dispersions* and differences. For instance, with this so called 'system of dispersion,' Foucault compares how discourses on 'madness' differ *throughout time*; dependent on the historical decade 'madness' is seen as either a crime, a virtue, an illness and or a threat. However, I will define trends, tensions and contradictions in statements as *currently* found in the discourse on post-truth politics. I will add value to the definition of discursive formations not through a system of dispersion but through a system of deconstruction, illustrating and uncovering the manifestation of (constituting) ideologies, presuppositions and structures in the corpus. (Foucault 1971) p. 9-11

original object. All the signifier does is group things which hold certain similarities, such as the signifiers 'human,' 'three,' and 'house.' Therefore, a 'signifier,' whether this is a word, an image or a gesture, can never be a true reference of the 'signified.'⁶⁵ **As we use words and other signs – or signifiers – to make sense of our world, I would conclude that we can never positively represent reality; our reality is always masked or perverted.** Accordingly, journalists as represented by our corpus, and arguably people in general, can not possibly represent basic reality. Therefore, the closest we can come to representation is one which masks, perverts or colors reality, as words and signs are never a fully positive representation.

As Baudrillard formulates in 'Simulacra and Simulations,' representation initiates from the utopian idea that one can produce a sign which is the equivalent of reality. We perceive the world through a system of signs, each sign gathering meaning dependent on the context one finds the sign in. **As 'utopia' is an ideological concept, Baudrillard indirectly claims that the idea of representation is ideological.**⁶⁶ As discussed, ideological discourses – and discourses on ideology – are always discourses of *truth*. Hereby, Baudrillard's confirms the before stated argument that the post-truth politics discourse – about the false representation of (and within) politics and political campaigns – is inherently ideological.

Baudrillard presents four successive phases of simulation, describing the relation between a sign and 'basic reality.' In the first ideological phase a sign would reflect basic reality, a fundamental axiom in journalism. The second phase describes signs as we are confronted with in our daily life, signs which dissimulate (mask and pervert) basic reality. Baudrillard argues that this phase is a phase of maleficence and evil.⁶⁷ However, I argue that, as we can never fully reflect basic reality, the second phase is our natural state. Even a picture or a portrait is never faithful, it is always timed and framed. Accordingly, this phase is by no means necessarily evil, as it is the most accurate phase of 'representation' of which humans are capable. Approaching this phase as 'evil' would turn this thesis into a discussion of ethics instead of a critical analysis of a discourse on truth and representation. A journalist, for example, will always have certain (often subconscious and implicit) biases, presuppositions, structures and ideologies which influence her work, even if she believes she is simply representing 'basic reality.'

In the third phase Baudrillard describes, the sign which the *absence* of a basic reality, a sign *pretending* to represent, while actually it does not have a profound or true reference. This phase is a simulation, a copy without a real such as Disneyland which simulates a world as portrayed in fictional movies and cartoons; a fictional world. In the fourth phase the sign bears no relation to any reality whatever. The sign is its own pure simulacrum; a copy without an original; a fake, a thing which holds no relation to reality whatsoever, such as 'The Matrix.'⁶⁸ As Baudrillard states, dissimulation would see simulation – a representation that holds no resemblance to reality – and try to dismiss it as a false representation, or 'absorb it.' In other words, it tries to understand it by its own standards. The simulation, however, would try to dismiss the whole idea of representation as one big simulacrum.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ (Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact 2005) 68-70

⁶⁶ (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations 1992) p.152-153

⁶⁷ (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations 1992) p.152-153

⁶⁸ (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations 1992) p.152-153

⁶⁹ (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations 1992) p. 152-153

There is a certain irony in discussing the limits of representation while being on the verge of presenting a corpus which is supposed to – at least to some extent – represent the journalistic post-truth politics discourse. Therefore, I must warn that the corpus will inevitably provide a somewhat masked or perverted but nonetheless indicative view on (newly drawn and retraced) relations and structures in and around the post-truth politics discourse.

CORPUS

The main focus of articles prescribing to post-truth politics is either on the Brexit referendum and enforcement and/or on the presidential campaign and the presidency of Donald Trump. Therefore, the corpus is composed out of articles from the respective countries in which these political events take place. The analysis is conducted on articles written *during* the recent United States presidential elections. Wired, the Economist and the Columbia Journalism Review are selected as a source of articles due to their identified areas of expertise. For, technology, economy and journalism are all central concepts with regard to post-truth politics as defined. The New York Times and The Guardian are selected as a source of articles because of their central role within the ‘post-truth’ discourse. The corpus consists out of six opinionating articles, all prescribing to post-truth politics as defined in our introduction on at least three out of the four notions.

- **[‘How Technology Disrupted the Truth,’ Katherine Viner, The Guardian, 12 July 2016](#)**

Katherine Viner is the editor-in-chief of The Guardian. Viner’s article is an early on long read, paving the road for The Guardian’s full-blown offense strategy with regard to their vocal anti-Trump and anti (alt-) right position. Headlines read *“Is Trump a psychopath? I'd call him a narcissist,”*⁷⁰ and *“Frightened by Donald Trump? You don't know the half of it.”*⁷¹

- **[‘The Age Of Post Truth Politics,’ William Davies, The New York Times, 24 July 2016](#)**

The New York Times (NYT) is one of the focal point for the right wing’s critique on journalism.⁷² Take for instance this Fox News headline reading *“What the clueless, deceitful New York Times tells me about Trump.”*⁷³ Trump himself tweeted about the NYT on numerous occasions, such as this tweet; *“FAKE NEWS media knowingly doesn't tell the truth. A great danger to our country. The failing @nytimes has become a joke. Likewise @CNN. Sad!”*⁷⁴ Therefore, not one but two articles of this newspaper are submitted to the corpus. Davies’ piece is an early on in-depth article showing a multifaceted view on society with regard to truth, lies and falsities in current politics.

