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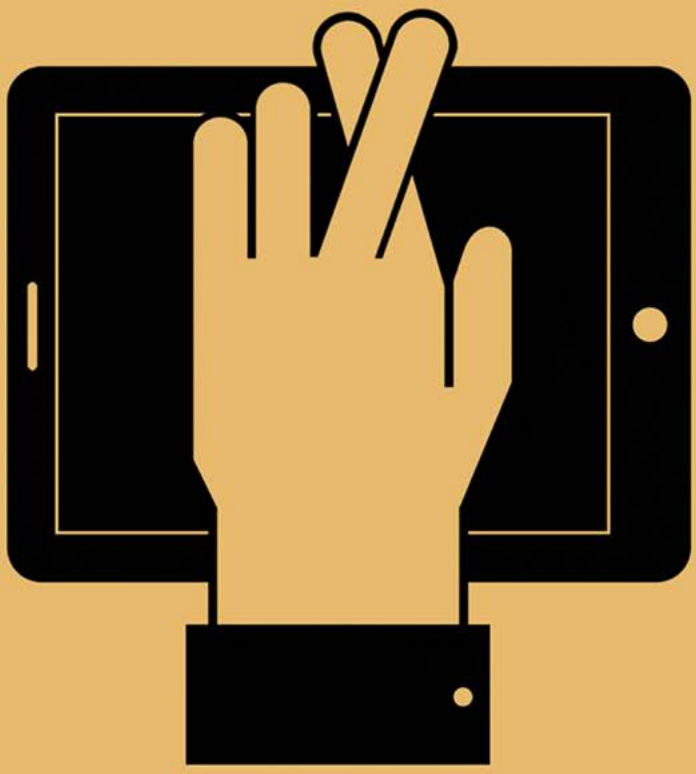

/// A NEW CULTURE OF TRUTH

GUEST EDITORS: FRIEDRICH CAIN, DIETLIND HÜCHTKER,
BERNHARD KLEEBERG, JAN SURMAN

Adres Redakcji /// Editorial Office
Stan Rzeczy, Wydział Socjologii UW, ul. Karowa 18, 00-927 Warszawa
e-mail: redakcja@stanrzeczy.edu.pl
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

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A NEW CULTURE OF TRUTH? ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL EPISTEMOLOGIES SINCE THE 1960S IN CENTRAL, EASTERN, AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

Friedrich Cain
University of Erfurt

Dietlind Hüchtker
University of Vienna

Bernhard Kleeberg
University of Erfurt

Jan Surman
Independent Scholar

Truth has become a fiercely contested subject. Shaped by the experience of insecurity, the first half of the year 2020 has put the process of "truth in the making" on display in conditions of a global pandemic: quite often "In truth we trust" seems to be equated with "In science we trust" (Carolan & Bell 2003). At the same time, the truth people trust in seems to have multiplied: they do not have trust in *the* truth, but in a *particular* truth.

The COVID-19 crisis, which is likely the first globally mediatised health crisis in history, allows us to observe the relations of societies and science in a condensed form. We can spot how "science in the making"[1] is

[1] For the theoretical distinction between "science in the making" and "science already made" see Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar's influential book (1979). Sociologists and historians of science

put under pressure and how modes of scientific reasoning have to be defended against a public need for immediate results and clear-cut, universal solutions. We can see how preliminary results are being widely applied and how competing truths are based on partial data, on outcomes that have not been peer-reviewed,[2] or on work in progress which is mistaken for scientific results. Sometimes the premature acknowledgement of pre-peer-review articles – before their rejection a few weeks later (Rabin & Gabler 2020; Redden 2020) – seems to have paved the way for these new cultures of truth, since what scientists regarded as methodologically faulty almost automatically turned into "truth"[3] for an anti-academic public.

The pandemic has not only abridged the maturation process of scientific information – which now seems to turn immediately into scientific truth – it has also strengthened the expert as the figure who invents, mediates, and formulates *the* truth. Of course, these experts, the subjective faces of pandemic prevention, differ from country to country: for instance, in Germany it was Charité virologist Christian Drosten, in Sweden – the State Epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, in Poland – the Minister of Health, Łukasz Szumowski, and in Russia – the Mayor of Moscow and head of the Working Group of the State Council for the Fight against Coronavirus, Sergey Sobyanin. This list, as incomplete as it is, signals not only a close connection between science and politics, but a close connection between the objective and subjective side of truth, between truth cultures and truth figures: in order to be acknowledged as experts, these physicians, politicians, or apt administrators have to rely on long-standing cultural assumptions about who can be a person of trust at all.[4]

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have long made the connection between the reliability of science and the need not to treat science as a black box but to look at the processes inside it. See, for one of the early claims, Steven Shapin's "Why the Public Ought to Understand Science-in-the-Making" (1992). For studies of the complex processes of drawing and writing, see the works of the research initiative Knowledge in the Making (Hoffmann 2008; Krauthausen & Nasim 2010; Wittmann 2009). On emerging modes of knowledge-making in pandemics, see Lorraine Daston's post (2020).

[2] While many noted White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany's (in)famous statement that "[t]he science should not stand in the way of opening the schools," not many looked into how McEnany substantiated this statement, namely with reference to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*'s paediatric study claiming that the risk from COVID-19 to children is comparable to that of the seasonal flu (see Yeung et al. 2020). The issue of pre-peer-review publications, which began as a way to facilitate the swift exchange of information, is itself worthy of special study.

[3] For instance, in Germany such a conflict arose about the interpretation of reliable data. See the public conflicts between Hendrick Streeck, Alexander Kekulé, and Christian Drosten, which have been described as *Virologen-Streit*.

[4] In the last two examples, Poland and Russia, the opposition also recognised Szumowski and Sobyanin to be "apolitical," at least until the "flattening of the curve" and the relaxation of sanitary regimes. No significant oppositional or scientific counter-experts could be identified.

Thus the most lasting image of the COVID-19 pandemic may not be the grey-red image of the virus currently flooding the social networks. It may well be the image of joint press conferences in which Donald Trump and Anthony Fauci, side by side, represented different cultures of truth: both had their arguments, of better or worse nature, and both aimed their statements at a particular public. Tellingly, Fauci presented scientific information which indicated uncertainty, while Trump presented a populist truth that aimed at providing certainty for his voters in an election year. Both related science to uncertainty, albeit following a different logic and using different rhetoric – Fauci pointed out that science is uncertain by nature; Trump took uncertainty within the scientific community as a justification for questioning scientific credibility.[5] Trump and Fauci obviously represent two opposing cultures of truth: one in which the subject narcissistically believes in his own intellectual power and juxtaposes the elevated common sense of the self-made man with a scientific rationality conceived of as elitist and egotist; the other believing in the power of science. Both figures also stand for two different ways of mediating truth: the politician making short, firm, and decisive statements; the scholar translating scientific incompleteness and uncertainty into widely understandable health instructions. Trump tweets – with the White House staff giving explanations – while Fauci gives long interviews in a language full of what linguists call hedging.[6]

The COVID-19 situation opens up the possibility of studying truth practices as if they were under a burning glass: it highlights strategies of trust- and belief-making; it highlights the role of the media and the public, the role of translation and context, and, last but not least, the role of specific figures who step into the centre of truth-making processes. However, the global fragmentation of truth cultures is older than the pandemic. In several countries, the political parties in power have successfully started to restructure all parts of society as well as the media reporting on it, and they have also started to restructure the sciences and humanities: rearranging legal departments, banning discourses and even specific disciplines, such as gender studies, reorganising university funding, and changing evaluation criteria. And, at the same time, they have started to attack crucial elements of scientific truth regimes. This has massive consequences not only for the

[5] On the history of blurring scientific results as a strategy to question their validity, see Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway's study (2010).

[6] On different ways of hedging between scientists and politicians, see Priya Venkatesan Hays's chapter (2016).

sciences and humanities themselves but for international politics as well, since common epistemological values (truthfulness, reliability, robustness, etc.) and categories (facts, objectivity, etc.) are being questioned that (used to) base consensus-building on the integration of different interests (Reckwitz 2019).

This epistemic constellation needs to be studied from a specific analytical perspective, which is developed in the current issue of *Stan Rzeczy* [State of Affairs]. Instead of re-echoing classic truth theories, we suggest a praxeology of truth, with its parameters of "truth scenes" and "truth figures" (Kleeberg & Suter 2014). With this praxeological approach to "doing truth" we intend to investigate the (situational) settings in which truth is claimed or denied, and to inquire into the subjective consequences of subscribing to or avowing a truth, as well as into the social and political consequences of adhering to "the truth." In this issue, we are thus concerned with the deliberate adherence to truth that has become a very influential tactic in what has been called the "post-truth era." Whereas with reference to the United States and Western Europe this has been diagnosed as a crisis,[7] in post-Soviet Europe it has been analysed as part of an ongoing process of post-Marxist pluralisation, given the lack of a sustainable, democracy-based truth tradition (Grigoryev 2011; Levinson 2004; Roudakova 2017). The destabilisation of familiar epistemologies and the dismissal of established gatekeepers is a global phenomenon with a long history but differing intensities, to which various degrees of scholarly attention have been paid.

This issue is the outcome of various talks and workshops of our research initiative (East) European Epistemologies, founded in Erfurt in 2017. Initially, the initiative aimed to study the contributions to science studies of authors from Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe and to situate them within their political contexts. Starting with consideration of the first half of the twentieth century,[8] the initiative widened its scope to take into account broader social and political phenomena, which also made it possible to look at more recent events, seeing them, however, in a historical, *longue durée* perspective. The texts in this issue trace certain genealogies in an area of the world where negotiating truth has a specific history. Truth discourses have not only been powerful since 1989, but also before that date. Thus, when the Marxist truth regime broke down and Marxism,

[7] For a recent discussion of the crisis of democracy and what it means to be post-truth, see Johan Farkas and Jannick Schou's book (2020).

[8] For a first publication, see the special section "Past and Present of Political Epistemologies of (Eastern) Europe" in *Historyka. Studia Metodologiczne*, vol. 49 (2019).

during the transformation, lost its official monopoly on interpretation, an already ongoing process may solely have been intensified.

We want to focus on the region of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe. The mostly post-socialist countries have not been spared the emergence of new political epistemologies that follow the truth regimes of specific groups. Often, these groups are nationalist, chauvinist, and xenophobic; often the epistemologies are appropriated from abroad, and equally often they emerge as pan-regional ones, or entangled ones. They are produced by private, semi-official, or even governmental brokers, and spread via both traditional media (such as television and newspapers) and new media, such as Facebook, Vkontakte, Twitter, Instagram, or recently TikTok.

In a number of post-Soviet countries, political parties have striven since the 1990s to rearrange the social and media landscape to their liking. Recently, however, this process has also reached institutions that had long and consensually been acknowledged to be non-political and whose autonomy was supposed to guarantee their impartiality in their respective search for truth: the legal system, as well as science and scholarship (compare, e.g., Halmai 2019; Pető 2020; Zoltán et al. 2020). At the same time, crucial elements of modern truth regimes have been questioned – with the abovementioned massive consequences for the sciences and humanities, and for politics as well. What seems to be the severely dystopian nature of modern rationality could be described as a patchwork of epistemic landscapes over which many smaller skirmishes and larger turf wars are being fought.

While activities like art and architecture have long been underscored as media which embody, support, and even produce particular truths about the past, the present, or the future (see, e.g., Groys 1992 [1988]; Petrov 2011), a more recent phenomenon can help visualise the complexity of processes in which adherence to the truth serves social integration: the "Immortal Regiment" (Bessmertniy Polk), which was originally a private initiative and from 2015 has been headed by Vladimir Putin, and the "Return of the Names" (Vozvraŝenie Imën), organised by the Moscow Memorial society, are emotion-based mass events representing two contesting memories of Russia. In the latter event, individuals read out the names of victims of Soviet persecution; in the former, participants march with pictures of relatives involved in the Second World War. Not only is a particular sense of community created but also a historical myth emerges about the genealogy of post-Soviet Russia, which has to deal with crimes of the past or which proudly carries the banner of survivors of the Leningrad siege (Fedor 2017; Smith 2019).

Phenomena like these have been analysed by Ulrich Schmid, who has studied how Russian society is influenced and formed under the media and political conditions of the twenty-first century via "political technology." To this end, he analyses historical concepts of truth in Russian culture, their connections with ideologies, emotions, and historical images, their literary and artistic "fabrication," their media presentation, advertising and PR mechanisms, and the relation between lies and reality (Schmid 2015). His reflections on "truth" as a political medium used by a dictatorial state are convincing, and he makes the comparison with Western democracies, where PR, spin doctors, and ideologies exist as well, but where additional mechanisms of controlling and correcting (and further truth figures) are in place (ibid.: 15). Nevertheless, this brief but fundamental distinction leaves the reader feeling somewhat helpless in the face of the growing dissemination of knowledge and science by the media, populist interpretations of facts, and the rise of populist leaders (see, e.g., Ehlers & Zachmann 2020).

An investigation of this multitude of phenomena needs a new analytical framework. In the first article, Bernhard Kleeberg argues that truth is a social operator and proposes to quit philosophising about it and to start observing the social effects of invoking it, along the lines of a praxeology of truth. Presenting truth scenes and truth figures as basic parameters, the praxeological view regards truth theories as a subject of investigation only if they are part of a group's self-reflection, and not for their definition value. Rather than asking about the form and existence of truth, a praxeology of truth has to dedicate itself to a microanalysis of specific settings and scripts, subjects and virtues, places and practices of doing truth. At the same time, it aims to understand the advocacy of truth as a technique of (identity) politics in order to enable more effective forms of dealing with them. A praxeological approach allows concepts of truth to be historicised in different arenas beyond the East–West dichotomy, or for political systems to be generalised while nevertheless taking differences and contexts into consideration.

Recently, we have seen new truth figures emerge to join classic figures, such as scientists, journalists, or artists. Whistleblowers and debunkers (but also trolls) occur in their very own constellations and dwell in places that appeared during the establishment of Web 2.0. However, the set of truth figures is very dynamic, and the countries of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe are quite illustrative cases as they experienced multiple regimes (and regime changes) during the twentieth century. One very distinct truth figure that rose to prominence during the 1970s was

"the dissident." It could be argued that this figure came to be hollow after the fall of the Soviet Union. However, "the dissident" did not become a completely empty figure as both liberal and populist politics readily appeal to their dissident pasts and reappropriate that past for their rhetoric. New truth scenes have emerged as well: the infamous Stalinist show trials took the cultural technique of confession to its dismal extremes, with far-reaching consequences for the political culture of post-Soviet countries.[9] Truth scenes incorporate a wide range of institutions (e.g., the court, the party, the fact-finding team), sites, or truth spots (Gieryn 2018; the confessional, the laboratory, the street), and practices, techniques, and media (algorithms, rhetoric, the live-stream) which change over time: they emerge, disappear, replace other institutions and practices, and get replaced. It would be a mistake to simply identify the "crisis" of absolute, uniform truth – be it scientific, juridical, journalistic, economic, or political – with the arrival of new media, which provide a multitude of truths. Instead, the problem starts from the assumption that we are witnessing truth competitions.

With their interest in political epistemologies, the contributions to this issue connect to a special issue of *Historyka* (Cain et al. 2019). Yet in focusing on truth, they lead through a variety of truth scenes with different truth figures across different truth regimes, from Stalinist processes to the contemporary #MeToo movement in Polish social media. What unites them is their interest in the specific situations in which truth statements are expressed or contested, accepted or rejected – frequently in connection with a political situation. They demonstrate that current conflicts about truth are more than debates about new truth practices, more than conflicts of interest or an emotional state of affairs; they are about politics, about the establishment of power.

Anna Shor-Chudnovskaya uses a close reading of Veniamin Kaverin's memoir *Epilogue* (1989) and Lydia Chukovskaya's novella *Sofia Petrovna* (late 1930s, first published in 1965) to analyse how the Stalinist Terror of the late 1930s disconnected truth from logical understanding. She retraces how show trials led to confessions made under duress and to the detachment of "the people" from the ruling classes or from "the system," which was perceived as corrupt anyway. The author analyses how personal experiences were connected to truth and lies in different ways and how the protagonists lost the ability to clearly distinguish between them. As she suggests, this had long-standing consequences for political culture and produced

[9] See Anna Shor-Chudnovskaya's article in this issue.

the reluctance of people today in regard to political participation. Political reality lost its connection to logic and evidence and has never regained it.

Andreas Langenohl backs this argument in his analysis of the "imaginary" of state-socialist elections and links it to recently observed phenomena during elections in liberal democracies. These phenomena have been overlooked in many theories of political participation. Using the concept of the "imaginary," he analyses practices of voting as affording truths that lead to the better understanding of societies. He shows the factual heterogeneity of the act of voting in the Soviet Union, where elections were of practical importance, though not in the sense of theories of liberal democracy. He suggests widening the analytical categories for studying liberal elections in order to make sense of attitudes that run counter to classic ideas about voting.