- **[‘Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook Must Defend the Truth,’ Jim Rutenberg, The New York Times, 20 November 2016](#)**

The other articles in the corpus articulate their assumptions about truth and reality quite carefully. This article, however, is submitted to the corpus because Rutenberg is not afraid to put his cards on the table, providing us with a wealth of disputable quotes. For example, Rutenberg prompts the idea of establishing a Facebook led ‘hyperfactual counterinsurgency,’ killing false representations of reality with ‘facts,’ urging his reader to dismiss the notion of truth as being something relative.

⁷⁰ (Z. Williams 2016)

⁷¹ (Monbiot 2016)

⁷² (Breitbart News 2017)

⁷³ (Stossel 2017)

⁷⁴ (Trump, Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 2017)

- **[‘The 2016 Election Exposes A Very, Very Dark Side Of Tech,’](#)** [Issie Lapowsky, WIRED, 2 November 2016](#)

Wired magazine is linked to the technological imaginary; an imaginary that casts expectation and hopes on technology, believing it will solve many of society’s obstacles.⁷⁵ Therefore, the predominantly deterministic doubts and suspicions cast on technology as disrupting ‘truth’ and ‘humans’ in this article are all the more notable. For, speaking about exposing the *dark side* of technology requires the author to have a certain presuppositions about what is already revealed, and about what a ‘dark side’ is.

- **[‘Facebook Is Eating The World,’](#)** [Emily Bell, Columbia Journalism Review, 7 March 2016](#)

Emily Bell is the Director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at the Columbia Journalism School (CJR). Bell’s article is quoted in several other articles – including Viner’s – and discusses the role of technology in combination with a more future-oriented perspective on journalism. The analysis in the article focusses mainly on the current state of journalism, its business models and possible threats to the journalistic profession. As the contents of this article can be retraced in a range of other articles it presents a solid base for interpreting the discourses’ stance on journalism as a whole.

- **[‘Yes, I’d Lie To You,’](#)** [Anonymous, Economist, 10 September 2016](#)

The Economist states that they do not use bylines, keeping their journalists anonymous, as their articles are often co-written by multiple authors. The Economist claims that *“The main reason for anonymity, is a belief that what is written is more important than who writes it.”*⁷⁶ There are several underlying paradoxical assumptions in this article, which makes one wonder; ‘is this the result of co-writing or can we also retrace these paradoxes in other texts?’ This Economist article holds a critical position with regard to the idea of reality as being one sided.

I will use deconstruction to read backwards from seemingly obvious and universal presuppositions which condition (implicit) statements and ideologies in the corpus. These statements and ideologies concern specifically journalism, new media (technology), the public sphere and representation. I will define discursive formations to expose new relations between these statements in the corpus, indicating which formations are dominant and analyzing how certain formations relate to other discursive formations in texts. Baudrillard’s theory on representation helps me identify and analyze problematic and paradoxical presuppositions and structures in the texts. I will now apply these theories to the corpus.

⁷⁵ (Schäfer 2011) p. 29-30

⁷⁶ (The Economist 2013)

Anonymous, the Economist: “The power of truth as a tool for solving society’s problems could be lastingly reduced.”⁷⁷

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

I will initiate this analysis by defining the corpus’ ideological starting point. The title quote indicates that the anonymous author perceives truth as a cure for society’s problems. ‘The truth’ is hereby constructed to be a fixed object; an objective and tangible tool that can be used to ‘cure’ society’s diseases; a tool that works independently from social, political and economic factors. Upon analyzing the corpus, the positivistic belief that there is – or at least should be – a fixed universal truth is a dominantly present discursive formation.

The most critical position with regard to ‘truth’ is held by the Economist. The anonymous author discusses institutions such as the church, schools, science, the media and government as *producing* and implementing truths. Hereby, he or she suggests that ‘the truth’ may not necessarily be a representation of basic reality but that ‘truth’ can be fabricated. The article addresses the issue that a truth producing infrastructure is dangerous, as it is sensitive to corruption and abuse. We can find a recent example of this corruption and abuse. In January the Whitehouse Press Secretary held a monologue urging the press not to write ‘this’ version of the truth (the relatively small crowd Trump’s inauguration drew) but ‘that’ truth (it was the biggest crowd ever to have witnessed an inauguration). The spokesman made unfounded accusations of falsity – undermining the media’s representation (or dissimulation) – and instead provided an alternative reality based on fabricated signs which he urged to be implemented as ‘the truth.’⁷⁸ The fabrication of signs was supposed to mask the absence of any referent to a real in the story of the Press Secretary. This structured fabrication of truth can be seen as Baudrillard’s third phase *simulation* of reality. The Economist’s statements with regard to the existence of a fixed truth are more critical than other articles in the corpus. However, we can find a contradicting tension within its article, as the title of the closing paragraph reads “*The truth is out there;*” a truth hidden under fabricated truths. In the article journalists and new gatekeepers alike are urged to find the truth – as a static noun –describing the difficulties these parties might encounter with regard to the competitive marketplace and new technologies in achieving to find the truth. Other articles such as the NYT piece by Rutenberg are more straightforward with regard to their positivist position. Rutenberg’s view on truth is clear, stating that a certain debate “(...) *appeared to buy into the notion that truth is relative in a time when that notion has to finally go away.*”

Davies’ article criticizes the way truth may now be seen as a probability, much like the weather forecast predicting the chance of rainfall and sun, after which he asks; “*Is it possible to live in a world of data but not facts?*” Davies continues to express an anxiety for a world in which we can calculate the percentage of