Thari Jungen tells a similar story, in which classic democratic practices, with stable status in academic analysis (e.g., US elections), are destabilised when they are appropriated in order to be twisted. In her account of the manufacture of hoaxes in the small North Macedonian town of Veles, she shows how the purely economic interest of local fake-news producers opened up possibilities for alt-right agendas to outplay the truth, for example, during the 2016 presidential elections in the United States. Jungen points to the critical connection between hoaxes, fakes, commodification, and right-wing appropriation, which has often been underestimated in the academic debate, where memes and similar practices receive more attention. She stresses the ambiguity of fake news' position between popular culture and ideology and defines a hoax as a materialised lie challenging the legitimacy of existing power relations.

Anna Grutza analyses media truth practices in connection with Radio Free Europe (RFE), a broadcasting station which was appreciated for its truthful reporting by its secret listeners in the socialist states. The author focuses on the procedures installed at RFE to ensure the truthfulness of the programme and shows how technology, review and interview processes, collections and connotations (of socialism, democracy, etc.) were intertwined in truth scenes. A news item broadcast by the network was thus the product of various processes by which highly subjective reports were checked for their reliability and gradually turned into facts. In so doing, the atmosphere of objectivity associated with RFE was crucial for debunking the network of lies and the non-information or disinformation of socialist regimes.

Finally, Paweł Bagiński analyses tactics of truth-speaking (or writing) at the time when #MeToo (#JaTeż) went viral in Polish Facebook commentaries (16–20 October 2017). He uses the Foucauldian concepts of parrhesia and confession to understand how female commenters used the social network to counteract the mechanisms of the patriarchal dispositive. He shows how systemic violence against women becomes a topic of truth scenes and how this not only makes the violence visible but also provokes adherents of the dispositive under attack to resort to defence mechanisms. Thus, Bagiński shows the critical importance of social media for making social problems visible, but he also hints at the fragility of newly emerging truth figures.

The articles highlight various practices of making various truths. Shor-Chudnovskaya's and Langenohl's starting point is the Soviet Union. Shor-Chudnovskaya emphasises the new cultures of truth in the political epistemologies of the Stalinist period. Langenohl analyses the voter as a truth figure and voting as a truth-making practice. Grutza, Jungen, and Bagiński study various media as truth spots. While Grutza focuses on the radio and highlights practices of building a truth scene, Jungen and Bagiński concentrate on social-media formats. They analyse the power of aesthetics and language as tools for establishing and evoking a truth. Together, the articles show the changing roles of truth scenes and truth spots and especially emphasise the transformations of political epistemologies.

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/// Friedrich Cain – currently affiliated with the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies of the University of Erfurt, Germany. His research interests cover the history of science and the humanities, as well as historical and political epistemology, with a focus on Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe. He is working at present on a history of science studies in the two German states after 1945. His PhD dissertation, *Wissen im Untergrund. Praxis und Politik klandestiner Forschung im besetzten Polen (1939–1945)*, will be published in 2021, as will be the volume *A New Organon: Science Studies in Interwar Poland* (co-edited with Bernhard Kleeberg).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3078-9933

E-mail: friedrich.cain@uni-erfurt.de

/// Dietlind Hüchtker – professor of historical transregional studies at the Faculty Centre for Transdisciplinary Historical and Cultural Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria. Her research is focused on concepts of space, the history of epistemologies and knowledge, rural history, and gender history. She is co-editor of the journals *WerkstattGeschichte*, *Rural History Yearbook*, and *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie*. Her publications include "Traktoristinnen, Rockstars und der polnische James Dean: Die Performativität popkultureller Zeichen in der Volksrepublik Polen" (2018, in *L'Homme: Europäische Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft*); *Geschichte als Performance. Politische Bewegungen in Galizien um 1900* (2014, English translation forthcoming); *Heilig. Transkulturelle Verehrungskulte vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (2017, ed. with Kerstin Jobst); *Überbringen – Überformen – Überblenden: Theorietransfer im 20. Jahrhundert* (2011, ed. with Alfrun Kliems).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3090-2657

E-mail: dietlind.huechtker@univie.ac.at

/// Bernhard Kleeberg – professor teaching the history of science at the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies of the University of Erfurt in Germany. His current research focuses on the history of social psychology and the historical epistemology and praxeology of truth. He is editor-in-chief of the book series Historische Wissensforschung (Studies in the History of Knowledge) and co-editor of *NTM – Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin* (*Journal of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine*). He recently finished his book *Standard of Living: History of a Concept* (forthcoming in 2021). Among his most important publications are "Bad Habits and the Origins of Sociology" (2015, in *Rethinking Order: Idioms of Stability and De-Stabilization*, eds. Nicole Falkenhayner et al.); *Ernst Mach und das Gedankenexperiment um 1900*, special issue of *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (2015); "'Doing Truth'. Bausteine einer Praxeologie der Wahrheit" (2014, with Robert Suter, in *Wahrheit. Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie*); *Schlechte Angewohnheiten* (2012, ed.); *Knowing God, Believing Nature*, special issue of *Science in Context* (2007, co-ed. with Fernando Vidal); *Theophysis. Ernst Haeckels monistische Philosophie des Naturganzen* (2005).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7299-2331

E-mail: bernhard.kleeberg@uni-erfurt.de

/// Jan Surman – historian of science and scholarship, focusing on Central and Eastern Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Surman holds a PhD in history from the University of Vienna and has most recently been working at the Herder Institute, Marburg; IFK International Research Center for Cultural Studies Vienna; and the National Research University – Higher School of Economics, Moscow. His research focuses on scientific transfers, academic mobility, and scientific internationalism. His publications include *Universities in Imperial Austria 1848–1918: A Social History of a Multilingual Space* (2019) and *The Worlds of Positivism: A Global Intellectual History, 1770–1930* (2018, ed. with Johannes Feichtinger and Franz Fillafer). He is a founding member of the social media platform hps.cesee: History of Science in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1499-3122

E-mail: jan.surman@gmail.com

PRAXEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF TRUTH

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POST POST-TRUTH: EPISTEMOLOGIES OF DISINTEGRATION AND THE PRAXEOLOGY OF TRUTH[1]

Bernhard Kleeberg
University of Erfurt

> *The madman.* – Haven't you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, "I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!" Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter. Has he been lost, then? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone to sea? Emigrated? – Thus they shouted and laughed, one interrupting the other. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Where is God?" he cried; "I'll tell you! We have killed him – you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do this?" (Nietzsche 2007 [1882]: 119–120)

References to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Gay Science* have become trendy. Recent diagnoses of the socio-political state of affairs suggest that after God's death truth is next. Just as modern science once dug the grave for

[1] The concept of a praxeology of truth arose as part of a research initiative established with Marcus Sandl and Rudolf Schlögl in 2009 at the University of Constance. Parts of this article are based on Thomas Lampert's translation of a paper co-authored by the late Robert Suter (†2014) (Kleeberg & Suter 2014a). For helpful critique I would like to thank Friedrich Cain, Cécile Stehrenberger, Folke Schuppert, and one of the anonymous reviewers of this article.

religion, someone else freshly trenched it for science. To most, the identity of the accused seems clear: it was the postmodernists who dug the grave, even if the American president, the Russian president, and others gave poor truth the critical push that made it fall. But regardless who did it, we were now living in a post-truth era.[2]

Yet, just as Nietzsche misjudged the future of religion, I would like to suggest that diagnoses about the death of truth are utterly wrong. Quite the contrary: we are living in a truth era. A close look at the empirical phenomenon, at when, where, and how truth is being invocated, shows that truth has never been more vigorous and youthful than today. Still, ours seems to be a new culture of truth. What we can observe in the ongoing debates is a proliferation of invocations of truth, vehemently advocated. If at all, this seems to lead towards a multiplication of truth. Therefore, an inquiry into truth should, if it wants to grasp it in all its complexity, start by visiting truth at the point where it actually appears, where it is being addressed or denied, that is, in concrete situations or *truth scenes*. The *praxeology of truth* sets out to analyse these scenes, claiming that truth is always embedded in practices within which we decide in the first place what to regard as true or false and what consequences are to be drawn. Thus, truth can switch regimes, that is, it can follow the logic of a religious community, the scientific community, or modern mass communication. And if the procedures and techniques of establishing truth profoundly change in accordance to a new regime, we have to ask whether our understanding of truth, as well as the function of truth itself, change as well.

In the following, I will argue that while we should change our concept of truth along the lines of a praxeology of truth, its function seems to be stable – even though in a different way than might be expected: within the praxeology of truth, truth is regarded as a *second-order concept* that relates to the observation and judgement of knowledge. Truth – that is, the basic hypothesis – only enters the game if knowledge is being questioned, criticised, or discarded, or, maybe more accurately, if a person or group that possesses knowledge is being questioned or attacked. And in this case – and I will come back to it later – to invoke the truth means to escalate the situation, to differentiate or integrate groups, to ask a subject to commit to the group's cause, to confess his or her devotion: it is a *technique of identity politics*. With this, the basic premises of a *praxeology of truth* that can be discussed using the

[2] Ralph Keyes was allegedly the first to have spoken of the "post-truth era" in a book title in 2004; a vast amount of similar titles have appeared since 2017 (e.g., Ball 2017; D'Ancona 2017; Davis 2017; Fuller 2018; MacIntyre 2018; McMillan 2017; Wilber 2017).

analytical concepts of the *truth scene* and the *truth figure*, as well as referring to identity politics and attention as crucial parameters, are implied. In this respect, the *praxeology of truth* and classical truth theories differ significantly: (1) truth is *situated*; (2) truth cannot be analysed along the common oppositions of knowledge and belief, universalism and particularism, science and politics, objectivity and subjectivity, but is closely linked to *subjectivity*. The plausibility of the hypothesis proposed here – that such correlations are both situation-dependent and central for the understanding of truth – can ironically be shown precisely with those pleas for a return to truth that have added another chapter to the long-smouldering foundational dispute in historiography (Kiesow & Simon 2000)[3] and recently even the ongoing political debates: for instance, the "marches for science" advocate the authority of scientific facts, but they advocate scientists *as a group* as well – and they display how science functions as a *praxis*, with its social, political, institutional, and other dimensions (see Kofman 2018).

/// Yesterday's Truth

Instead of arguing on the basis of a classical (philosophical) interpretation of truth that does not take in the empirical reality of the ongoing political and epistemological conflicts, the praxeology of truth tries to refine the question of truth on the basis of postmodern theories. It assumes that the invocation of truth results in the integration of social groups that have entered a dispute about the correct interpretation of reality – an interpretation relevant to their identity. In the history and sociology of science, this is a familiar phenomenon: an explicit reference to truth or to the objectivity of knowledge often obscures that we are not dealing with epistemological arguments but rather with a dispute about the identity of the subject, as Karl Mannheim put it,[4] or the moral economy of a *Gefühls*- and *Denkkollektiv*, which Lorraine Daston (1995) has described: it is a dispute

[3] See, for instance, Richard Evans's work (1997), or Hans-Ulrich Wehler's, who argued that the "most profound cause of Foucault's cultivated amoral arm-chair nihilism lies in his epistemology" (1998: 85), which presumes historically variable truth regimes; Egon Flaig's (2007) (neo-)Kantian argument for objective reality is similar. More recently Gottfried Gabriel (2013) has made a more differentiated argument, welcoming the "return of truth" and speaking of the new "secret yearning of the postmodern for the referent."

[4] For Mannheim, the question of truth is the question about the emergence of the specific aspect-structure of thinking from which truth arises, and about the identity of the subject that claims the truth; the plurality of truth could not be epistemologically reduced, since every epistemology only told a story about how itself helped to arrive at the truth (see Mannheim 1964: 235–237, 1965 [1929]: 234–236).

about a whole framework of norms and emotions, in reference to which judgements are made about truth and error, and about the epistemic virtues required within this framework. This includes the constitutive rules of rational argumentation, such as negatability, verifiability, and consistency. Take, for instance, Thomas Kuhn's paradigm change: the decision for a new, alternative paradigm cannot be based on rational arguments, since the epistemological standards, the standards of rationality, are themselves part of the paradigms at stake – they ground the normal-scientific tradition. Key to the implementation of the new paradigm is the emergence of an anomaly incompatible with the dominant paradigm, gaining attention, proliferating, and continuously irritating scholars, until an alternative paradigm that is able to integrate the anomaly arises and a scientific revolution might take place. "Therefore," Kuhn (1996 [1962]: 112) writes, "at times of revolution, when the normal-scientific tradition changes, the scientist's perception of his environment must be re-educated – in some familiar situations he must learn to see a new gestalt." So if the world after a "paradigm-induced gestalt switch" (ibid.: 120) is seen in a fundamentally different way, this is due to an act of re-education – a re-education that changes the scholar's identity, since it changes what counts as normal.

In current political debates, truth is often related to questions of identity as well. It is, for example, linked to an intentional (conspiracy theories) deformation (fake news[5]) by the media, or it is employed as a sign of modern enlightened rationality (against creationists, or deniers of climate change or of the dangers of COVID-19). While German historian Jörn Rüsen in an essay on science and truth (2006: 159) argued that interest in truth as an issue of "scientific thought" had significantly dwindled in the face of widespread postmodern scepticism,[6] the last two years have brought a new urgency to the question, since relativist theories of truth seem to have been adopted by political groups of the far right. As Bruno Latour (2004) warned, there has been a hostile takeover of critical arguments that once served to deconstruct hegemonic (scientistic) ontologies

[5] The fake-news in-group seems to have a two-stage conception of truth: it (1) denies the statements of outsiders as not true (in the sense of a negative logic of truth that does not qualify their own statements as true but only the statements of others as untrue); and (2) it believes in a hidden truth in which only insiders can partake. The positive, conspiracist logic of truth aims at an esoteric truth beyond the media apparatus.

[6] "Truth is a discursive process guided by criteria that render cultural meaning-formations capable of approval. The sciences are an essential element of this process and the university is a site at which it occurs" (Rüsen 2006: 167).

in the name of truth, now in order to underpin ressentiment.[7] Yet these positions are seldom met by further advancement of postmodern theory and a reflection of current media technologies – academic discourse frequently links truth to classical truth theories and refers to "the" postmodernist relativisation or even dissipation of truth in power relations, against which truth has to be made strong again. The objection that there cannot be more than one truth, that truth is indivisible and universal, timeless and non-subjective points towards a cognitive dissonance. And it is not surprising that first and foremost scientists and journalists, as key representatives of the attacked truth culture, are calling for a return to *the truth* as the reference point for a new seriousness in science and politics. Thus, for instance, the historian Werner Paravicini in his *Die Wahrheit der Historiker* (2010: 10) engages in an emphatic battle against postmodern prophets: "When nothing is real to us anymore, nothing valuable to us anymore, let alone sacred." And in the editorial to a special issue on truth of *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, Anne-Sophie Friedel warns of the political consequences of flexible dealings with truth. We should, she emphasises, engage in "the causes for the loss of authority of facts and its traditional sources – science and journalism – in favor of 'felt truths'" and return to "one of the most fundamental and oldest questions of philosophy: What is truth?" (Friedel 2017: 3; compare Weingart 2017).

Replicating arguments from the science wars of the 1990s, these voices point out that "postmodern epistemologies" had dissolved the code of "true" and "false" into relativist questions of interpretive authority by treating them solely as the effects of power calculations and rhetorical strategies (e.g., Blackburn 2005, 2007; Changeux 2004; Engel & Rorty 2007; Frankfurt 2006; Gerhardt 2011; Paravicini 2010; Williams 2004). Paul Boghossian, in *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (2006), argues against the idea of the social construction of knowledge that has inspired a postmodern relativism, which, he insists, serves as an epistemological justification for dismissing objective facts, especially in social and political disputes.[8] In their editorial of *Die Rückkehr der Wahrheit*, Carsten Dutt and Martial Staub emphasise that this did not mean rehabilitating a naïve truth

[7] Ava Kofman in her article on Latour as "the Post-Truth Philosopher" (2018) speaks of a "rise not only in anti-scientific thinking," but "reactionary obscurantism." Recently, Latour has himself been criticised for giving up some of his critical perspective (see Giraud & Aghassi-Isfahani 2020).

[8] In Boghossian's (2006) example, the Lakotas' creation myth of the Buffalo people instead of evolutionary theory. See also the German edition (Boghossian 2013). On the connection between such criticisms and the culturalisation of scientific discourses, see my paper co-authored with Andreas Langenohl (Kleeberg & Langenohl 2011: 290–291).

concept, but rather a "return to seriousness in dealing with the problems of our knowledge culture that have been set aside by the intellectual matadors of the postmodern *anything goes*" (2007: 4; transl. T. Lampert).[9] Especially the events of 9/11, Simon Blackburn (2007: 5) argues in the same volume, "have reminded people that there are convictions we must affirm. We need truth, reason, and objectivity, and we need them on our side." Blackburn's analysis is directed against postmodernism as well, which, he argues, had undermined Western rationality by adopting a postcolonial sense of life. This has, he continues, relativised truth, reason, and objectivity, as well as "depth and importance," and disavowed them as cultural constructs tinged by the filters of "class, gender, power, culture, and language."

In this debate we can observe in exemplary fashion what the object of a praxeology of truth can be – for the new seriousness brings into play an old opposition: relativism and subjective arbitrariness versus a social and scientific order grounded in objectivity and truth. The hypostatisation of truth and subjectivity into polar opposites, however, obscures the fact that they mutually condition each other. It is no coincidence that the authors cited above have called for a new stance towards the subject: truth is of fundamental significance, Harry G. Frankfurt argued in his book *On Truth*, because

> [i]ndividuals require truths in order to negotiate their way effectively through the thicket of hazards and opportunities that all people invariably confront in going about their lives. […] Our success or failure in whatever we undertake, and therefore in life altogether, depends on whether we are guided by truth or whether we proceed in ignorance or on the basis of falsehood. It also depends on *what we do with* the truth (2006: 26–27).

Thus, if truth – beyond any reference to scientific knowledge – in the first instance guarantees the reduction of complexity, the stability of meaning, and success in practical life, it also introduces epistemic virtues into scholarly discourse, if scholars are obliged to believe the theses that they advocate. In this way a programme directed against life "beyond belief and knowledge" (Flügel-Martinsen 2011) is outlined, an identity programme that involves strengthening certain forms of subjectivity: seriousness,

[9] Paul Feyerabend's "anything goes" has often falsely been attributed to French philosophers and their deconstructivist theories of language, while it was an expression of identity politics against Western scientific rationalism and capitalism, as Philipp Sarasin (2019) has argued.

truthfulness, steadfastness of belief, honesty, conscientiousness, and conviction about the value and validity of one's own truth. In this way the truth postulates draw the consequences from the older debates about "the end of sincerity" (Knaller 2007; Trilling 1972). The invocation of truth serves to strengthen the self (see Foucault 1997, 2005, 2011);[10] it promotes trust in one's own decision-making capabilities. Truth contributes to the development of subjective capabilities and moral virtues, which together constitute the condition for the truth capacity of subjects.[11]

Obviously, the commitment to truth already presumes certain subjectivation practices that can vary historically – think only of the ancient parrhesiastes (Foucault 2011: 1–32; Gehring & Gelhard 2012), the medieval scholastic (Signori & Rösinger 2014), the modern natural scientist,[12] or the recent whistleblower or debunker. Accordingly, we can presume that the semantics of truth are set in motion by *specific* forms of dealing with knowledge (or even with belief). Thus, truth is implicitly inserted into frameworks of knowledge-transmission practices in order to distinguish knowledge from non-knowledge; it is invoked to lock in place or qualify transitory knowledge in situations of dispute or to separate it from pseudo-knowledge. It serves as the regulative idea for the motivation of advances in knowledge or as (in)official truth in the exercise of power or the call to subversion. Truth – always dependent on subject positions – appears as a difference effect, marks liminality, or reduces ambiguity, for example, in boundary discourses or situations of (critical) complexity and uncertainty, which may hold not least and indeed precisely for the debates about post-truth.

Still the eminent role of subjectivity is hardly noticed by the proponents of this plea to return to classical truth concepts. Popular German philosopher Markus Gabriel, in his epilogue to the German translation of Boghossian's *Fear of Knowledge* (2013), notes that the book pursues "a thor-

[10] Michel Foucault opposed investigating, as a critique of ideology, "errors, illusions, screen-representations, in short, everything that prevents the formation of true discourses" – instead he argued we should focus on the effects, calculations, and politics of the production of truth discourses themselves (Foucault 1980: 9).

[11] It is probably no coincidence that Blackburn's critique of "postmodern" relativism is connected to concerns about not being taken seriously in engaging for truth and about being declared *non compos mentis*. Behind this is the ideal of rational autonomous subjects asserting themselves and their truth in disputes (see Blackburn 2007: 8–9, 16–19).

[12] Modern natural scientists of the scientific revolution, for instance, had to buttress the credibility of their scientific observations and knowledge by appearing as "gentleman-scholars" and "Christian virtuosos," as Steven Shapin (1995) has argued.

oughly therapeutic impulse" (Gabriel 2013: 136).[13] And, in September 2019, Gabriel in his book on "eternal truth" and New Realism outlines a new post-postmodern identity, when he states that

> the idea of the progressive […] has moved over to the world of facts. The progressive is now siding with the facts. Today, we have to stand up for scientific objectivity […] This is the end of post-modernity. In postmodernity the idea was: to be progressive means to dial down the idea of facts and objective truth. Suddenly, it is the other way round (Gabriel & Eckoldt 2019: 44).

Yesterday's are tomorrow's epistemologies – according to this reactionary epistemology, post-truth and post-modernity form a pair.[14] But do classical theories of truth really help us to deal with the effects of new media techniques and their regimes of attention or the post-democratic boom of identity politics? The common denominator for these positions appears to be the invocation of a *praxis of dealing with truth*, although admittedly conceived neither explicitly nor uniformly as such. What remains unquestioned here is that even on the level of discursive negotiations it is evident that various scenarios, participating actors, communicative practices, and horizons of theoretical reflection repeatedly produce *their own* forms of what is claimed as truth or what is subject to critique.

In order to be able to describe in more detail these different forms of enacting truth, truth should be investigated from the praxeological perspective in the sense of a situated "doing truth." While truth seems to be meaningful or functional only if addressed as timeless and non-subjective, it is thoroughly interlocked with specific subjects carrying out specific practices in specific situations. And hence it is not simply "the truth" that stands at the centre of this methodological approach. The central focus is rather the correlation of truth with other basic epistemological categories and ideals and with specific scenarios and actors and how these co-

[13] Boghossian's (classically analytic) accusation of being "counterintuitive" (2006: 5) itself implies the significance of the subject, while his references to science, schools, and courts of law emphasise the situationality or locational specificity of truth (4). The polemical tone of the treatise makes plausible the consideration that truth or the setting-in-motion of truth semantics can be explained as the effect of specific truth scenes, such as that of the dispute. Regarding his talk of "nonsense," we need only imagine the eminent role it would play if the corresponding positions were presented within a discussion of "postmodern" philosophers or analytic philosophers.

[14] Donna Haraway has pointed out that the current debates denote an important political moment "*not* to go back to very conventional and very bad epistemologies about how scientific knowledge is put together and why and how it holds" (quoted in Kofman 2018).

produce each other *in actu*. Or, to state it with reference to philosophical truth theories: if the sciences produce and develop knowledge, truth as a second-order concept relates to the observation and judgement of this knowledge. But it is neither redundant (Moore & Ramsey 1927), nor a mere confirmation of a proposition in the sense of the performative theory of truth (Strawson 1949), but has a *social function*. To ask about the truth is to pose the question of power, as we could express it with Michel Foucault,[15] yet first and foremost it is to ask for the commitment to a group.

/// The Praxeology of Truth: Parameters

The praxeology of truth that my late colleague Robert Suter and I developed starts with the observation that we always encounter truth in complex social contexts. Whether in respect to scientific facts and hypotheses, to statements or confessions, in reality truth seldom satisfies the ideal demands made on it by philosophical theories. What we see is not simply scientists quarrelling over the correct interpretation of their findings or politicians fighting over the true interpretation of statements or actions; we not only see fact-finders trying to debunk fake news or media experts spinning rumours in order to influence public opinion, we find divulged facts, purchased truths, intricate scientific hypotheses, and confessions made under pressure – to name but a few examples. But even if such "dirty" everyday truths do not fulfil the moral norms tied to "the" truth (such as honesty or truthfulness), these norms are nevertheless effective.

A praxeology of truth that is concerned with the analysis of the processes of constituting truth and the human interactions initiated when truth is being invoked in a given situation cannot – or rather must not – simply presume ideal-typically conceived forms of establishing or negotiating truth, as do philosophers who aim at a universal concept of truth. Instead, it has to focus on interests and technologies that vary according to context, and on the situational irritations and manipulations that co-determine such processes and lead to correspondingly differentiated practices of truth. A respective investigation of *doing truth* has to pay special attention to what is usually designated as the "ethics of truth," although without any moral prefigurations. Its primary focus revolves around moral

[15] The analysis of truth regimes does not necessarily imply a specific concept of truth – as has ironically been demonstrated using the example of Foucault: Reiner Ruffing (2008: 53) has shown that Foucault, commonly dispraised as a truth relativist, advances a concept of truth (as a revealing and concealing proceeding) that remains closely tied to Martin Heidegger's.

economies or, more precisely, a political epistemology of truth: the object is not a moral concept of truth, but rather the effects of moral arguments and attitudes on the constitution of that which is ultimately attributed validity as a truth norm.

Where must praxeologies of truth begin if their object is not to be arbitrary? The praxeological approach is guided by problematisations of truth that are evident historically, discursively, or epistemically and that fulfil two functions: they invoke a norm of truth and assert its validity in order at the same time to deplore the variety of deviations from it. In this way the truth norm is repeatedly thematised, analysed, criticised, and relativised. The extent to which the norm is established and whether this is intended at all, whether it is in fact already valid or is supposed to be validated only within this problematisation – all of this is obviously variable and dependent on context. The praxeological analysis of such standardisations is less concerned with an ethical or epistemological evaluation than with the implications that accompany the invoking or questioning, the perverting or deconstructing of truth norms. Which of the respective actions are being taken depends – truth and subjectivity being closely intertwined – on the situation and the particular participants. For this reason, the praxeology of truth is especially interested in the aforementioned "dirty truths." And the concept proposed for the framework in which corresponding negotiations of truth occur is the *truth scene*. For the actors who concurrently assume the function of transmission we propose the concept of *truth figures*. With these parameters it will hopefully be possible to describe the composition and formation of truth cultures such as those that have recently arisen amidst new media landscapes.

The concept of the *truth scene* can serve to emphasise the situational, procedural, and performative moment in the consolidation of truth. It is in such scenes that the exploration, reassurance, or confirmation of truth takes place, as well as the correction or refutation of truth. As empirical phenomena these are encountered primarily following disruptions or accentuations of something self-evident, in situations of learning or dispute, but also with demonstrations of power. Here truth becomes visible as occurrence or manifestation (Badiou 2010: 7–35; Foucault 2014: 1–21)[16] – through processes of de-flexibilisation, reduction, or rendering unambiguous, or through an act of closure that makes the positioning of sub-

[16] Achim Landwehr (2011) in his critique of Paravicini's *Die Wahrheit der Historiker* points out that truth "only becomes necessary as a category when doubts emerge, when cognitive discomfort spreads, and when actions fail."

jects necessary. In truth scenes, participants can appear as rulers, judges, witnesses, chroniclers, priests, scholars, etc.; they are assigned positions and their actions become observable. In this way distinctions can be made between *difference effects* and *performance effects*. The spectrum of difference effects can be divided into those of identification and those of pluralisation, depending on whether the truth is confirmed or challenged, either on the level of truth or of subject positions. Here subject positions designate a typified subjectivity that is always normative in two respects: as the epistemological basis of judgements and as the ethical basis of itself. If the refutation of a truth, for example, accompanies the testing of new truths and subjectivities, the confirmation of a truth consolidates and strengthens the participating subjects in their subjectivity. The fact that truth is at stake in truth scenes also engenders performance effects, which can mean a confirmation, ironisation, critique, displacement, or deconstruction of truth and subject positions. These processes cannot always be traced back to the actions of participants, but also encompass unintended disruption effects – for instance, when an experiment fails, an argument proves unreliable, or a documentary film does not seem authentic.[17]

Following Hans-Georg Gadamer, we can understand a truth scene as a truth game to the extent that it represents a "truth event" requiring seriousness from players: it takes hold of them and completes a movement designed neither for repetition nor for an end (Gadamer 2004 [1975]: 102–109).[18] Truth scenes, however, do not aim at a "universal model of being and knowledge," as Gadamer (ibid.: 483) defines the truth event. Rather, they make historical breaks and continuities visible by comprehending truth as a situational event, in which the play of performance and repetition ensures "iterations" of truth and subjectivity along differences (see Derrida 1982). Nevertheless, a central paradox of invoking "the" truth is also observable in them, as the situational character of truth scenes frequently combines directly with their concomitant definition as "trans-situational": namely, primarily "the one" truth is invoked that is neither temporal, nor spatial, nor tied to particular persons. This claim entails heightened risk since truth assertions can fail. Thus, truth scenes also allow those measures

[17] On the side of subjectivity, the issue is above all the relationship between Louis Althusser's subjection and Foucault's subjectivation – the former as the rudimentary form of culturally prefabricated self-identification patterns that activate or form the subject, constitutive for subjectivation processes (see Butler 1997: 83–85; Rose 1996a). In truth scenes, the attitude of subjects towards existing subject positions also becomes visible as the expression of their respective subjectivity.

[18] There are parallels here to Foucault's "games of truth" (*jeux de verité*; see Foucault 1990: 6, 2014: 12–15; on Greek tragedy as the ritual manifestation of truth, see: ibid.: 22–92; Ewald & Waldenfels 1992).

that have been introduced to protect against such contingency to emerge particularly clearly, for example, rituals, prescriptions, and performance restrictions – measures that with Foucault we can understand as procedures of "alethurgy."[19]

Truth scenes always also depict observation constellations that require indirect and direct forms of presence and thereby also personify truth in order to move it at the same time into the nexus of proximity and distance (see Schlögl 2008). Frequently such observer constellations are tied to specific locations, depicting, for example, the court of law, the laboratory, or the field, and moreover are also tied to specific (social) practices and rituals (see Gieryn 2006, 2018).[20] Embedded in overarching truth scenarios, concrete scenes are also framed medially, for instance, in the form of a narrative or script that enables their transmission and adaptation in other locations.

Truth figures in general initially call attention to the fact that the visibility of truth is also secured through *figurative dispositifs*, whether of the "naked truth" (Blumenberg 2001 [1957]; see Konersmann 2008), the "naïve provincial," or "hard facts." These figurative and metaphorical elements of truth provide evidence in specific contexts, indeed even constitute the actual core of the truth problem and allow epistemology to congeal into a mere praxis effect. Truth figures form, on the one hand, the imaginary of truth; on the other hand, they also depict concrete instructions about how individual or collective subjects could authenticate their truth. Thus, truth scenes draw on notions of subject-related truth capacity and simultaneously put these to the test. This capacity for truth is embodied and mediated by truth figures, which can serve as socio-cultural self-descriptions of the definition of truth standards and truth regimes and thus make truth visible in the nexus of social inclusion and exclusion. Truth figures, for instance, can be considered from the beginning as only conditionally capable of truth, for example, on the basis of their gender, their social status, or limited sen-

[19] Foucault (2014: 7) designates alethurgy – which is constitutive for every form of hegemony – as "the manifestation of truth as the set of possible verbal or non-verbal procedures by which one brings to light what is laid down as true as opposed to false, hidden, inexpressible, unforeseeable, or forgotten."

[20] Nicholas Jardine (2000) has proposed "scenes of inquiry" as an analytic parameter that emphasises the local and tacit methods, practices, and techniques of practitioners of science. Though he refers to practices, his notion of "scene" rather denotes specific circumstances, while our concept of the scene is more closely related to theories of performativity and theatricality, stressing the constellations of figures, the role of scripts and those aspects that Erika Fischer-Lichte (1998: 86) draws on to reposition the concept of theatricality: performativity, staging, corporality, and perception (see Butler 1988; Goffman 1956; and critically augmenting the concept, Willems 2009).

sory perceptions. The anthropological dimension of truth is also evident here. Catalogues of the senses that are necessary for the perception of truth can be found: as soon as truth figures are based on sense certainty, they can be analysed as specific figures of perception and attention. Hence the body also determines truth constellations according to the qualities attributed to it – thereby invoking the nexus of knowledge and power (Foucault 1978).

The example of the co-production of truth and subjectivity within the framework of a truth scene shows that connections to very different forms of knowledge are created here and at the same time even correlated. As soon as the subject in the truth production also engages in an objectivation of the self, a field of knowledge opens within which a psychologisation of the subject capable of truth can occur. Often the possibility of such psychologisations is linked to the coupling of truth capacity with the inter-subjective verifiability of subjective truth. If truth is dependent on the logical, methodological, or consensus-based consistency of a subject's statement, it becomes at times indistinguishable from communicative competency; and in referring back to the subject that asserts it, truth acquires at the same time an epistemic basis. The truth of the subject makes this objectifiable in three respects: in respect to the subject's psychological disposition, sociability (intersubjectivity), and communicative competency. What becomes clear under such conditions is not least the failure of truth assertions and self-assertions.