⁷⁷ (The Economist 2016)

⁷⁸ (Helsel 2017)

certainty in which we know something to occur, instead of using numbers to achieve consensus over the facts that shape our reality. In other words, Davies expresses the need to know whether something is black or white, rather than having the knowledge of how light or dark gray something is. He refers to us previously being in a society of stand-alone facts, an idea that literally resonates in five out of six articles, with the other making more careful though likeminded claims on our previous state as a society of facts. Davies describes; *“Rather than sit coolly outside the fray of political argument, facts are now one of the main rhetorical weapons within it.”* Lapowsky states; *“And that makes political discourse difficult, because as tough as political cooperation has ever been, it’s that much harder when two sides can’t agree on even a basic set of facts.”* Viner, for instance, states that we are now *“(…) ushering into an era where everyone has their own facts,”* and claiming that before, *“We all shared a common set of facts.”* The corpus assumes a trend of ‘truthiness’ among the public. As Viner puts it; *“When a fact begins to resemble whatever you feel is true, it becomes very difficult for anyone to tell the difference between facts that are true and “facts” that are not.”* The author of the Economist defines truthiness as ideas which *“feel right”* or *“should be true.”* The corpus is unanimous in nostalgically stating that even though facts did not always resemble the truth, at least they provided a basic reality we all agreed on. A ‘pre-truthiness’ time. In other words; the corpus argues that we used to have truth and now this truth is being disrupted.

Davies discusses how *“What was new (with the birth of accounting) was that it presented a type of truth that could apparently stand alone, without requiring any interpretation or faith on the part of the person reading it.”* Baudrillard criticized this logocentric illusion of having signs (in this case numbers and text) that represent reality perfectly – signs as ‘stand alone facts.’ As I argued in the previous chapter, representation – using signs to portray ‘reality’ – always mask and pervert. Therefore, our reality and our truth is dependent on the construction of signs we are exposed to, and impose on ourselves. Accordingly, no two realities or truths can ever be the same, and therefore ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ can never be completely represented (by signs). In order to substantiate my argument, I will present a post-truth politics discourse related case.

On Slate, Daniel Engber expresses his surprise that Trump is not universally seen as a racist.^{79 80} In November 2016, the popular Humans of New York blog featured an interview with a woman who argued; ***“Don’t get me wrong. I want everyone to get along. And I don’t want to sound racist. But they’re coming into our country. If you ask me, that makes them racist.”***⁸¹ Social scientist Forscher found that in research, racism or prejudice is often treated as something ‘implicit and unconscious’ instead of ‘malicious and intentional,’ creating a gap of understanding between the researcher and the public.⁸² Therefore, the exemplified woman might hold a different constructed perception of racism, reality and truth compared to – for instance – Daniel Engber. This case illustrates that knowledge and language is fluid and constructed, and that therefore, one can never fully establish a universal logocentric and positivist truth, only dominant ideologies. Therefore, the following chapter is dedicated to uncovering which structures condition – and are conditioned by – the corpus logocentric and positivist ideology.

⁷⁹ (Engber 2016)

⁸⁰ Concerning Mexican immigrants, Trump states; *“They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”* (Forscher 2015)

⁸¹ (HONY 2016)

⁸² (Forscher 2015)

William Davies: **“Facts hold a sacred place in western liberal democracies. Whenever democracy seems to be going awry, when voters are manipulated or politicians are ducking questions, we turn to facts for salvation.”**⁸³

A TRUTH PRODUCING STRUCTURE

In this chapter I will uncover which structures condition – and are conditioned by – the corpus’ logocentric ideology. The corpus’ positivist and logocentric ideology can be retraced to the journalistic code, which urges journalists to ‘find the truth and report it.’ Viner, for instance, states that the very reason news organizations exist is *“to find things out and tell readers the truth – to report, report, report.”* Viner’s quote insinuates that ‘the truth’ and ‘reality’ can be reported and represented. More specifically, I identified a recursive discursive formation with regard to the role of institutionalized journalism as the pillar of the public sphere. The Economist states that *“Post-truth politics is made possible by two threats to the public sphere: a loss of trust in institutions that support its infrastructure and deep changes in the way knowledge of the world reaches the public.”* In line with Viner and the Economist, Bell argues that *“Something really dramatic is happening to our media landscape, the public sphere, and our journalism industry.”* Additionally, Viner ascribes to Habermas’ claim of ‘changing journalistic standards’ as a threat to the public sphere. Viner, Bell and the Economist explicitly mention the public sphere – its existence an assumed universal truth – while presupposing a certain conception of the (former) public sphere as something which needs saving. What appears to be disrupted is the corpus’ idea of the public sphere and its pillar; journalism.

Authors in the corpus speak of *“keeping the national conversation honest,”*⁸⁴ *“defending traditional news values”* and *“fighting for a public space”*.⁸⁵ Bell states that *“Serious, public-interest journalism is demanding, and there is more of a need for it than ever. It helps keep the powerful honest; it helps people make sense of the world and their place in it.”* **The corpus paints a romanticized picture of journalism, democracy and the ‘public sphere,’ in which the public sphere is portrayed as a truth producing structure.** After all, the corpus claims that the public sphere and its institutionalized journalism set out to keep the ‘powerful’ and the ‘national conversation’ honest; in line with ‘the truth.’ Accordingly, the public sphere would be a tool, a tool spreading the corpus’ logocentric and positivist conception of truth. However, there is tension between the statement and the enunciation. **On the one hand journalistic representation is seen as a tool for ‘objectively’ enforcing the ‘truth’ through the public sphere, on the other hand the corpus makes strong ideological claims on what this truth should be.**