The invocation of truth, however, does not have to use methodological forms of verification. It can also occur in affective forms such as emphasis or enthusiasm, which refer to the problematic of non-knowledge. Belief, intuition, and trust are also truth-constitutive moments since these parameters co-construct truth scenes; as forms of non-knowledge they ground not only epistemic cohesion, but also social cohesion and thereby truth hierarchies.[21] The process of establishing truth can also lead to inclusions and exclusions, if a witness, for example, is proved to have lied or is depicted in more dynamic figurations or transformations (conversions, revelations, loss of faith, etc.). While figures such as the confessor, or the medium who has a revelation, exist primarily in (religiously) coded truth regimes, there are also figures such as the dissident, the nihilist, and the Copernican, who oppose existing truth regimes with different truth concepts or even reject the necessity of truth at all.

[21] The distinction between knowledge and non-knowledge can also be traced back to difference effects and performance effects in truth scenes.

Truth figures also provide insight into different temporal concepts of truth, such as progress or salvation history, which have their correspondence in pioneers of truth, believers, or investigators. While truth scenes can thus serve as instruments for the analysis of updated assertions of truth, truth figures address the diachronic dimension,[22] within which the transmission or shock of truth occurs by embodying their recurring guarantors, critics, or enemies. As soon as truth capacity is linked, for example, to social status, personal integrity, or rhetorical skill, they make truth scenes transparent in regard to historical, social, or medial conditions. Thus, truth figures direct attention to the temporal stabilisation or destabilisation of specific truths and their justification patterns. With the inter-figural relationships in which truth figures usually stand, these can accordingly be traditional contexts. However, inter-figural contexts can also take shape as observation constellations: whether the physiognomist recognises typical similarities or the detective identifies clues, whether the eyewitness grounds the accuracy of his or her testimony in subjective experience, the judge issues a decision, the court reporter criticises its lack of consistency, or the liar is exposed in the course of determining judgement and truth – all of these constitute changing figurative networks, whose continual transformation, establishment, expansion, and reduction should be investigated.[23]

This example in turn bolsters our conceptual distinctions. The practices of specific truth cultures, which are describable through truth scenes and truth figures, can be distinguished as independent fields of investigation from the *truth theories* within whose framework they are reflected, transcended, or even problematised. But even these point to a practical dimension: since well-formulated truth theories do not emerge in all social fields, we should also assume implicit, praxis-inherent truth theories. In the case of explicit theorisation, a truth theory can also have a practical value itself – in the affirmative sense, for instance, it can guide action as the script of a truth scene, or as a problematisation it can formulate a critique of the predominant ways of truth identification and simultaneously outline alternative truth forms. Truth theory thereby influences the composition of

[22] On the diachronic dimension of the truth figure using the example of the prophet, see Sandro Liniger and Robert Suter's paper (2013). On "passing on schemas of conduct" that can serve as scripts for truth scenes, see also Foucault (2011: 208). This in turn requires certain medial and representational formats, such as biographies, anecdotes, examples, and protocols.

[23] For a discussion of examples from photographic evidence in detective work to the practices of truth at court see the contributions to *Wahrheit*, a special issue of *Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie* (Kleeberg & Suter 2014b).

truth scenes and figures and also promotes the transmission and privileging of certain forms of truth.

Taken together, the parameters presented here generate the necessary complexity to do justice to a differentiated field of historical investigation. If the local and situational practices and processes of truth production come into view in truth scenes, this synchronic perspective is expanded through truth figures to include the historical, social, and medial presuppositions of such scenes. This historical depth dimension opens the possibility of a (self-reflective) universalisation or relativisation of exemplary scenes and figures in the form of theories. If truth scenes, figures, and theories mutually presume each other, then we propose that they also be analysed in relation to one another in order to utilise their mutual-irritation potential: for instance, invoking scenes and figures (in a relativising way) in connection with statements about the validity of truth theories; countering the question of practices with the function of theories; or questioning the situational analysis of truth scenes by referring to the continuity of truth figures. In this way, a series of questions comes into focus that until now could not even have been raised from this perspective: what are the effects of an invocation of truth? What demands does it generate on the truth capacity of participating actors? What forms of disturbance, irritation, and refutation is truth subjected to and to what extent do these in turn contribute to the establishment of truth? What kind of scenarios set in motion truth semantics and with them specific figurations of actors?

These coordinates stake out a broad field of research, which can then be delimited by focusing on the concrete processes of constituting truth in specific truth scenes, without, however, losing sight of the question of how truth can be reclaimed as the object of interdisciplinary reflection in the humanities. Whereas the manifesto character of the pleas for a return to truth cited at the beginning of this article included bracketing one's own historical presuppositions – in regard to the orienting function of truth, for instance, the philosophical tradition of pragmatism – we propose investigating the formation of certain truth scenes, truth figures, and thereby also truth theories *in situ* in order to develop a critical historical praxeology of establishing and dismantling truth. Points of connection emerge especially through those praxeological concepts of an ethnographic history and sociology of knowledge and science (Knorr-Cetina 2002; Latour 2018; Latour & Woolgar 1986; Pickering 1992)[24] which in the framework of a pragmatic realism – in connection, for example, with Charles S. Peirce,

[24] On praxeology as a general sociological approach, see the work of Robert Schmidt (2012).

William James, and James Dewey –emphasise the unfinished, the underdetermined, and the vague dimensions of knowledge production, the situational, the performative, and the procedural dimensions: objects, facts, theories, ideals, and practices are constituted in specific situations in relation to each other; their epistemic status and their active or passive roles are altered in the "dance of agencies" during the "mangle of practice," as Andy Pickering (1995; Pickering & Guzik 2008; see Haraway 1988, 2008) has called it, in which they come into focus primarily through differences (see Rheinberger 1997, 2001). Together they determine the phenomenon of validity. Thus, the codification of knowledge occurs for the most part only retrospectively before a backdrop of successful processes of "cleansing" objects and homogenising practices (Bachelard 1984; Latour 1994, 2007; Law 2008; Pickering 2009). This access to the co-evolution of knowledge and objects in practice or to the symmetrical "co-production" of nature and society (Latour 1992: 287) can be related in useful ways to the production, homogenisation, stabilisation, and deconstruction of truth.

/// Mediality and Truth as a Social Operator

With these remarks on a praxeology of truth, let me now come back to the current discussions on post-truth and hint at some of the possible outcomes of this analytical approach. Do we observe specific forms of subjectivation in the ongoing debates? What kind of truth scenes and truth figures can be found? And what does this tell us about a possible change of our culture of truth?

In search for truth in the current media landscapes, we might start with a look at the internet. If you google "truth 2.0," what you get is a hip-hop homepage and an EU-sponsored project on citizen science, in which six "citizen observatories" from Europe and Africa provide data about their local environment.[25] If you try the German "Wahrheit 2.0," amongst the first hits is a soap opera and a Facebook site presenting a (not-at-all surprising) mixture of media bashing, critique of capitalism, anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, official Russian propaganda, and advertisement for natural cosmetics.[26] Both the English and the German web pages show in their own impressive way – and this would probably become even more obvious in the case of social media – that the *regimes of truth* we know have shifted,

[25] Ground Truth 2.0, https://gt20.eu/about/about-gt-2-0/, accessed 7.05.2020.
[26] Wahrheit 2.0, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/pg/Wahrheit-20-280505102133835/posts/?ref=page_internal, accessed 7.05.2020.

or are maybe even disappearing (see Harsin 2015),[27] and that we cannot get hold of "the truth" by means of conventional instruments and truth theories. Besides the delegitimisation of modern truth figures such as the scientist or the (investigative) journalist, we observe a decentralisation and multiplication of communication channels, with a previously unknown plethora of statements containing truth claims which by reason of their sheer quantity alone cannot be checked using traditional verification practices. This truth 2.0 – the "big data truth" – is more related to algorithms of attention than to familiar verification practices.

In an age of ever-simplified access to information, with Twitter, Facebook, Google, and others as the most prominent platforms used, scientific facts and what are presented as such are even more likely to follow the code of information/non-information that, according to Niklas Luhmann, already characterised the system of the classical mass media. The main feature of information lies in its relation to time, as he put it: "Information cannot be repeated; as soon as it becomes an event, it becomes non-information. A news item run twice might still have its meaning, but it loses its information value" (Luhmann 2000: 19–20). Used as a code value, this meant the system is

> constantly and inevitably transforming information into non-information. The crossing of the boundary from value to opposing value occurs automatically with the very autopoiesis of the system. The system is constantly feeding its own output, that is, knowledge of certain facts, back into the system on the negative side of the code, as non-information; and in doing so it forces itself constantly to provide new information. In other words, the system makes itself obsolete (ibid.).

News, that is, information, is being produced by – among other things – surprise, conflicts, quantity, local relevance, norm violations, scandals, and so forth (ibid.: 28ff.). These Luhmannian selectors directly relate to *truth scenes*: as a machine of escalation, truth leads to conflicts; and the repudiation of information that corresponds to the norms of a truth regime is able to generate attention as it might be understood to be scandalous (think of Kellyanne Conway's comment on the number of attendees at the inaugural speech of the new American president in 2017). And, most

[27] Michael Seemann (2017) speaks of the "deregulation of the truth market"; compare Bernhard Pörksen's article (2018) and Thari Jungen's contribution to this volume.

importantly, if social media and the internet spread and circulate information, news value can be reassigned to them by branding them as true or false. A truth scene is opened up – a game about fake news, often automatically self-enforcing due to algorithmic feedback loops. This dance around true and false in itself generates attention and entails economic effects, as communication theorist Jayson Harsin has put it. It goes hand in hand with the relatively new practice of fact-checking and the truth figure of the fact checker or debunker, who sometimes works individually, sometimes as part of an organised "real time rumor tracker."[28] And interestingly, this figure and its practice manifest the correspondence theory of truth as a basic norm of the truth regime that has come under attack.

Harsin's argument concerns media techniques; it aims at the fragmentation of truth as an effect of the multiplication of communication channels and the end of hegemonial truth regimes in the age of mass media. I would like to substantiate this diagnosis from a more sociological perspective and argue that while the multiplication of communication channels has indeed had a damaging effect on traditional truth regimes like that of academia, truth has not been fragmented, but subjectified and multiplied as an effect of social fragmentation and the disintegration of overarching international institutions and organisations. The self-assertion and stabilisation of small communities, specifically via social media, is facilitated by means of a joint drawing of boundaries between true and false. This process of recommunalisation is mirrored in the current crisis of the political, which, powered by the development of digital media, relocates political debates to autonomous fractions of the general public, as sociologist Andreas Reckwitz (2017*:* 434) argues. As a consequence, not only has the "universal" disappeared from politics, but socially, culturally, and politically shared norms as well: "shared, reciprocal forms of appreciation, shared systems of cultural values and forms of communication and normative frames of the society as a whole" (ibid.: 437; my transl.). Since the self-assertion and stabilisation of communities with their respective identities (especially via social media) can be promoted by drawing borders between true and false, the invocation of truth would thus be a cause and effect of social disintegration at once. Accordingly, the "death of the social," as Nikolas Rose (1996b) termed it, entails the crisis of universal epistemological norms and thus not the death but the vitalisation of the praxis of invocating truth.

If this analysis is true and the new cultures of truth are an effect of social fragmentation as well as of algorithmic attention economies, it might

[28] Emergent, http://www.emergent.info/about, accessed 7.05.2020.

explain the emergence of a number of relatively young truth figures, like the PR specialist, the spin-doctor, the troll, the fact finder, or the science communicator. Their expertise points to a shift to truth regimes centred on attention and emotions, which are easily manipulated following economic or political agendas.[29] Adding to this, the idea of a reciprocal entanglement of truth and subjectivity, as the starting point for a praxeology of truth, can be helpful in another way: it uncovers a novel meaning of authenticity as a form of subjectified truth. This helps to explain the recent phenomenon that the exposure of a liar obviously does not entail the consequence that people turn away from him. Here, an old truth practice – to "live in truth" like the faithful or the parrhesiastes – resurfaces, within which truth and subjectivity merge in a form of authenticity. In the face of a transformation of truth regimes, its truth figures, and the media they use, a truth thus embodied can gain ground, as can be studied from the American type specimen of post-democracy. The writer Dave Eggers (2020) recently described his president accordingly: "To his followers, a spontaneous lie is better than a rehearsed truth. […] They perceive this as refreshing and somehow more honest" (see Umbach & Humphrey 2018: ch. 4).

Just as truth entails subjectivation, a radical subjectivation like this means that truth pops up in a specific scene – that of *staged authenticity*. A staging that sociologist Ingolfur Blühdorn (2013; see Reckwitz 2017: 435) has accounted for as the core of the theatrical performance of the political in our late modern simulative democracy. According to the ideals of our "culture of authenticity," as Charles Taylor (1995) termed it in *The Malaise of Modernity*, the moral code of remaining *true to oneself* means to articulate one's own supposed originality in the face of instrumental self-reference and social pressure in particular – even if this kind of self-fulfilment tips over into narcissism or occurs as an intentional violation of moral codes. And it is this violation – whether in the form of racist or sexist remarks, or as a denial of scientific facts – that generates the emotions and attention necessary to integrate groups and stabilise their identity. Truth – as this example makes especially clear – should be rescued from the neat and clean realm of philosophical epistemology and be analysed as the phenomenon of our dirty reality that it very effectively is: a *social operator*. With a praxeology of truth providing the analytical instruments to do so, one consequence might be to avoid truth scenes that trigger epistemological

[29] The Cambridge Analytica scandal, for instance, proved that data is not only collected and aggregated, but also used and misused to make money; see The Cambridge Analytica Files, *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/news/series/cambridge-analytica-files, accessed 29.05.2020.

and political tribalisation, and instead to implement common practices of situated problem-solving or other political strategies that are more down-to-earth.

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/// Abstract

Our truth culture has changed. Yet we are not living in a post-truth era but in a truth era – an observation of the ongoing debates shows a proliferation of invocations of truth. This paper argues that in order to grasp this transition, we should not refer to classical truth theories or common oppositions such as knowledge and belief, objectivity and subjectivity. Instead, we should focus on concrete practices in concrete situations: on "doing truth." This paper introduces the concept of a "praxeology of truth," which sets out to analyse truth by means of two parameters: "truth scenes" and "truth figures." In suggesting that to ask about truth is to pose the question of power, it follows Michel Foucault, but it regards the invocation of truth as a technique of identity politics and truth as a social operator.

Keywords:
fake news, political epistemology, post-truth, praxeology of truth, social disintegration

/// Bernhard Kleeberg – professor teaching the history of science at the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies of the University of Erfurt in Germany. His current research focuses on the history of

social psychology and the historical epistemology and praxeology of truth. He is editor-in-chief of the book series Historische Wissensforschung (Studies in the History of Knowledge) and co-editor of *NTM – Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin* (*Journal of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine*). He recently finished his book *Standard of Living: History of a Concept* (forthcoming in 2021). Among his most important publications are "Bad Habits and the Origins of Sociology" (2015, in *Rethinking Order: Idioms of Stability and De-Stabilization*, eds. Nicole Falkenhayner et al.); *Ernst Mach und das Gedankenexperiment um 1900*, special issue of *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (2015); "'Doing Truth'. Bausteine einer Praxeologie der Wahrheit" (2014, with Robert Suter, in *Wahrheit. Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie*); *Schlechte Angewohnheiten* (2012, ed.); *Knowing God, Believing Nature*, special issue of *Science in Context* (2007, co-ed. with Fernando Vidal); *Theophysis. Ernst Haeckels monistische Philosophie des Naturganzen* (2005).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7299-2331

E-mail: bernhard.kleeberg@uni-erfurt.de

POLITICAL CULTURES OF TRUTH

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THE INCOMPREHENSION OF TERROR AS A HARBINGER OF "POST-TRUTH"?

Anna Shor-Chudnovskaya
Sigmund Freud University, Vienna

> "I'd like to see M."
> "You can't see him," the Komsomol activists explained reluctantly. "He is under arrest."
> At that time, arrests were not yet daily routine, not surprising anyone, so I just yelled involuntarily, "For what?" (Kaverin 1989: 98).[1]

The epigraph to this article is an excerpt from *Epilog* [Epilogue], a memoir by the Soviet writer Veniamin Kaverin (1902–1989). For readers living long after the events described, the author considered it necessary to explain why he would ask "For what?" in response to a report of someone's arrest. It is clear from his explanation that that seemingly ordinary and quite logical question was not taken for granted at the time. Kaverin specified that he had asked it only because the repression had not yet reached its peak. This explanation is bewildering: does this mean that he would not have asked such a question later, for example, in 1937? And if not, why?

In reading memoirs of that time, one comes to the conclusion that there was then a special attitude connected with the simple question "For what?" The well-known Soviet philologist and translator Efim Etkind (1918–1999) also considered it necessary to mention this question in his memoirs. In 1948, he accidentally learned that his colleague Tatyana Gnedich (1907–1976) had been arrested in 1944 and was still in detention:

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Russian are by Martin Malek. Transliterations are given according to the British Standard 2979:1958 system.

> I was […] stunned, […] because we had not known that the poet and translator Gnedich had been arrested. For what? In those years no one asked "For what?"; if one used such words, they were preceded by an ironic reservation. "For what?" is an idiot's question (Etkind 2011).

Like Kaverin, Etkind stressed that "For what?" had gradually become inappropriate in talks about arrests and disappearances. And like Kaverin, he does not explain why. Obviously, the political (state) terror and a specific kind of refusal to understand what was happening were closely linked in the experience of those who lived in that era.

Since Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* policy (1986–1991), a considerable number of archival documents, documentary evidence, and scientific literature dedicated to the years of Joseph Stalin's rule (1923–1953) have been published. However, it seems to me that in many regards one feature has not been given due attention, namely, a specific kind of perception of the Great Terror (which in literature is usually limited to the years 1936–1938)[2] as inaccessible or poorly accessible to logical understanding. Using the example of several authors, in this paper I want to present evidence about the impossibility of understanding political reality under Stalin. My main goal is to consider to what extent the Great Terror contributed to the development of a specific political epistemology, which in my view is part of a certain political culture and which is largely characteristic of later periods of Soviet history, and perhaps even today, because there is still no clear, unambiguous answer to the question "For what?" in Russian society. As sources I will rely especially on texts created by contemporary witnesses during the Great Terror or immediately after Stalin's death. First and foremost, I will consider various works of Russian literature whose authors were the relatives of victims and who tried to capture what was happening to them and to the people around them – how their attitude to the facts, to reality, to the truth changed when it was not possible to explain what was going on with the use of logic. Of course, it is important to always be aware of the fact that these literary creations are only examples

[2] Depending on the time frame and the definition of "political persecution" (e.g., how executioners who then went into the death mill themselves should be considered), the number of Gulag victims can vary greatly. Many statistics are difficult or impossible to compare because of the different methods of counting. According to one plausible estimate, between 1930 and 1958 over 20 million people passed through the Gulag and over 2 million died. Many were shot without being sent to labour camps. For data from Memorial, compare Yelena Zhemkova and Arseniy Roginskii's paper (2016).

– albeit in my opinion particularly meaningful ones – and that other Soviet authors (e.g., Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, and Yuriĭ Dombrovskiĭ) have also written on these topics. But the examples I have chosen – Veniamin Kaverin and Lydia Chukovskaya – are also interesting, precisely because they were among the first Soviet Russian authors to raise these issues and deal with them.

Recently, the term "post-truth" has become the subject of numerous discussions about a new attitude to truth and the new culture of truth that is now particularly visible in Western countries and in Eastern Europe. These disputes can be divided into four main areas:

1. Discussions on the crises of rationality and changes in attitudes towards the truth in the field of philosophy. First of all, this development is occurring under the pressure of various constructivist tendencies and is connected with disputes about the concept of "reality" and the possibilities (and necessity!) of adequately understanding it (Dreyfus & Taylor 2015; Lyotard 1984; Szaif & Enders 2006).
2. Discussions on the possibilities of scientific cognition, trust in science and in the objective, "true" results of scientific research and "scientific facts" (Latour 2004; Latour & Woolgar 1986; Weingart et al. 2017).
3. Discussions about new media (and primarily the internet) and their potential for disseminating incorrect information or, even more importantly, information that cannot be verified and therefore cannot be assessed as correct or incorrect (Pomerantsev 2014; Graves & Cherubini 2016; Hendricks & Vestergaard 2019). This includes modern theories about communication processes (Kuznetsov 2011).
4. Finally, discussions on a new attitude towards truth in the political sphere as part of political epistemology and political culture. In this context, "post-truth" means, first of all, denying the possibility or even appropriateness of truth in the public sphere (Arendt 1967; Krastev 2017; Nida-Rümelin 2006). In democratic systems, it seems to mark the transformation of democracy – in which direction, it is difficult to say so far.

It should be mentioned that none of these directions is really new and that all of them characterise the development of thought in the twentieth century.

This article is devoted to the attitude to truth mentioned in the fourth point, that is, as a part of political culture, and, moreover, in a non-democratic regime. In this context, it would be wrong to think that the term "post-truth" refers only to the manipulative practices of ruling elites. It is equally important to take into account the political consciousness of people who are not endowed with political or state power: the subjects of political thinking and political culture. Their attitude to truth depends on both actual political practices and the political history of society. The attitude to truth in Eastern and East-Central Europe has a specific history that differs from other regions. For East-Central Europe, today's special relations with truth were formed under the influence of political events in the second half of the twentieth century. But in Russia these special relations were no less determined by events that preceded the Second World War.

/// *Sofia Petrovna*

> I don't know what shook me more in 1937: was it the brutality of the authorities or the degree of human stupidity? (The next winter, I wrote the novella *Sofia Petrovna* about this stupidity which I hated and which hurt my soul but at the same time aroused pity in me.) (Chukovskaya 2009: 275)

This is how, almost half a century later, in her autobiographical book *Procherk* [A stroke of the pen], Lydia Chukovskaya (1907–1996) remembered her feelings while writing the novella *Sofia Petrovna*. What exactly does she mean by "human stupidity"?

Sofia Petrovna is the only contemporary literary evidence of Stalin's terror.[3] According to the Russian literary critic Dmitry Bykov, this novella is a kind of "live report." Written immediately after the news of her husband's death, the story helped Chukovskaya survive: "I would have hanged myself if I had not willingly or unwittingly fixed on paper what I had experienced. I would have committed suicide as traitors do" (2009: 451). What was the betrayal about? Chukovskaya explained that "[i]t turned out that no less than by Mitya's death […] I was shocked by my own gullibility to the falsehood of empty words, the ability to deceive myself" (ibid.).

[3] The poem "Requiem," which Anna Akhmatova wrote between the years 1934 and 1961, is another important testimonial. Chukovskaya's novella is therefore the only literary work that was finished during the time of the Great Terror.

The arrest in 1937 of her husband, the outstanding theoretical physicist Matvei (Mitya) Bronstein, divided Chukovskaya's life into two parts. She saw her husband for the last time a few days before his detention and kept seeking the truth about his fate for the rest of her life. Living in constant anticipation of her own arrest, she wrote *Sofia Petrovna* in a simple school notebook during the winter of 1939–1940. As the author of such a piece would most likely be shot, she hid it.

Although hating numbers and mathematics all her life, Chukovskaya possessed a rare analytical mind combined with a subtle poetic and artistic flair; she captured the Great Terror as a writer, and, at the same time, as accurately as if she were taking a documentary photo.

Sofia Petrovna is amazing for more than the history of its creation and the fact that the manuscript was miraculously preserved (it was not confiscated by the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, or NKVD, and it did not even disappear during the German siege of Leningrad (1941–1944) with all its chaos, the devastating famine, and so forth).[4] The remarkable feature of this testimony about the Great Terror is that it is not about the victims, the inmates of prisons and labour camps who survived or died (about whom Varlam Shalamov, Evgeniya Ginzburg, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote *Kolyma Tales*, *The Steep Route*, and *The Gulag Archipelago* respectively). *Sofia Petrovna* is dedicated to those who were outside the prison walls and who survived, like Chukovskaya herself – for some reason or by pure luck. But did they remain unharmed? Was it possible *not* to become a victim (albeit in a specific manner) of the Great Terror by staying at home and therefore out of prison? Chukovskaya gives a negative answer: the "stupidity," the "gullibility to deception," the "ability to deceive," when they suddenly concerned millions of people, were also among the devastating results of the Great Terror.

Both the novella *Sofia Petrovna* and the autobiographical book *A Stroke of the Pen*, which Chukovskaya finished a couple of years before the collapse of the Soviet system, are careful, thorough, and at the same time merciless examinations of herself and other characters. The protagonist of the story, Sofia Petrovna Lipatova, is not a lyrical heroine but rather the opposite. In fact, the story is devoted to only one thing: Sofia Petrovna, whose son is arrested, tries to understand what is happening, but is unable to do so. In speaking of the "human stupidity" that struck her while writing the novella, Chukovskaya means incomprehension. Looking back, she felt both

[4] The book was first published in 1965 in Paris in a version that was not authorised by the author. The first publication in the Soviet Union took place only in 1988.

pity and hatred for Sofia Petrovna. Chukovskaya found herself extremely lonely in her own search for meaning and truth after her husband's arrest. "Not hiding from the truth" was an occupation for a very narrow circle of people, and it was dangerous. But even they were mostly unable to understand: either they were unwilling to dig up the truth or the events were just too incomprehensible at the time.

In *A Stroke of the Pen* Chukovskaya tells how unbearable it was for her to have conversations with people around her: not with strangers and indifferent people, but with people who sympathised warmly with her, who were concerned about the fate of her husband, and tried to help her. The most intolerable conversations were with other women who had lost their husbands or sons in 1937:

> My confrontations with the "incomprehenders" were getting more and more frequent, more and more painful. I couldn't forgive people their incomprehension, although, I repeat, I didn't understand much myself. But the feeling of brotherhood and alliance in the common grief left me almost immediately after I faced the blind, stupefied people. The main source of suffering is my inability to explain and to demonstrate my defencelessness and the lack of proof that I am right (ibid.: 272).

Sofia Petrovna was formed out of this pain, because art, as Chukovskaya believed, is always born out of a desire to understand reality. It is noteworthy that Chukovskaya had not yet established herself as a writer, as she claimed that this novel was her first literary work:

> This was the first time I had set pen to paper, because I could do nothing but write. I did not write about Mitya, nor about myself; I wrote about a woman who believes that "we don't imprison people for no reason," but every word was dictated by Mitya's fate […] and my new condition dictated by my new reality (ibid.: 453).

What was this new reality about? When looking back later, Chukovskaya called 1937 a time of "senselessness." But in *Sofia Petrovna* she does not seek names for what was happening; the text does not contain the author's reasoning, and there is not a single conclusion, not a single summary explanation. It might be said that the author was trying to be as unbiased as possible. Her task was to provide a very careful description of the

events, not missing any trivialities. This is how a detailed and honest report from the scene of the accident was born, depriving the author of any hope. Sensitive readers eventually find it hard to breathe, because this story is about total destruction. The relatively short piece shows the destruction of the characters' usual way of life, of personal and professional biographies; the destruction of a family and the relations between people; the destruction of communication, language, words and their meanings; the destruction of comprehension, and, as a consequence, of the human psyche.

> Let yourself understand that [they arrest] you "for nothing," "for no reason whatsoever," that murderers kill because it's their profession to kill, and your heart, not even shot by a bullet, will burst into pieces, and you will lose your mind although you have not been shot. Man was hiding from the truth as if from a revolver muzzle pointed at him (ibid.: 268).

Sofia Petrovna is striving for some plausible explanation of what is happening to her son and herself, but she finds herself in a dead end of incomprehension, because the truth is meaningless and therefore unbelievable (*nepravdopodobno*). And the most believable thing (*pracdopodobno*) must be a lie, because otherwise it would have to be understood and admitted that society is under the control of murderers. In refusing an extremely absurd-seeming truth, the heroine of the story gradually goes mad. Chukovskaya testifies to what she had repeatedly observed: once in the midst of senseless, gratuitous total violence and total lying, there can be no salvation from despair unless there is faith in the sense of what is occurring in such a world. Such a saving lie for Sofia Petrovna, as well as for millions of other people – Chukovskaya's contemporaries – is the belief that all this cannot "really" be the case – that what is happening is a mistake and a misunderstanding and that, as Soviet common sense postulated, "we don't imprison people for no reason." This crazy belief in an error saves the heroine from suicide.

Chukovskaya repeatedly mentions in her late autobiographical notes that she also partly shared the conviction that "all this" (meaning the events surrounding her) "cannot be real." In 1937, she and her family wondered, "Will the state grab thousands of people in vain? […] Why? Neither fools nor smart people could answer this question" (ibid.: 278). Another question they asked was "Why, in fact, is it necessary to arrest a person who is obviously innocent and beat him until he confesses that he intended to

blow up the Smolny?[5] […] Where did so many people suddenly come from who could beat the defenceless? […] And why?" (ibid.: 142–143). It is noteworthy that *A Stroke of the Pen*, which was written in the early 1980s (and, therefore, decades after the Great Terror) is full of questions to which the author still had no answers.

In her novella, Chukovskaya describes a political situation in which truth is unbelievable, and belief in untruth is the only kind of resistance that Sofia Petrovna can manage. Chukovskaya only gradually found another way for herself: she was able to withstand the despair that her heroine could not bear because she resisted with literature and courageous testimony. She was singular in her readiness to try to understand any – even the most improbable reality – with the help of literature. In remembering Chukovskaya after her death, the literary critic Samuel Lurie said that "she had a literary view of things. […] And she believed that there, in Russian literature, is the truth" (quoted in Tolstoĭ 2007). It is precisely because *Sofia Petrovna* does not answer any of the painful questions about why people were arrested and murdered and how this turned out to be possible that the novella documents the possibility of finding the truth. "Do not let the deaths of the innocent grow into renewed executions but into a clear thought. The exact word" – Chukovskaya urged in 1968, believing that it was the writer who was called upon to correct "the murder of the truthful word," which was "one of the blackest atrocities committed for decades" under Stalin (Chukovskaya 1991: 9). But in the 1960s and 1970s *Sofia Petrovna* was not published in Chukovskaya's homeland, and until the beginning of the *perestroika* she was constantly persecuted and harassed because she appreciated the truthful word, refused to make concessions to censorship, and wanted to call things by their proper names when speaking about the Great Terror.

/// *The Open Book*

In commenting on his novel *Otkrytaya kniga* [The open book], Veniamin Kaverin admitted once that its plot plays a secondary role. The main issue is the historical context. "I've been waiting for decades for my arrest, especially since the mid-1930s, when the saving formula collapsed: if you're arrested, you are guilty" – Kaverin wrote in his *Epilogue*[6] (1989: 129). By

[5] Seat of the Leningrad city authorities

[6] *Epilogue* is one of Kaverin's most frank books, which he decided to write in the 1970s. It was created without any hope for publication. Then the manuscript was secretly sent abroad. It was only thanks to the *perestroika* that the book, in which Soviet literature is closely intertwined with the history of lack of freedom, was released in the late 1980s in Kaverin's homeland.

the mid-1930s, all logical explanations for the numerous arrests had finally been exhausted for Kaverin. It had become clear that people were arrested for nothing. He escaped this fate, but he constantly worried about his relatives and friends. Like Chukovskaya, Kaverin closely observed the effects of the Great Terror in daily life, and these observations were reflected in his works.

Perhaps the most interesting work in this respect is his novel *The Open Book*. Like Chukovskaya in her novella, Kaverin wrote his novel not only as a witness but also as a survivor of the events (after more than a decade had passed). Yet Kaverin worked on this long novel for a considerable time. Although he had begun writing already in 1946, he only considered the work finished after Stalin's death, on the eve of Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw, when repression and censorship were relaxed.[7] However, the work's main difference from Chukovskaya's novella was that Kaverin adapted it to the requirements of censorship. He wrote his novel in such a way that it could be officially published. *The Open Book* is primarily a fascinating story about the life of scientists and of scientific discoveries in Soviet microbiology and virology in particular. And the atmosphere of "brutal, unresponsive and relentless violence" – as Kaverin described the Great Terror at the end of his life in *Epilogue* (ibid.: 126) – is only a background to the scientific research and great discoveries. The historical context of the novel is based on the fate of his brother Lev Zil′ber (1894–1966), the founder of Soviet immunology, who was arrested three times under Stalin (in 1930, 1937, and 1940), and on the fate of various other scientists who were killed during Stalin's reign.