According to Thompson, ideology mainly functions through fragmentation, legitimation, dissimulation, unification and reification.⁸⁶ Thompson partially disagrees with Marx’ perception of ideology by arguing that

⁸³ (Davies 2016)

⁸⁴ (Rutenberg 2016)

⁸⁵ (Viner 2016)

⁸⁶ (Thompson 1990) p. Introduction

ideology does not necessarily operate by masking social relations or that it sustains class power; to Thompson ideology can be used to serve – establish or sustain – any form of domination. It is thus not merely the ‘elite’ or ‘establishment’ that can utilize an ideology to achieve domination.⁸⁷ Interestingly, Thompsons’ means of enforcing an ideology can be retraced in the corpus. The corpus’ positivist claim is **legitimated** by insinuating that there are threats to the assumed public sphere, a sphere whose disruption will cause people to become clueless with regard to the truth and their place in the world. In order to morally defend the values of the public sphere, their claims to truth must be legitimized. Accordingly, the corpus is prone to **unification**, as the following quotes illustrate. “(...) *what kind of a news and information society we want to create,*”⁸⁸ “*Tomorrow, we’ll elect the leader of the free world, and well, we can’t say that technology has exactly made it easy over these last truly grueling 19 months,*”⁸⁹ “*We must also address the new power dynamics that these changes have created*”⁹⁰ and “*how are we to achieve any consensus on the nature of social, economic and environmental problems.*”⁹¹ It is unclear to whom this ‘we’ refers, but it seems to be focused at ‘the public,’ as well as fellow journalists. The **reification** of ideology can be retraced in naturalization, as the corpus addresses the public sphere and its ideals as universal. **Dissimulation** then finds its roots in displacement.⁹² Dissatisfied with the current perceived state of the public sphere, the corpus shifts the blame to other factors; technology, commercialization and truthiness. However, what are the presuppositions the corpus’ makes with regard to their idealized conception of the public sphere, and can these presuppositions be rendered paradoxical, circular or problematic?

Emily Bell: “**We also need to know that all public speech and expression will be treated transparently, even if they cannot be treated equally. This is a basic requirement for a functioning democracy.**”⁹³

THE ILLUSION OF HABERMAS’ IDEAL

In this chapter I will criticize the corpus’ presuppositions about the public sphere. Davies states that “*Whenever democracy seems to be going awry, when voters are manipulated or politicians are ducking questions, we turn to facts for salvation.*” Viner articulates that “*Facts and reliable information are essential for the functioning of democracy,*” reflected by Bells’ “*(...) This is a basic requirement for a functioning democracy.*” It is as if the corpus presupposes that as long as the public sphere is perfectly maintained and reinforced, we will be funneled towards a universal ‘truth.’ For, they argue, if journalists report the truth, people can be kept honest, in line with this truth, and made aware of a logocentrally described basic reality, as well as their place within it. By presenting ‘democracy’ and ‘the public sphere’ as being under attack, the corpus obscures that democracy and

⁸⁷ (Thompson 1990) p. Introduction

⁸⁸ (Bell 2016)

⁸⁹ (Lapowsky, The 2016 Election Exposes The Very, Very Dark Side Of Tech 2016)

⁹⁰ (Viner 2016)

⁹¹ (Davies 2016)

⁹² (Janks 2010) n.p, chapter: ‘Thompson’s modes of ideology.’

⁹³ (Bell 2016)

the public sphere have never been ideal to begin with. Therefore, I will analyze the problematic presupposition that there is a public sphere, which in its 'ideal state' functions as a truth producing structure.

In the title quote Bell seems to fully accept that not all public speech and expression can be treated equally. **Why would one remark be treated this way and another remark be treated that way; because of social status, power relations, criminal history or perhaps even gender? Would this then insinuate that not just public speech but additionally not all public can be treated equally?**

According to Jürgen Habermas, three institutional criteria condition the functioning of a public sphere and by that, democracy. These criteria prescribe that a public sphere must be inclusive and that it should have a 'disregard for social status,' while enabling the development of new ways of critically questioning culture (as culture itself is now being produced as a commodity).⁹⁴ Habermas emphasized that a public sphere which excluded specific groups would be no public sphere at all.⁹⁵ However, at the time Habermas situates his model, the bourgeois who gathered in tearooms and coffeehouses – as the first model of the public sphere which developed on the basis of the literary sphere – existed exclusively out of white males. The bourgeois – as being the middle or upper (social) class – can be defined as educated, of 'respectable' descent and in possession of land. Among many, Nancy Fraser criticized Habermas' romanticized conception of the 'bourgeois public sphere,' arguing that actually it had been constituted by "a number of significant exclusions."⁹⁶ These exclusions are based on – among others – gender, social status and ethnicity, resulting in white bourgeois men seeing themselves as a 'universal class,' emphasizing their 'fitness to govern.' Fraser exemplifies that the bourgeois public sphere per definition excluded women, criminals, the poor, the proletariat, migrants and slaves. Habermas maintains that even though he might have underestimated the significance of the exclusion, this critique does not mean that he was completely mistaken in his idea of a transformation of the liberal bourgeois public sphere into a model of modern mass society in the social welfare state.⁹⁷

In 'On Society and Politics,' Habermas argues that after revolutions such as the Chartist movement in the UK and the February revolution in France it was no longer obvious to people that 'the public' was restricted to a social class. With the spread of the press and propaganda *the public* was now extended *beyond* the bourgeois.⁹⁸ Habermas states that it was no longer merely the wealthy, land-owning men who defined or coerced laws, now laws formed under 'the pressure of the street' were common instead.⁹⁹ Habermas uses the expansion of 'the public' to describe the demise of his ideal bourgeois public sphere, as now even uneducated proletariat was included in 'the public.' The public sphere's inclusivity, when reasoning according to Habermas' theory, continues to grow. Take for instance the decades of abolitionist, suffragette, civil rights and LGBT movements fighting against exclusion and prejudice, justification, cultural values and social norms. Fighting for the rights to vote, the power to take part in the economic marketplace and the power to, indeed, take part in 'rational' debates on politics with people of all social classes.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, several issues have transitioned