Another important difference between Kaverin's novel and Chukovskaya's novella about the ordinary, semi-educated Sofia Petrovna is that the heroes of *The Open Book* are representatives of the scientific intelligentsia. In fact they are its best representatives, as the prototypes of the main characters were outstanding Soviet scientists. *The Open Book* is a novel about well-educated people engaged in intense intellectual work. However, Kaverin often portrays their fear and bewilderment, especially when they feel that they understand less of the reality around them than of their labo-

[7] In 1948, the first part of the novel was published in a journal version, which was significantly changed at the demands of censorship. The publication generated a large number of negative responses, which Kaverin later described as a "coordinated attack" (1989: 297). He repeatedly "adapted" the novel to the requirements of censorship. The first publication of the full version in 1956 also contained numerous concessions to censorship because "the time when it is possible to write about the arrests has not yet come." Later, Kaverin reworked the novel further in order to bring it closer to the original or, as he wrote in 1989, "to the truth" (ibid.: 300). The reflections in this article are based on the version of the novel that was published in 1999. This version is also quoted here.

ratory work. Kaverin would later call their desire to resist the atmosphere of a "consciousness turned inside-out, in which we were all caught at the time" (ibid.: 125) naive: "We learned only after forty years what was actually happening in the country, while at that time our ignorance was a pervasive feature of life" (ibid.: 96). Nevertheless, he finished his novel on an optimistic note.

The main character of the book, Tatyana Vlasenkova, is the only one who continues to ask the stinging question "For what?":

> "By the way, Krushel′skiĭ has been arrested."
> This was an old scientist, a member of the Academy of Sciences […].
> "Unbelievable! For what?"
> Rubakin smiled.
> "Today the weather is nice," he said (Kaverin 1999: 415).

In this episode, some patient colleagues try to explain, with evil irony, the meaninglessness of the question. A few years later the husband of the protagonist will be arrested and she will abandon the question, without giving up the desire to understand what is going on. In an attempt to save her husband, she accidentally learns that he was arrested after a denunciation by his colleagues at his research institute. When she looks into the case, she realises that the Great Terror is based on complete lies and that denunciations are only one of its manifestations. Kaverin's heroine concludes that jealousy and whistleblowing are secondary. Instead, it was a special kind of lie, reaching to the highest state level, that made the disappearance of millions of people possible: "Obviously, with all the appearances of scientific logic, black was defined as white and white as black," and all of this turned into a "ruthless act of accusation" (ibid.: 588) that could take the life of any person.

The "dangerously senseless order of things" that reigned in the country (Kaverin 1989: 139) reminded some educated people of the Inquisition of the medieval Catholic Church. Talking about this resemblance in *Epilogue* and referring to the opinion of his brother, one of the arrestees, Kaverin comes to the conclusion that "there was no resemblance. The actions of the Inquisition did not take place in dumbness, in secret." He concludes that what happened under Stalin did not allow of any comparison (ibid.). He repeatedly called the Great Terror "mute," emphasising that in these years it was not only hard to understand anything, but also impossible to

use a rational argument, a word, an indication of the facts, a statement – all this made no sense, leaving a person completely defenceless and helpless.

With the help of cautious replicas of his protagonist (it should be recalled that the novel ended after Stalin's death), Kaverin makes it clear that the Great Terror was controlled by a special kind of lie, which slipped away from any meaning. It was a lie that could not be proven to be a lie, because it took the form of absurdity. The deception, having no sense, evaded revelation: "As in Goya's painting, two faces were turned to me – one smiling with a hard-to-believe sincerity, the other – gloomy, with a motionless mouth, with the half-open eyes of a killer" – this is how the protagonist portrays one of the denunciators, and this description surprisingly reflected the common method of having interrogations be conducted by two NKVD investigators – a good one and an evil one – in order to torment the detainees with a schizophrenic bifurcation of interrogation styles as well.

The end of the novel is much more optimistic than the real fate of its prototypes, although Kaverin's brother did in fact manage to survive in a labour camp. Unlike *Sofia Petrovna*, Kaverin's novel leaves the reader with hope. His main character also firmly believes that "all this" cannot be, but in a quite different way than that of the lunatic Sofia Petrovna. If Sofia Petrovna is no longer able to distinguish lies from truth, Tatyana Vlasenkova retains this ability to the end. If Sofia Petrovna is helpless and insidious, Vlasenkova's behaviour is both braver and more cunning, as she does not give up the hope of being able to expose the denunciators someday. She tries to outwit them. "I spoke quickly, almost without thinking, and taking care only of how to lie more confidently and more precisely. For the first time in my life, I lied with a clear conscience, because it was the only way to defeat another lie against which there was no other weapon" – this is how Kaverin has his protagonist act in the final scene, during a conversation with the main denunciator (1999: 596). While remaining confident that lies and truth could and should be distinguished from each other, Vlasenkova understands that the Great Terror puts her in a situation that, at least, does not yet give her such an opportunity.

Like his main character, Kaverin did not uncompromisingly demand the disclosure of lies. He was brave in repeatedly speaking out against Soviet power and the suffering of the repressions. Yet he also made concessions and censored his works on several occasions. In the final years of his life he bitterly repented having done so:

> I have been deceived without guilt and punished by humiliation and fear. And I believed and did not believe and worked stubbornly, retreating at every step of the way, and got confused in contradictions, proving to myself that the lie is the truth. And I longed to forget the hard dreams in which I had to tolerate meaninglessness and to be cunning and hypocritical (quoted in Starosel′skaya 2017: 172).

/// Faith in the Falsehood versus Pretence in the Truth

The main characters of these two literary testimonies about life during the Great Terror are examples of opposing political epistemologies and opposing attitudes to political reality. While Chukovskaya's protagonist is finally deprived of the ability to distinguish truth from lies under the influence of the Great Terror and is ready to accept a more plausible lie for the truth, Kaverin's protagonist retains the ability to distinguish truth from lies to the end, but for tactical reasons refuses to do so and resorts to pretence. At the same time, both Chukovskaya and Kaverin confront their characters with a special kind of lie – a lie disguised as something so absurd, outlandish, and nonsensical that it is particularly difficult or even impossible to accept and, thus, to expose.

If we now turn to non-literary sources, such as the historical studies that have appeared in recent years based on archival materials about the NKVD-run detention centres (investigation files, interrogation protocols, intra-departmental correspondence), we will see that these two political epistemologies can be found not only among the non-incarcerated public but also among those arrested by the NKVD, and the variant of *Sofia Petrovna* seemed to be clearly dominant. As evidenced by the documents available to researchers, the majority of those arrested believed that a mistake had occurred, and they continued to believe it sometimes until their execution or during many years in labour camps. Even they, the direct victims of the Great Terror, who knew much more than those who remained at large, found it difficult to believe the truth and much easier to mistrust it.

It should be remembered that a certain fascination with communist ideas and ideals, even among the victims themselves, led people to have remarkably ambivalent attitudes towards their own individual destinies. Thus, for instance, the well-known Soviet authors Evgenya Ginzburg and Varlam Shalamov remained more or less convinced supporters of the com-

munist or Soviet model of society even after years in prisons and labour camps, where they had only barely escaped death. This peculiar phenomenon of the deep utopian loyalty of victims and survivors (not to mention their relatives) in regard to a regime which was alone responsible for their humiliation and dehumanisation would have been unthinkable, for example, in the case of the *Shoah* (compare Schor-Tschudnowskaja 2018).[8]

However, the system of the Great Terror did not provide much opportunity for proving one's innocence, although there were some rare cases. The Terror had other aims: the essence of the interrogations and the whole "investigation" was to demand that the arrested person confess (to "crimes" she or he had not committed). This was neither an investigation nor a verification or comparison of facts but pressure on already convicted persons to confess their guilt. Perhaps this is why there is an impression that the Great Terror held on to a special kind of lies, which resembled absurdity and nonsense, that is, they contained not so much the opposite of the truth as a lack of meaning as such. This sense of meaninglessness has been documented in numerous testimonies. For example, Petr Vasil'evich Karamyshev, the former head of the NKVD administration for the Nikolaev region (today's Ukraine), who was acquitted and released after his first arrest and executed after the second, wrote about his time in prison:

> This is more than I can bear, because I have already experienced such a great deal of the suffering which a man who believes in the triumph of the Bolshevik truth can endure. I ask you therefore to intervene in this matter, to put an end to all these cruel and senseless persecutions (quoted in Savin et al. 2018: 7).

The historian Igal Khalfin, who analysed the interrogation protocols from the second half of the 1930s, came to the conclusion that almost all these documents contain fictitious crimes. What is remarkable about them is not only that they have nothing to do with the real thoughts and deeds of the arrested person, but also that they often contradict the laws of logic and even the laws of nature. Through sophisticated torture, which was allowed and widely used at that time, the arrested persons were forced to confess that they had committed senseless acts. With bitter irony, Khalfin called this the "collective creativity of the Chekists" (2019). We might also speak

[8] See also Yuri Slezkine (2017), who treats Bolshevism as a kind of sectarianism, emphasising the meaning of faith ("apocalyptic millenarism") for this ideology.

of a collective psychosis, but Khalfin rigorously dismissed any psychiatric terms. Being interested primarily in the extent to which the Great Terror was understood by those who performed it, he stated that

> [f]or researching the NKVD's methods of investigation, terms such as "irrationality," "paranoia," or "violence bacchanalia," which are so common in the literature on this period, do not explain much. There is no need to refer to psychosis and other psychiatric hallmarks to understand how the Stalinists understood guilt. The process of investigation, starting with the arrest, proceeding through interrogations, and ending with a verdict and a gunshot, was meaningful and *understandable* to the investigators, and even for the executioners, who had to shoot dozens of people per shift (Khalfin 2019; emphasis added).

Khalfin insisted that the "senselessness" of the Great Terror contained its own meaning, and the "lack of logic" – its own logic. And if the victims of the Great Terror mostly did not understand at all what was going on, it was more or less clear to its executors. Khalfin believed that the meaning of the "senselessness of 1937" (Chukovskaya) has to be sought on the side of the perpetrators of the terror. And this meaning, as Khalfin concluded after a detailed study of documents about the Great Terror, turns out to be irrational. He considers that the behaviour of NKVD investigators was guided by a logic similar to some kind of "demonology," that is, a search for the forces of evil from Beyond. "'Demonology' is not mentioned directly, but it works. Without it, it is impossible to kill so many people," said Khalfin in one of his presentations (quoted in Litvinova 2015). And, as other historians have done before, he compares the Stalinist repressions to the Inquisition and the search for heretics, although he recognises that this comparison is problematic. However, he sees an undeniable similarity in one thing: Stalin's society was characterised by an eschatological, or, more precisely, "millenarist understanding of time" (Khalfin 2019).

> I analyse the Bolshevik understanding of time. This was changing. However, for the Bolsheviks it was very important to know their place in history. After 1936, the Bolsheviks believed that the end of time had come and that it was necessary to sum up the final results. And if a person was "wrong," he should be physically destroyed. This was the logic (quoted in Litvinova 2015).

For Khalfin, the semantic foundation of the Great Terror was the specific understanding of guilt, the search for "demons" and the conviction that any one could turn out to be one. And according to Khalfin, as this confidence began to dominate, the language, the main epistemological tool, was devalued and replaced by a suggestive gesture: "You are guilty." And this in turn was documented by thousands of self-incriminations and confessions beaten out under torture: "Yes, I am guilty."

Soviet society, as seen by the political (Soviet) elite and the NKVD, was declared guilty of "demonism" in advance. Thus, the political regime, which set itself the goal of separating its "own" (in Russian *svoi*) people, who have the ("holy") truth on their side, from its "enemies," made this very distinction impossible because it provided no precise criterion for determining "its own." According to Khalfin, it turns out that if it is impossible to separate one's "own" from one's "enemies" then the necessary consequence of such an "end of time" is the impossibility of separating the truth from lies. No matter what the arrested person says, in the eyes of the investigator it is most likely a lie. Thus, it is impossible for the person to prove his or her innocence in relation to the charges, however absurd they may be.

If a political epistemology in such a society is possible at all, it is thus an epistemology of spoofing (*podmena*), in which truth is considered to be a lie and lies are true, and in which it is impossible to label lies as such because they take the form of absurdity. Survival in such a society was possible only by chance, when one could save oneself by a blind belief in the plausibility of lies (like Sofia Petrovna) or by slyness (like Tatyana Vlasenkova). And if the years of Stalin's terror (of which there were no less than twenty in total) rooted such a political epistemology in the society, then the following decades may have relativised it, but not abolished it.

/// Historical Heritage and Political Epistemology

Political epistemologies are subject to constant change, and if they are even partially conserved it indicates that they retain their adaptive function, or, in other words, the political reality keeps individual patterns unchanged. Numerous researchers have documented a certain political consistency to the decades of the Soviet regime after Stalin's death (1953) and an undoubted continuity with the years of Stalin's rule: a peculiar mixture of dream, illusion, utopia, deception, and lies formed the political foundation of Soviet society until its end. The veiling of political realities (Dietrich Beyrau), and

the classic formula of the "cunning man" (according to Soviet and Russian sociologist Yuri Levada) who knew that the main thing was not reality but how it was mediated, were dominant features of politics in the USSR until its very end (Schor-Tschudnowskaja 2019).

In considering the post-Soviet period of development up to the present time, it is possible to point to various aspects that testify to a certain stability of the political epistemology assimilated from Soviet times. Over the last two decades (after 1999), we have seen an increase in confidence that it is impossible for a political subject to separate truth from lying and that the sphere of public administration and political interests is, by definition, a place where deception prevails. Both from my own observations and those of other commentators it would seem that there has been a "normalisation of lying" in Russian politics in this time (Skillen 2019). The opposition politician Grigoriĭ Yavlinskiĭ noted back in 2011 that

> [t]he main political problem of our country is not the level and quality of democracy or the protection of freedoms and rights of citizens, as it is commonly believed, but an unlimited and total lie as the basis of the state and public policy (Yavlinskiĭ 2011).

The well-known political scientist Vladimir Pastukhov, for his part, commented on political processes in Russia as follows:

> If the goal of poetry is nothing but poetry, the goal of terror is terror. It has no other "practical" goals. This is a ritual that will now be performed daily by a new Russian religious sect – the "order of law enforcers." Like any ritual, it has long been – and is – unrelated to reality, it has no clear practical meaning, it has only a sacral meaning, and it is self-sufficient. This is why there is no "For what?" and "Why?" here (Pastukhov 2019).

If one did not know the date of this comment and the political events it describes, one might think that these words refer to the distant Soviet past. The term "religious sect," the lack of connection with reality, and the eternal question "Why?" which remains without a meaningful answer, have all been addressed above in this article. But Pastukhov was commenting on current events: in particular, the various persecutions of opposition candidates in the run-up to elections to the Moscow City Parliament in September 2019 and the numerous detentions at public rallies against these

persecutions (as well as the administrative and judicial harassment of detainees, primarily in Moscow). Being well aware of Russia's history in the twentieth century, Pastukhov consciously turned to terminology borrowed from historical sources to highlight the parallels between the present day and the Soviet past.

For its part, the Human Rights Centre of the Russian NGO Memorial points out that numerous legal charges have been fabricated for the sake of such persecutions.[9] In modern Russian judicial practice it is very difficult to rationalise and substantiate the evidence by a consideration of facts.[10] In addition, there are numerous cases of bullying during the investigations (Davidis 2018), although no one has exact figures in regard to their extent. And so the Memorial staff finds it necessary and justified to draw some parallels between current and past political practices.

In summary, in regard to the continuing influence of the political epistemology established during the years of Stalin's terror, it is worth noting that despite all the apparent differences between the systems of that time and today's Russia, one important similarity is striking: the dominant feature of the political culture in Russia is (and remains) a high level of conviction that the ruling political class is deceiving the population and that lies are an inseparable attribute of politics and public administration. As a consequence, the levels of slyness and sham, as adaptive strategies of the population, remain extremely high. The well-known Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov (2019), in commenting on the results of a recent poll, pointed out that the semantic dominant perception of power today is "criminal, corrupt" (ca. 46% of respondents), that is, deceptive, and that this perception has obviously Soviet origins.

The final example is an extensive recent study by the Russian sociologist Irina Olimpieva (2019), who investigated how young people perceive corruption (as a form of deception incorporated into state structures and political power). She found that young people consider corruption to be the main component of state power, as well as of business, which is largely controlled by the state. At the same time, the respondents revealed their feelings of complete helplessness in the current situation and their confidence that it could not be changed: "Young people do not believe in the possibility of a fundamental change in the state of corruption in Russia in

[9] See, for example, Otkrytaya Politsiya (2016).

[10] Some observers have raised the question of whether there is even a presumption of innocence in Russia today, especially in politically motivated trials. It would actually seem that the defendant has to prove that he or she is not guilty – and this cannot be done because the facts and evidence are not taken into account by the court. I thank Jan Surman for this hint.

the foreseeable future. It is believed that the state must fight corruption, but the state itself is corrupt" (Olimpieva 2019: 6).

In the context of such a situation, it is legitimate to ask to what extent "post-truth" is a new phenomenon for Russia, if we consider its political aspect alone. It may be concluded that the opportunities offered by the new media, and especially the internet, to manipulate information in such a way that it is practically impossible to distinguish between true and false information have been gratefully received by Russian society and the political elite precisely because the propensity for not distinguishing between truth and lies came to be rooted in the political epistemology of Russian society long before the new technical and media opportunities appeared.