⁹⁴ (J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* 1989) p. 35-38

⁹⁵ (J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* 1989) p.85

⁹⁶ (Fraser 1990) p. 59-61

⁹⁷ (Dahlgren 1995) p.10-13

⁹⁸ (J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* 1989) p.235

⁹⁹ (J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* 1989) p.235

¹⁰⁰ (Fraser 1990) p. 59-61

form the private to the public domain, such as domestic violence and heteronormativity.¹⁰¹ How can one compare Habermas' ideal of the public sphere – describing a relatively small homogeneous group of people – to a sphere which is actually inclusive to a majority? More and more interest groups with differentiating issues and perspectives on reality have formed within the 'public sphere,' resulting in contestations rather than consensuses. Therefore, an inclusive public sphere promotes the co-existence of multiple perceptions of 'truth,' rather than the enforcement of a universal truth. **Accordingly, the corpus' ideal of a public sphere – as a truth producing structure – only works when it is based on exclusion, confined to limited groups which share certain interests or truths; an undesirable situation in modern democracy.** Therefore, the corpus' presupposition that in its ideal situation, the public sphere is a truth producing structure, is not just problematic, it is paradoxical.

In assuming that the current state of politics in the US and the UK is caused by a disruption of the public sphere the corpus risks not critically analyzing the issues that enable the success of unconventional politicians. An example of this risk is the journalistic shock concerning the election of Trump, calling it *"the most improbable political victories in modern US history."*¹⁰² Reflections on the journalistic coverage of the 2016 election quickly came flooding in, such as the following quoted articles which all appeared on the morning after the election. The New York Times states that *"an air of improbability trailed (Trump's) campaign, to the detriment of those who dismissed his angry message, his improvisational style and his appeal to disillusioned voters"* and *"Mr. Trump was widely underestimated as a candidate."*¹⁰³ Slate's Isaac Chotiner reflects; *"He occasionally stood up to defend democratic values from his encroachments, but we were unsurprisingly if indefensibly quicker to counter his attacks on freedom of the press than on other liberties,"* claiming that this is *"also the opinion of many of my colleagues at Slate and of journalists I know at other publications."*¹⁰⁴ However, this is not the first time journalists have refrained from seeing the depths in which our political, economic and social structures are met with dissatisfaction.

Journalist Dorothy Thompson, who called Hitler a man of 'startling insignificance' in 1928,¹⁰⁵ reflected on her misjudgment in 1935, stating; *"No people ever recognize their dictator in advance. He never stands for election on the platform of dictatorship. He always represents himself as the instrument of Incorporated National Will. When our dictator turns up you can depend on it that he will be one of the boys, and he will stand for everything traditionally American."*¹⁰⁶ Thompson's foresight with regard to politician who claim to be the 'the instrument of incorporated free will' rings a populist bell. Take for instance President Trump claiming that he will take the power away from the Washington elite and give it to 'the people.'¹⁰⁷

Populism is a deceptively 'self evident' and often used term, while its specific perception and definition (like most terms) is up to debate. Jan-Werner Müller, politics professor at the University of Princeton, is currently doing extensive research on populism at the university of Vienna. In an interview with Dutch

¹⁰¹ (Fraser 1990) p. 70-72

¹⁰² (Roberts, et al. 2016)

¹⁰³ (Fregenhimer and Barbaro 2016)

¹⁰⁴ (Chotiner 2016)

¹⁰⁵ (Broich 2016)

¹⁰⁶ (Thomas 2006) p.170-171

¹⁰⁷ (Shabad 2017)

Newspaper *De Trouw* Müller explains that populism is about method, not about content. For instance, Müller found in the US, in contrast to Europe where populism is often associated with the political 'right', populism is historically associated with the political 'left.' As its core characteristic populism demands a moral Monopoly when it comes to representing 'the people,' doing all that they can to delegitimize their opponents. Müller clarifies that the antidemocratic aspect of populism is its anti-pluralistic tendencies; threatening the rights to freedom of speech, assembly and association. Crucially, Müller demands that populists should not be excluded from public debate, as this would only strengthen their argument that 'the elite' is not perceptive to the voice of 'the people.' The professor emphasizes the importance of communicating with populists, stating that talking *with* populists is something different than talking *like* populists.¹⁰⁸ Talking about *left* and *right*, *them* and *us*, *true* and *false*, for instance, is what constitutes the division.¹⁰⁹

We can direct Müller's insight to the corpus; by prescribing a positivist notion of truth to a discourse, only one argument in a discussion (or discourse) can be true. **By escalating the true/false dichotomy the anti-pluralistic tone of debate is stimulated; a climate in which populists thrive.** For instance, Trump has structurally placed journalists in a fenced environment at his rallies, chanting "*do we hate the media?*" followed by a cheering 'yes we do!' from the public. Concerning journalists, he states; "*They are terrible. Honestly, and I don't mean all, but I mean like 75, 80 percent. And they know it, they know.*"¹¹⁰ In an environment in which something is either true or false, black or white, a politician such as Trump is able to structurally and successfully undermine representation. In line with Baudrillard's theory on simulation we can explain Trump's actions as him claiming that (other than his own) 'representation,'¹¹¹ – with all its limitations – all representation is merely an elitist simulacrum. Accordingly, it is not the loss of one universal 'truth' which should be feared. Instead, it is the funneling towards *one* truth which should be feared.