Of course, the political epistemology of the Russian population today has many new traits in comparison with Soviet times. Among these traits, one important circumstance allows us to speak of a widespread new attitude to truth in Russia – and it is not the development of virtual technologies. I mean the fact that – as can be seen in numerous public discussions – in the perception of many Russians the West today appears to be a political community that is rapidly losing its democratic foundations and therefore, in terms of "the culture of truth," is increasingly approaching Russian society. The prefix "post" in relation to the political "culture of truth" in today's society in Russia conveys the great extent to which the balance of power in the global context has shifted in the people's perception in comparison to the Soviet period. Today, the majority of citizens in Russia feel that there is "no truth" – not only in the domestic politics of their country, but also abroad. There is less and less hope of distinguishing lies from the truth, because the image of an alternative attitude to the truth, which strictly enforced the boundary between truth and lies, and the possibility of exposing lies, has practically vanished. It was this idealised attitude to truth (and to lies) that was ascribed to Western societies in Soviet times and served as a model and a benchmark, albeit one that was then not (yet) attainable. The consequences of the loss of this standard for Russian society have yet to be examined.

Translated by Martin Malek

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/// Abstract

This article is devoted to the attitude to truth as a part of political epistemology and of political culture in post-Soviet Russia. It considers the extent to which the Great Terror contributed to the development of a specific political epistemology, which is also largely characteristic of later periods of Soviet history and perhaps even of today. Of particular interest is the population's perception of the terror as inaccessible or poorly accessible to logical understanding. As main sources, the article relies on two literary texts: Lydia Chukovskaya's *Sofia Petrovna* and Veniamin Kaverin's *The Open Book*. Despite all the apparent differences between the Soviet system and today's Russia, one important similarity is striking: over the last two decades (after 1999) there has been a visible increase in the belief that it is impossible for a political subject to separate truth from lying and that the sphere of public administration and political interests is, by definition, a place where deception prevails. This article discusses the potential historical roots of this certainty.

Keywords:
post-truth, Russian political culture, Soviet and Russian literature, Soviet history, Stalinist purges

/// Anna Shor-Chudnovskaya – assistant professor at the Faculty of Psychology at Sigmund Freud University in Vienna, Austria. She is a sociologist and psychologist with the following fields of interest: the history of Soviet society, Russian culture and literature, everyday life in the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet transformation of Russian society, the formation of current sociological theory, etc. Her research is focused on social patterns

of interpretation in Soviet and post-Soviet Russian societies. She is the author of numerous works which have been published in several countries, including: "Sila i slabost′ obshchestvennoj kriticheskoi refleksii v gody perestrojki" [Strengths and weaknesses of social critical reflection in the *perestroika* years] in *Poslednee desyatiletie sotsializma. Transformatsionnye protsessy v GDR i v Sovetskom Soyuze* [The last decade of socialism: Transformation processes in the GDR and the Soviet Union], ed. O. Nagornaya (Novyj Hronograf, 2016); "Young Russians about Their Family's Soviet Past: A Nostalgic, Post-Utopian or Retrotopian Approach?" in the journal *Mir Rossii* (2018); "Das schwierige Erbe von Utopie, Illusion und Betrug in der postsowjetischen russländischen Gesellschaft" in *"So ist er ein Weder-Noch, ein Sowohl-als-Auch…": Beiträge zur Literatur und Kultur*, ed. J. Flinik et al. (Peter Lang, 2019).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3999-2070

E-mail: anna.schor-tschudnowskaja@sfu.ac.at

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VOTING IN THE HORIZON OF CONTRADICTORY TRUTHS: A PRAXEOLOGICAL VIEW ON GENERAL ELECTIONS IN STATE-SOCIALIST CONTEXTS

Andreas Langenohl
Justus Liebig University Giessen

/// Introduction: What Kind of Truth Do Elections Relate?

According to many accounts of the political systems of state-socialist societies, elections in those societies were barely veiled attempts to create an ideological image of societal unanimity, inevitably resulting in voting results of over 98% for the governing regime (see, e.g., Brunner 1990). However, recent historical research has drawn a much more differentiated picture, highlighting various non-instrumentalist functions of elections in socialist settings (see Pravda 1978: 186–193 and the contributions in Jessen & Richter 2011). These include the use of elections as arenas, however limited, for the negotiation of citizens' demands, especially in the case of local elections where citizens sometimes negotiated their participation in the elections with the office-holders, addressing their concrete demands to them, or the use of elections as channels of communication to the party (in some instances, voters used the ballot papers to note down messages). However, a more fundamental feature of elections in socialist societies has not yet been discussed, namely, that of relating a truth about society that appears in the context of political functionalisation but cannot be reduced to it, and is thus heterogeneous and contradictory. This article approaches such a constellation through a discussion of what the "imaginary" of the

general election, which has preoccupied political theory with respect to Western societies, was in the case of state-socialist contexts.

While no analytical concept of truth figures prominently in studies about elections and voting, I maintain that such an approach is important for understanding not only the specifics of elections and voting under state socialism but also of elections and voting much more generally. To begin with, the genealogy of the theory of democracy is saturated with doubts about the political device of general elections, which, if indirectly, invoke truth as a foil against which the particular weaknesses of general elections can be identified: they create false representations of society, are coterminous with a dictatorship of public opinion, prevent people from presenting their own causes by themselves, and so forth. In this way, a normative notion of truth becomes a point of reference for a political critique of the distortion of political articulation through elections – a point that was also made by Václav Havel (2018 [1978]), whose figure of the greengrocer eventually realises that the only way to react to elections in a sham regime is to stop participating in them. In another analytical idiom, elections and voting have become conceptualised as epistemic machines that render truths about society to the political system, so that elections are attributed the function of providing the political system with input regarding the state of affairs in society. A more social-theoretical conceptualisation of the truth of elections – bypassing criticism of elections as false representations, as well as demands for their epistemic functionality – holds that elections are part and parcel of the practices in modern polities that crosscut and interlink "political" and "societal" understandings of the world one lives in. According to this praxeological conceptualisation of truth, voting performs an important role not only by being a practice that connects citizens – with their demands, inclinations, and priorities – to the political system, but also due to its power to have macro-conceptions of society – such as the conception of a "democratic society" – redeem themselves on the level of individual agency at the ballot box. Seen from this angle, voting performs the task of inserting individuals' actions into a broader understanding of what kind of society the individuals actually live in – which makes this understanding an epistemic understanding, that is, one that relates to truth as a basis for rendering practices such as voting meaningful.

The present article will pursue the conception of truth as informing practices which are performed with a view to overarching understandings, because, rather ironically, elections under state socialism can be related only to this conception of truth. The stringent political functionalisation

of state-socialist elections by party and/or state elites makes any more sophisticated qualms about their absent representativity redundant; and the same functionalisation accounts for their incapacity as epistemic machines for the regime (which was one reason for the outspoken uninformedness of state-socialist regimes regarding political sentiments in "their" populations). The only concept of "truth" that state-socialist elections can be analytically referred to is a praxeological one, that is, one that dissects the truth dimension of voting in the understandings that inform voting as a meaningful act – and, as will be shown, even as a politically meaningful act despite all regime functionalisation. As I will argue, it is precisely from this praxeological perspective that elections under state socialism can be seen as laboratories of a performative notion of truth that unfolds in the interstices between individual agency and popular conceptions of society.

The article will first discuss the issue of truth in elections as seen from the angle of Western political thought, and will develop the argument that the notion of truth captures the broad variety of reasons for which representative elections have been criticised. Thus, the truth of elections becomes the touchstone of more general problems that political thinkers have identified with respect to the institution of the general democratic election. Second, the article will conceptually reconstruct a praxeology of the imaginary political meaning of voting practices. This model will build upon Charles Taylor's concept of the social imaginary, exposing the intricate relationships between concrete political practices and the truth about polity and society that they must invoke in order to make sense from the perspective of the subjects. Yet, in comparison to Taylor's account of historically Western societies, in state-socialist contexts this truth was much more variegated, heterogeneous, and contradictory. Thus, in a third step, the praxeology of the general election will be confronted with the context of the historical evidence of the various functions of elections in state-socialist contexts, with an emphasis on the Soviet Union, where strictly plebiscitary elections were most widespread (Pravda 1978: 174–179). Here, the article aims at rescuing imaginary truths from voting under state socialism: among other things, in order to argue that imaginaries connected to voting are fundamentally plural and heterogeneous. In this connection, the analysis undertaken here may also serve as an inspiration to "un-other" state-socialist societies with regard to how they practised voting and elections, as will be hypothesised in the conclusion. It might not be too far-fetched to assume that certain propensities of the "truth" of elections in

those societies are being reinvigorated in contemporary societal and political constellations the world over.

/// Elections and Their Truths: Arguments in Political Thought

In contemporary political theory, general elections are held to be a core feature of a democratic political system (Dahl 2003 [1956]). Within this interpretive spectrum, they serve a couple of political functions. Through the majority mechanism, they represent society's interests in the institutions of government and legislation; they provide government and legislation with the required political legitimacy; they keep policy makers informed about social dynamics and concerns; finally, they might even serve the function of inhibiting the potentially dysfunctional participation of too many actors in policy-making, because representation through elections is tied to the idea that genuine political agency is exclusively the business of those elected, not of those electing (see Easton 1965).

This plethora of political functions attached to the institution of the general democratic election is stunning, as becomes evident when regarded from a historical perspective. Egon Flaig (2013a, 2013b), who has dedicated himself to a political anthropology of voting and has focused in particular on the institution of the majority decision, emphasises the comparatively recent coupling of elections (or voting more generally) and the principle of political decision-making based on numerical majorities. According to him, the Greek *polis*, where this latter principle was prominently if intermittently practised, was rather an exception from the historical rule, as voting practices have historically mostly been connected to the symbolisation and performance of political support, and not to scenes of political decision-making. Voting served the purpose of legitimising a decision that had already been taken or a ruler that had already been determined; and in this regard, its political-cultural significance did not rest mostly in the production of a difference between majority and minority, but in the signalisation of unanimity (see also Rosanvallon 2011).

According to Flaig, it is only in modernity that general elections have become tasked with the double function of creating a representation of societal concerns and priorities and at the same time of legitimising legislation to take care of those concerns and priorities. Both these ambitions are held together through the institution of majority rule: the majority decision simultaneously creates a representation of societal tendencies as mirrored in the programmatics of the individuals or party organisations elected to

power, and legitimises the empowerment of those individuals or party organisations. Yet it is also here that elections and voting become disentangled from actual decision-making – to be precise, *again* disentangled, since voting and decision-making historically did not go together most of the time (see above). Being represented through elections and majority rule is tied to waiving any claim to making genuine political decisions. It is specifically with regard to this understanding of elections as representations of society that doubts concerning their truth value – to which I will now turn – arose early on.

Hannah Arendt's criticism (2006 [1963]) about the lack of genuine political quality in representative elections – that is, that elections keep voters from becoming political actors – is as well known as her argument that the logic of politics has no room for considerations of truth. Yet, her criticism can as plausibly be traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville's (1835: 60) critique of elections as a "necessary evil" in large-scale democratic societies and his concern about the danger of "public opinion" dominating political discourse and political decision-making. Thus, unlike Arendt, whose critique he prefigured, Tocqueville did problematise elections and the public opinion as only inadequately, and with great distortion, representing societal trends and tendencies. The idea that elections, and the party-led campaigns preceding them, produce a distorted image of society can also be found in Jean Baudrillard (1991), who argues that the juxtaposition of different parties through their programmes and positions celebrates political differences and options, yet in actuality effaces the fundamental sameness of political parties and their personnel (as belonging to the political class). Seen from this viewpoint, elections belong to the "ideological state apparatus" (as one might say with Althusser), which camouflages the class divisions in society through dramatising alleged political distinctions.

While Tocqueville and Baudrillard took issue with the ways that elections of necessity distort adequate representations of society, another branch of critique highlighted the distinction between political system and society in a democracy as the source of an – at least potential – truth effect produced in the context of elections. For instance, Émile Durkheim (1991) considered democratic elections to be an unavoidable part and parcel of a democratic and republican political order, yet demanded a strict separation of voting – as an individual and thus "a-social" practice – from political decision-making. In particular, he refused the idea of an imperative mandate, which was being discussed in France at the time of his writing. Arguing that voters have individual and particularistic reasons and mo-

tives for placing their cross on the ballot, Durkheim maintained that this needed to be transcended in order to arrive at an adequate representation of society in the political system, which could only be achieved through reflection and deliberation among elected politicians, without any strings attached. In other words, to be able to arrive at a general representation of society's interests, the members of the political system must be independent from their voters' individual motives and desires. In a seemingly similar and yet juxtaposed fashion, Claude Lefort (1988) and Marcel Gauchet (1990; Lefort & Gauchet 1990) have argued that the difference between the political system and society is the main truth that elections deliver, as the serial and strict individualism of the practice of voting displaces any seemingly self-evident political representation of society. The truth that elections produce is, instead, that the political system and its games of opposition and coalition will only ever inadequately, temporarily, and transiently represent society, and be proven fallible at the next election.

To complete the rundown of positions on elections and truth in political thought, Pierre Rosanvallon's (2011) views add to the complexity of the truth(s) of elections. According to his argument, the potential of elections to make truth claims is circumscribed in contemporary societies. In particular, this is due to the differentiation between majority and minority as a fundamental feature of representative elections, whose flaws, however, are increasingly seen in the simplism of a distinction that glosses over important societal differences that cannot be rendered in terms of that juxtaposition. Furthermore, elections are increasingly being challenged by other claims at representation, such as expert discourses, non-elected office holders (especially in the legal sphere) or social movements. Thus, while elections still produce a truth about society, the legitimisation of that truth to ground political decisions and governmental powers is increasingly being critically scrutinised.

In concluding this discussion, we arrive at an utterly heterogeneous picture regarding the conceptualisation in political thought of the truth that the institution of democratic representative elections produces, refers to, or fails to encompass. Republican and Marxist critiques hold that representative elections systematically lead to a separation of elected government and institutions of governance from social and societal interests, issues, and concerns. Other approaches that highlight – if for various reasons – the necessary difference between the political system and society argue that the separation of one from the other produces a particular truth. Yet, while in Durkheim this is the moral truth of the collective consciousness, which

can only be arrived at through a rigorous isolation of political communication and decision-making from the particular motives that guide voting, for Lefort and Gauchet it is precisely the individual motivation behind the idiosyncratic act of voting that publicly establishes the truth that society cannot be fully represented by "its" political system. Finally, with Rosanvallon, an empirical concern is added to the truth that elections produce, as that truth is from the outset incomplete and circumscribed given the plethora of institutions and practices that attain representation, publicity, and "generality" in contemporary societies. Thus, in political thought, the truth claims characterising the democratic institution of general elections have come to be challenged in a myriad of ways. The critique thus fans out into reproaches of election-based representation as producing systematically distorted, ideologically charged, particularistic, or incomplete representations of society.

And yet, even given all these well-known concerns about elections and the truth effects they produce, the picture regarding the complicated truths of elections might be incomplete. What about elections in modern, yet non-liberal democratic settings? In state-socialist societies, elections were regularly held, yet, according to a widespread analysis, they were functionalised (or even falsified) by the regime to signal total societal support of the ideological and political programme (Brunner 1990; Karklins 1986; Mote 1965; Pravda 1978; Zaslavsky & Brym 1978). At first glance, it seems obvious that the whole problem of a "false" representation of society through elections was extreme in those settings, which then also would make them uninteresting for contemporary challenges to elections as a mode of political semiosis and decision-making. Yet, it is the claim of this article that even if elections under state-socialist regimes were tightly controlled politically, manipulated, or falsified, they were not simply false representations of society but enacted their own, and very specific, kind of truth.

In order to explore this thought, we must turn to a more thorough discussion of the notion of "truth" and thus avoid reducing it to the question of the appropriate (or inappropriate) "representation" of interests, structures, or concerns in society. In other words, the truth that elections perform should not be conflated with their political function, which, according to the political modernism of liberal democracies, is that of mapping the distribution of interests and political inclinations in society in order to arrive at a politically representative government. For as Flaig and Rosanvallon demonstrate, a brief look into political history already provides evidence about other uses to which elections and practices of voting

have been put. In order to address the truth of elections, beyond the modernist narrative of political representation, I will attempt a praxeological reconstruction of practices of voting as affording truths that do not refer exclusively to the political structuring of society. The truth addressed here pertains rather to the way that voting practices connect the individual act of voting – which is one of the politically most insignificant acts conceivable in a modern democracy, as it reduces the potential effect of a political communication to that of a single digit among millions of others – with understandings of the society within which this act makes sense despite its political insignificance.