Katherine Viner: **"The increasing prevalence of this approach suggests that we are in the midst of a fundamental change in the values of journalism – a consumerist shift."**¹¹²

SELLING OUT ON TRUTH

In this chapter I will introduce the corpus' obscuring and diverting conclusion that technology (or new media) is disrupting the truth. In line with recent Habermas, the corpus describes consumerism and commercialism as disrupting the values of journalism.¹¹³ Disrupting commercialism is a quality mainly ascribed to 'new gatekeepers.' The Economist author refers to the competitive marketplace, of which is claimed that the economic basis is crumbling, stating that abusing gatekeeping power was – and will always be – tempting. Bell states in the CJR; "*We are seeing massive changes in control, and finance, putting the future of our publishing*

¹⁰⁸ (Becker and Müller 2017)

¹⁰⁹ (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 1976) p. 61-64

¹¹⁰ (Rutz 2016)

¹¹¹ Which, as we discussed in Baudrillard's theory on simulation, is actually a dissimulation or simulation.

¹¹² (Viner 2016)

¹¹³ (J. Habermas, *How to save the quality press?* 2007)

ecosystem into the hands of a few, who now control the destiny of the many.” Dean described this commodification of information as communicative capitalism. However, assuming communicative capitalism is a recently developed trend is providing the corpus with a misguided conception of journalistic, economical, political and social structures. Therefore, the corpus critiquing new media for doing exactly what *they* have done for centuries is just too easy a way out.

Voices in the corpus ponder over renewing business models, reinstating the old gatekeepers and regulating Facebook in order to moderate the truth. What the corpus does not do however is place the subjects they label the result of ‘unfit gatekeeping’ within a wider context of underlying problematic structures and presuppositions which have always plagued journalism and politics. The corpus focusses on the technology and business models of mediation, rather than issues that enable the mediated messages. Presented solutions with regard to ‘post-truth’ are therefore limited to fit within confined and comfortable structures. For instance, solutions are found in regulating gatekeepers, but nobody seems to enquire into how the public actually wants their gatekeepers to act, and how they wish to receive and perceive their news. Take for instance Rutenberg’s claim; *“That’s why people who care about the truth — citizens, journalists and, let’s hope, social media giants like Facebook, too — will have to come up with a solution to this informational nihilism, fast.”* Even Eli Pariser – founding critic of the filter bubble – admits to clicking on like-minded articles more often than on opposing ones. **Therefore, I argue that it is shortsighted to simply assume that the public wants the truth, or that certain gatekeepers should decide which truths the public should consume.**¹¹⁴ Accordingly, let us continue to analyze how the corpus portrays new gatekeepers as ‘disrupting the truth.’

Emily Bell: **“The four horsemen of the apocalypse: Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon (five if you count Microsoft) are engaged in a prolonged and torrid war over whose technologies, platforms, and even ideologies will win.”**¹¹⁵

DIVERSION TECHNIQUES

In this chapter I will argue that seeing technology as disrupting the truth, within the framework of the public sphere as a truth producing structure, is problematic and paradoxical. The corpus recursively blames ‘new gatekeepers’ and their technologies and business models for enabling an assumed ‘disruption of the truth.’ More specifically, the corpus eschatologically blames ‘the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,’ their composition ranging from article to article but always including at least Google and Facebook. As Davies defines it; *“(old) gatekeepers would be in much less trouble without the second big factor in post-truth politics: the internet and the services it has spawned (new gatekeepers).”* The Economist quotes an *“influential conservative radio-show host”* who claimed to regret eliminating the gatekeepers – the established press – as now people can no longer say; look, here are the facts! This view is resonated by Viner who states that *“The decline of the gatekeepers has*

¹¹⁴ (Pariser, 2011) n.p, Introduction

¹¹⁵ (Bell 2016)

given Trump space to raise formerly taboo subjects (...) as well as, more obviously, allowing his outrageous lies to flourish.” Within the corpus, defining new gatekeepers as being a threats to the gatekeepers of old is not only based a critique on ‘new’ business models, but also on a ‘new’ editorial policy; identified as the idea of the ‘filter bubble.’

The Economist states that “*The tendency of netizens to form self-contained groups is strengthened by what Eli Pariser, an internet activist, identified five years ago as the “filter bubble”.*” Davies states that “*Individuals have growing opportunities to shape their media consumption around their own opinions and prejudices, and populist leaders are ready to encourage them.*” According to Pariser Facebook and Google have contributed to the development of personalized filter bubbles in which the media dictates what we see based on data-laden cookies. These personalized media give people what they have programmed algorithms to assume their users *want*, instead of giving people what a human editor has decided they *need to hear*.¹¹⁶

Without denying that we are living in personalized media environments, some remarks can be made. Viner argues that “*Publications curated by editors have in many cases been replaced by a stream of information chosen by friends, contacts and family, processed by secret algorithms.*” For instance, Viner states that “*When Eli Pariser, the co-founder of Upworthy, coined the term “filter bubble” in 2011, he was talking about how the personalised web (...) means that we are less likely to be exposed to information that challenges us or broadens our worldview, and less likely to encounter facts that disprove false information that others have shared.*” However, we are *less likely* to encounter facts that disprove false information *compared to what?* Previously, were we not subscribed to newspapers whose ideological or religious framework we supported – such as seen in the former pillarization of the Dutch public news system? Were we less sensitive to what people we looked up to – friends, teachers or acquaintances – told us? Were we not in any way being indoctrinated by our parents, the church or the state? **Accordingly, a recent research effort by the university of Amsterdam found that we do not (yet) have the right benchmarks to measure how these ‘filter bubbles’ would compare to personalized environments created before the rise of the internet.**¹¹⁷

Bell claims that “*We are handing the controls of important parts of our public and private lives to a very small number of people, who are unelected and unaccountable.*” **Social networking site staff might not be electable, but – exceptions aside – neither are editors.** Reflecting back on the public sphere; Habermas states that no matter how exclusive the public might have been, it always understood itself within a more inclusive public of private people – functioning as its bourgeois *representation* or mouthpiece. In this claim Habermas presupposes that the bourgeois comprehends the needs and desires of the more inclusive public of private people.¹¹⁸ The generalizing risk of such assumed ‘representation’ is exemplified by the following argument from 1914; ‘women should not vote, as they will only vote the same as men, there is no added value.’¹¹⁹ With regard to this kind of representation in the corpus, paradoxical standards seem to apply; new gatekeepers must all of a sudden be elected, where old gatekeepers can simply demand their position back without a regard for public opinion. This tension between the statement and its enunciation illustrates that the corpus only deems a

¹¹⁶ (Pariser 2011) n.p, Introduction

¹¹⁷ (Zuiderveen and Trilling 2016) p.7

¹¹⁸ (J. Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society 1962) p. 37-38

¹¹⁹ (Goodwin 1914)

public's opinion desirable when it suits them. Again, the corpus is treading in the footsteps of populism, assuming that they are the only ones who know what the public (should) want, and what their truth should be.

A recent study shows that the corpus' ideal of reinstating the gatekeepers of old is not exactly in line with public opinion. The annual trust monitor performed by public relations company Edelman found that in the UK, 59 percent of the people would trust a search engine over a human editor. Additionally, Edelman found that in the UK, 73 percent would trust an individual over an institution.¹²⁰ This means people allow their neighbors, family and friends to shape their worldview, despite what they see in the media or hear in school. Accordingly, people live in socially curated *bubbles*, if you will.

The PEW research center, a renowned nonpartisan and nonprofit research center, found that of the 18 to 29 year-olds, 35 percent saw social media as the most helpful source to learn about the – then – upcoming elections, followed by news websites and cable TV. Of this age group, 55 percent voted Clinton, versus 37 percent who voted Trump. In contrast, 53 percent of the age group 65 years and older voted Trump, versus 45 percent who voted Clinton. PEW research center found that exactly 1 percent of this age group found social media to be the most helpful source of political orientation, against 43 percent who found cable TV most helpful, followed by network nightly news and local TV. **In fact, all age groups (30–49, 50–64 and 65+) except the age group 18 – 29 found cable TV to be the most helpful source for political information.**^{121 122} Still, journalists processed their shock about the election of Trump by pointing the finger at social media, with headlines reading; *“Here’s How Facebook Actually Won Trump the Presidency,”*¹²³ *“Facebook’s failure: did fake news and polarized politics get Trump elected?”*¹²⁴ and *“How Facebook Helped Donald Trump Become President,”*¹²⁵ while in fact, cable news seems to be a much more appropriate target. Accordingly, it is not self-evident to accuse online gatekeepers and assumed filter bubbles of ‘disrupting the truth’ and of causing populist shifts in public political behavior. Therefore, why point the finger at technology?

Jim Rutenberg: **“Truth doesn’t need arbiters. It needs defenders.”**

A PANICK STRICKEN PRODUCTION OF THE REAL

In this chapter I will argue that the corpus’ focus on technology as a disruption of the truth is a diversion from their problematic ideological presuppositions concerning the public sphere and journalism. Habermas claims that press and propaganda cause a metamorphosis of the composition of the public; it grows more inclusive.¹²⁶ In line with Habermas, the corpus describes the rise of press and propaganda to cause a metamorphosis of the public. Currently, however, the corpus perceives this metamorphosis not as a metamorphosis of the composition of the public but a metamorphosis of the reasoning of the public (through a trend of truthiness and the devaluations of facts). The corpus sees new gatekeepers as disrupting the public

¹²⁰ (Edelman 2017)

¹²¹ (CNN 2016)

¹²² (Gottfried, et al. 2016)

¹²³ (Lapowsky, Here’s How Facebook Actually Won Trump the Presidency 2016)

¹²⁴ (Solon 2016)

¹²⁵ (Olson 2016)

¹²⁶ (J. Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society 1989) p. 54-56

sphere, paradoxically insinuating that only *now*, information is being commodified and media environments are being personalized. To the corpus, a disruption of the public sphere – and journalism as its pillar – equals a disruption of the truth. In presupposing that the truth is disrupted, or at least presupposing that before we had ‘truth,’ the corpus assumes that ‘the real is no longer what it used to be.’ Accordingly, the corpus can argue that shifts in public and political behavior are not the result of social, political or economic constructions, but of a ‘disruption of the truth.’ The effects of the corpus losing their grip on the *real* is best explained by Baudrillard in ‘Simulacra and Simulations:’ ***“When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production. This is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us: a strategy of the real, neo-real and hyperreal, whose universal double is a strategy of deterrence.”***¹²⁷

It is not merely the established media who find that their real is no longer being what is used to be; to media such as Breitbart News the real is also no longer what it used to be. Such media find themselves in a media environment in which the established press is structurally undermined. The trend we are seeing is multi-faceted nostalgia. Journalists as included in our corpus are nostalgic for a (fictional) time in which there was ‘a shared set of facts,’ when ‘journalism was still honest’ and when ‘democracy was still fair and balanced.’ In return, media such as Breitbart seems nostalgic for a (fictional) time when ‘America (or Britain) was still great.’ The panic-stricken production and escalation of the real is seen on both sides of the spectrum. In one reality there is a plethora of protest marches in favor of women rights and fair immigration policies, a 24-hour fact-checking news cycle on the fiction spread by the president(s administration) and a cry for a rehabilitation of the public sphere. In the other reality, the public sphere is finally starting to operate accordingly, a time in which the ‘real’ truth is excavated under a pile of political rubble. Both realities have something in common; they are strategic simulations of reality that – by escalating their *production* of the real through manufactured signs such as articles and news items – are meant to reinforce their lost (or desired) real.

We have established that news and communication has always been a commodity and that, therefore, it has always been constituted by certain capital. This capital however, has been marketed in the moral ideology of the public sphere. To clarify Baudrillard quotes Bourdieu; *“capital, which is immoral and unscrupulous, can only function behind a moral superstructure, and whoever regenerates this public morality spontaneously furthers the order of capital.”*¹²⁸ Journalism needs their moral superstructure, therefore, the journalistic discourse is focused on reinstating their morality and in condemning the current journalistic climate. They not only need their public to believe it, they need to believe it themselves. Baudrillard exemplifies his idea by describing the way Nixon’s ‘Watergate’ was made out to be a scandal.¹²⁹ By occasionally revealing lies and marketing presidential ‘missteps’ as scandalous, the readership’s idea that ‘this is not the way our government

¹²⁷ (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations 1992) p.153

¹²⁸ (Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations 1992) p. 154-155

¹²⁹ (Baudrillard, Strategy of the Real 1992) p. 155

usually functions' is strengthened or reinforced. Therefore, calling out Facebook for commodifying news and communication and creating filter bubbles, reinforces the corpus' false nostalgic conception that '*this* is not the way journalism (and the public sphere) usually functions.' Accordingly, by focusing on technology as 'disrupting the truth,' the corpus is able to reinforce their presuppositions conditioning their circular positivist and logocentric ideology.

CONCLUSION

The journalistic post-truth politics discourse is analyzed by deconstructing a selection of six articles from the discourse. As a result, it can be concluded that the journalistic post-truth politics discourse is conditioned by paradoxical presuppositions about representation, journalism and the public sphere. No matter how popular the post-truth politics argument might be, it is highly problematic, as I will break down in this conclusion.

Firstly, the discourse is structured by deep-rooted presuppositions about the (existence of the) public sphere, and the role of journalism within this sphere. The discourse assumes that the public sphere—in its ideal state—is a truth producing structure. However, the ideal of the public sphere is based on exclusivity rather than inclusivity. With more and more interest groups entering the ‘public sphere’ throughout time, the amount of constructed realities within such a public sphere increases. Such a public sphere would promote contestations rather than consensuses. Having an inclusive public sphere promotes the co-existence of multiple perceptions of ‘truth,’ rather than the enforcement of a universal truth. Accordingly, the discourse’s ideal of a public sphere—as a truth producing structure—only works when it is based on exclusion; an undesirable situation in modern democracy. Therefore, the discourse’s presupposition that in its ideal situation, the public sphere is a truth producing structure, is not just problematic, it is paradoxical. For, having a truth producing public sphere would be highly undesirable. It can therefore be questioned if the public sphere is even a useful tool to think with at all.

Secondly, the discourse is conditioned by the idea that journalists can wholly represent the truth. The logocentric presumption that journalists can represent ‘basic reality’ by following the rules of a journalistic code results in paradoxical expectations. What we expect from journalists, and what they expect of themselves, can not be done. No one can ever represent a basic reality, as outside of discourse (through representation and simulation) there is no reality; our reality is (socially) constructed. As the discourse’s nostalgic conception of journalism is being disrupted, morality in journalism needs to be reinstated. The journalists cry foul at new media, mostly for doing exactly what they have done for years; creating personalized media environments and producing news and communication as a commodity. I found that, for example, during the last US elections, cable news was a far greater political opinionating influence than new media. This would imply that the discourse assumes causality in defining relations between new media and the increase of populism or in a change in the political climate, rather than critically analyzing these media. In contrast to the analyzed articles I have defined *new* relations in the discourse, which brings me to my next point. In the discourse there is a great pressure on the truth as being positivist, and logocentrically representable. If there is only one truth, this would inevitably mean that in every argument, one side is always ‘false.’ Instead of deeming politic such as Trumps presidential campaign and the Brexit Referendum ‘post-truth’ or ‘fake,’ one could critically examine which issues enabled these politics to begin with. The journalistic shock concerning the election of Trump indicates just how badly journalists have been occupied with simulating or dissimulating reality as they perceive it to be. Accordingly, paradoxically, in its claim on truth, the journalists’ post-truth politics discourse inherently produces what it forbids: an escalation of the true/false dichotomy (in the media), creating an environment in which populists thrive.

RECOMMENDATION

I urge the reader to take this analysis as the first step to free popular discourses such as the 'post-truth politics' discourse from the vicious circle which confirms that the idea of having one truth is realistic, or, for that matter, desirable. It is important to research popular and self-confirming discourses, as I proved that popular discourses can be conditioned by – and through the performativity of language enforce – severely problematic presuppositions about truth and reality. The post-truth politics discourse starts at the assumed relation between new media and 'post-truth politics,' instead of critically analyzing and researching media itself. For instance, the discourse suggests that new media's editors should be democratically chosen, diverting attention from the fact that editors of traditional media are not democratically chosen either. The discourse demands a universal truth, but has strong ideological claims on what (and whose) truth this should be. To the discourse, having an exclusive 'public sphere' would be more beneficial in their quest for achieving (their) universal truth, than having an inclusive 'public sphere' would be. Accordingly, a question which I would recommend for further research is; do discourses comparable to the journalistic post-truth politics discourse even prove to desire an inclusive public sphere at all, or do these discourses deem some opinions to be more valuable (or 'equal') than others?

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