/// A Praxeology of Voting: Taylor's Conception of the Social Imaginary

The closest approximation between praxeological thinking about truth, which considers truth to be something that is being practised rather than existing in correspondence to some factual point of reference (see Kleeberg & Suter 2014), and a thematisation of elections and voting can be found in Taylor's writings since the 1980s. Taylor mentions voting and elections (if in passing) in the context of his more general considerations regarding the structure of scientific and popular understandings of society in modernity, and how scientific and popular truths about modern society are interrelated. In the earlier writings of the 1980s, Taylor (1985) was mainly interested in the specific ways that the social sciences, as a mostly theoretical body of knowledge, relate to the societies that form their object of investigation, arguing that the social sciences enter into a relationship of performativity with social and political practice which ultimately cancels out any notion of social scientific truth in terms of mere correspondence to a reality existing independently of it. From this he argued that the truth of the social sciences can also be seen in the ways that they successfully help organise democratic and inclusive social and political practices. In his later work, Taylor shifted the perspective, now thematising the informedness of social practices by overarching – including scientific – understandings of society. On the one hand, these understandings, which Taylor (2002) termed "imaginaries," are informed by social-science theories; on the other hand, they are not theoretically spelled out but reside in a sphere of implication and latency, becoming effective as frames of meaning that give concrete social practices their significance and meaning in everyday life.

What Taylor's conception thus shares with other praxeological approaches, such as Pierre Bourdieu's or Anthony Giddens's, is the constitutive-theoretical argument of a recursivity between mundane practices and structural and cultural features of society that overarch concrete situations. Turning towards "the practice of deciding things by majority rule," Taylor argues that "[i]t carries with it certain standards, of valid and invalid voting, and valid and invalid results, without which it would not be the practice that it is. […] In this way, we say that the practices which make up a society require certain self-descriptions on the part of the participants" (Taylor 1985: 93). Thus, participating in elections is informed by what Taylor (1985: 93, 2002: 106) calls an "understanding" that elections belong to the taken-for-granted political dimension of life in modern societies. Practising voting is informed by that understanding, and thus gains in meaningfulness, while at the same time confirming the adequacy of that understanding.

Hence, a particular truth emerges from those practices. It is a truth that is less explicit and pronounced than the one conceptualised by Lefort and Gauchet, because the imaginary mode of meaning tends to highlight continuities between different social practices while de-emphasising discontinuities and contingencies. At the same time, it is a truth that is less ideologically charged than the one conceptualised by Baudrillard, because it refers not so much to a picture of the political cleavages within society as to an understanding of voting as part and parcel of democratic practice.[1]

In a certain sense, then, Taylor's praxeological version of the "truth" of voting renders voting a formidably unpolitical practice. The truth of voting invokes an understanding of living in a society where elections and voting practices are a self-evident component of the institutional default mode of politics, and where participating in voting thus first of all vindicates the appropriateness of a certain social conduct-as-usual. The social inertia implied in Taylor's conception of the imaginary – which can be traced back to an interest in the absence of revolutionary political changes even under conditions where they were seemingly under way (such as after the demise of state socialism; compare Gaonkar 2002; Langenohl 2019) – thus translates into an insight into the unpolitical nature of voting, which is due to its capacity to make social sense.

Against this backdrop, the genuine politicity of voting would then consist in the truth of voting's *not* being reduced to the formal adequateness and taken-for-grantedness of practices that relate individual political

[1] On a side note, this consideration might explain the paradox that people participate in voting although the single vote has virtually no chance to make a change in the overall result.

actions to the setup of the formal political system and of social habitudes. Seen from this angle, Rosanvallon's considerations, which highlight the increasing problematisation of general elections as the default mode of the political representation of society, give an example of how social forces challenge the truth of voting on the basis of its incapacitated politicity. As another example, one might think of the recent mobilisation of elections by rightist forces for delivering "anti-establishment" messages to society and the political system; in these cases, we witness an attempt to connect the practice of voting to another imaginary, namely, an imaginary according to which voting makes the sense it does not because it confirms dominant understandings of society but because it radically challenges them.

Leaving this discussion aside for the moment, we have to acknowledge that all the conceptual contributions discussed so far refer to the experience of liberal-democratic political modernism. This applies to the contributions elaborated in section 2 as well as to the notion of the social imaginary and its application to elections as suggested by Taylor. How can they be applied to the truth of elections and voting practices in state-socialist settings, where elections were neither free nor fair?[2] And conversely, what do the truths of state-socialist elections reveal about the general imaginary of the democratic vote? The concerns about the absent political-representative potential of elections discussed above, from Tocqueville to Rosanvallon, can be rightfully reproached for not accounting for the specificities of state-socialist elections, where a set of wholly *different* concerns concerning representation might be assumed. In contrast, Taylor offers a more formal account of the meaning of elections for society – a meaning that should not be conflated with their normative democratic functionality because it refers to the ways that voting as mundane practice is informed by understandings of the society voters inhabit. While his account might be criticised as apolitical thinking, given that he seems to reduce the political significance of voting to a societal recursivity between practice and imaginary, we might as well see ourselves encouraged to ask whether voting under state socialism, even as a practice informed by an imaginary understanding, might not have been more political than Taylor's conceptualisation of elections suggests for liberal-democratic societies. More to the point, precisely as elections under state socialism were neither free nor fair, participation in them might have been informed by understandings that did not seamlessly

[2] Taylor (1985: 98) seems to be of the opinion that voting in the context of political systems informed by Marxism cannot be but "a sham, a charade"; however, his analysis does not cover any empirical ground.

enter into the recursive loop of a mutually vindicating social practice and social imaginary. It is with this intuition that the present article now enters into a stocktaking of the imaginary repercussions of voting practices in state-socialist societies.

/// Doing Truth at the Ballot Station: Scenes from the USSR

Recent literature on the cultural history of elections in state-socialist societies has tried to refresh what has so far been the rather fleeting interest of political science in elections in such settings. This literature generally emphasises that "most of the 20th century dictatorships put a great deal of effort into arranging general elections and referenda." In regard to state socialism, for instance, "the Soviet government along with other governments in the Eastern bloc countries regularly called their populations out to vote in general, equal, direct, and secret elections," and while "with regard to influencing the composition of the parliament, or even the government, all of this remained quite meaningless," the question of why these elections did take place all the same is still considered an open one (Jessen & Richter 2011: 9).

One answer to that question is that state-socialist governments tried to conform with expectations regarding the participation of the population in the political system – as seems to be characteristic not only of liberal democracies but of modernity in general, regardless of the regime type (ibid.: 20). Yet while holding elections might have improved the legitimacy of state-socialist regimes for their populations (Furtak 1990; Pravda 1978), it is difficult to establish to what degree this was the case given the absence of representative and reliable data about the population's sentiments about elections.[3] It can also not be excluded that this kind of claim to legitimacy backfired due to the obvious and hardly concealed un-free and unfair ways the elections were prepared and conducted (see, e.g., Smith 2011). In any case, historical studies argue that it would be too reductive to understand the political and societal significance of state-socialist elections solely from the viewpoint of regime legitimacy, and that it is instead necessary to look into the ways that participants in elections – not only voters, but also candidates and administrative staff – understood such occasions.

[3] Before the demise of the Soviet Union, research occasionally relied on interviews with émigrés from the USSR, while being aware of the non-representativeness of the samples thus achieved (see Karklins 1986).

This section aims to shed light on these "understandings" – in Taylor's sense of the term (see above) – of elections, because they organised voting as an at least potentially meaningful social practice (beyond its possible political functionality). The analysis will thus sort historical studies with respect to what they reveal about the orientations of the actors implied in state-socialist elections, using the example of the Soviet Union, aiming at a conceptual reconstruction of the truths about society that were mobilised and activated in those voting practices. In the following, I will discuss each of those understandings in turn.

First, Mark Smith (2011), who has analysed the campaign for the Supreme Soviet elections of 1946, exposes the contradictory appeal of those elections. On the one hand, the elections were framed by the authorities as a confirmation of the citizens' right to exert popular sovereignty as per the Soviet constitution; yet on the other hand, the elections were equally framed as of necessity producing a confirmation of the rule of Stalin, due to whose generous initiative the 1936 Soviet constitution was passed so that the right to exert popular sovereignty could be established in the first place (ibid.: 74–75). The discourse of rights was thus utterly paradoxical: "Having things by right and being given them as gifts stand, of course, in opposition to each other." According to Smith, the elections thus failed to establish a sense of having rights in the Soviet population. Yet, at the same time, they allowed people to gain a deeper understanding of the political and societal system in which they were living:

> [T]his rhetoric gave citizens the chance to understand the Party on its own terms. Controlling the media and the campaign agenda completely, not needing to deal with an opposition or to concern itself with unpredictable political weather, the leading Party could communicate its ideas of choice in a clear and uncluttered way, offering ready-made rhetorical strategies that the population could learn and repeat (ibid.: 77).

The campaign for the elections to the Supreme Soviet thus stands out as an example of an attempt to instil and forge an understanding of general elections as being part and parcel of a polity in which the mobilisation to participate in the elections aimed at achieving popular sovereignty through the unanimous support of a pre-established regime. From the viewpoint of Taylor's conception of the imaginary, the election campaign articulated a particular recursivity between an imaginary of society and the practice of

voting: the truth of voting became meaningful in its quality as a confirmation of the identity of society and the party state, an identity in which voting affirmed the rightfulness of the regime, which thus had every reason to allow such voting (see also Zaslavsky & Brym 1978: 371, as quoted in Jessen & Richter 2011: 23).

Second, Smith's conclusions (2011: 78) also entail the point that, although the 1946 election campaign in the USSR offered people an insight – if a disillusioning one – into the regime's claims of an identity between the party state and society, in the long term their separation in the perception of the population was foretold. Alex Pravda has argued that the development of elections, "since the mid-1960s, has been characterised by a steady leavening of the plebiscitary lump and a general spread of limited-choice elections," which he aligns with the increasing political "recognition that the most effective way to underpin political stability and maintain economic progress is to provide more institutional opportunities for the expression of different interests within the community, and closer links between the electorate and their representatives" (Pravda 1978: 172–183). Yet, sociological research has argued that during the same period, the gulf deepened between what was held to be true in public and in private, respectively. After Stalin's death, a disconnection increasingly occurred between communicative patterns in the public sectors of Soviet society (such as organisations, political mobilisation, and party affiliation) and what was increasingly consolidating as a private sphere. Thereby, the notions of public and private do not entirely match those that developed in liberal democracies – so that what was considered private also had a certain public dimension that sometimes transcended the spaces of home and domesticity, such as alternative cultural institutions or lifestyles (Ritter 2008; Voronkov 2001; Zdravomyslova 2003). For the present article, this development in state-socialist societies, which has been most thoroughly reconstructed with respect to the Soviet Union, is important because it can be argued that practices of voting contributed to that division of "private truths [and] public lies" (Kuran 1995, quoted in Jessen & Richter 2011: 25). This applies in particular to the following two characteristics of elections in the Soviet Union, which made them genuinely public affairs (in the above sense) whose "truth" was completely decoupled from understandings of truth in the private realm. On the one hand, elections were often accompanied by festive manifestations, such as concerts, dancing, amusements for children, and so forth, with participation being strongly encouraged by the authorities and their diverse organisations (Mote 1965: 72–76). Using the example of the Kom-

somol's share in organising elections between 1953 and 1968, Gleb Tsipursky (2011: 97) argues that "[e]lections, in parallel to other Soviet festivals, functioned to legitimize the state by offering its citizens a sociopolitical contract that provided them with the chance to receive pleasure from participating in the celebratory elements of elections," which resulted in "an agentive, if passive, affirmation of the Soviet government." The "contract" that is mentioned here, however, was a strictly "public" contract in the above sense, that is, one that decoupled the actual political orientation of persons from their public appearance (see Jessen & Richter 2011: 24–25). On the other hand, the procedure of casting one's vote was often staged in a way that made voting against the option preordained by the party state a publicly visible – and thus potentially dangerous – venture: most notoriously through the practice of urging people to cast their vote in such a way that it could be seen by the local election committee and bystanders.[4] In terms of imaginary meaning, the way that these practices of general participation were staged symbolically institutionalised an understanding of the vote as a practice of public faking, thus contributing to the imaginary separation of a realm of public "truths," which where in effect lies, from a disconnected realm of "real" private truths.

Third, there is evidence that elections in the Soviet Union were used by voters to convey messages and demands to their (to-be) elected representatives. This occurred through a range of practices, such as pre-election negotiations between potential voters and candidates (which could take the form of demands openly voiced at campaign meetings or of negotiations in private; see Mote 1965: 56–64), or the scribbling down of demands and messages on the ballot sheets (which, in turn, could range from praises or denunciations of local politicians to the articulation of wishes and demands; Merl 2011, Bohn 2011). The leverage that could be brought to these demands was mainly the (implicit) threat to abstain from voting, which would fall back on the candidates as evidence of their inability to mobilise popular support for the ruling party. Thus, Jessen and Richter (2011: 29) state that "[a]long with petitions, election campaigns belonged to the

[4] Although ballot booths were available, the default procedure foresaw that the voter would be handed a ballot with the name or names of the candidate(s) on it, and that she or he would immediately proceed to the ballot box to vote. Yet research is not in unison with respect to the degree of pressure on voters to publicly put their ballots in the ballot box. While Alex Pravda (1977: 177) and Robert K. Furtak (1990: 9) emphasise the pressure exerted on the individual voter not to use the booth, Georg Brunner (1990: 36) states that "according to the unanimous statements of Western observers, it has not been dangerous to use the secret polling-booth for some time – in contrast to the situation under Stalin – and those who did use it have not been reported to the electoral commission."

communication channels used for exchanges between the ruling and the ruled on a local, micro-political level." Seen from the conceptual angle of the social imaginary, the "truth" enacted in these practices concerns the connectivity between society and polity. Accepting that under a political regime that tolerates no opposition but grounds its legitimacy on popular support the only effective political action is to abstain from voting (Karklins 1986), the potential act of *not* voting becomes a source of instrumental power. The threat to exert political agency through an election no-show translates into a lever for carving out a "contact zone" (Pratt 1992: 4), however limited, between the political system and the lifeworld, so that voting makes the sense it does thus through enabling a "voice" option that the political system otherwise denies.

/// Conclusion: Multiple Imaginaries of Voting

In modern societies, voting and elections are the most fertile grounds for political semiosis. This applies not only to liberal democracies but to all types of regimes. The analysis of truths that orient voting practices in the Soviet Union has revealed three different such understandings: (a) understandings pertaining to the acceptance of the state-socialist non-democratic order through complying with formal expectations regarding voting; (b) understandings regarding a deepening cleavage between the practice of voting as an unusually public affair – if compared to liberal democracies – and truths to be kept in the non-public, "private" realm; and (c) voting as a channel to communicate truths about needs or demands that could not be openly addressed as demands pertaining to the polity as such.

Unlike in Taylor's conceptualisation, then, voting in general elections is not coupled to just one imaginary of society presupposed as a truth, but to many, which may be overlapping but also persist in mutual contradiction. While Taylor acknowledges the multiplicity of "modern social imaginaries" already in the plural of the term, his references to democratic voting do not do justice to the factual heterogeneity of a practice which is neither limited to liberal democracies nor crystallises as only one recursivity between voting and the imaginaries it invokes and depends on.

The examples from state-socialist societies cited in this paper not only illustrate this heterogeneity and contradictoriness, but also invite analogies to be drawn with the contemporary problematics of general elections in liberal (or not-so-liberal) democracies. First, state-socialist elections make clear that voting does not necessarily invoke an understanding of having

a "true" choice in elections. This can be related to the recent successes of self-declared anti-establishment parties or candidates the world over, which thrive on the claim that the existing party system denies real alternatives and real choices. Second, voting may be imaginarily associated with a sphere of officialdom associated with corruption, fraud, and lies (leading to "voting fatigue"), with which alternative forms of publicity (today, most notably, online media) are juxtaposed. Third, the understanding that elections create a contact zone between lifeworlds and a political system that is otherwise closed directly relates to a prominent understanding in today's democracies that, through voting for extremist parties or candidates, voters want to "send a message" to the established parties – an understanding which, of course, implies that those voters have no other means of communicating their demands.

In other words, the social imaginary invoked in voting practices in state-socialist societies reveals the fact that voting – which is usually held to be a core practice of liberal democracies – is a practice that can be functionalised against the ideological and organisational structure of such democracies. Thus, an analysis of elections and voting practices in state-socialist societies not only highlights the plurality and heterogeneity of imaginary truths as such, but also points to the significance of those truths in voting that fly in the face of any normative notion of democracy. It is high time to account for the non- or even anti-democratic understandings that voting practices may convey.

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/// Abstract

Historical and political science research into the role and significance of elections in state-socialist societies points to the variety of functions that these elections fulfilled, notwithstanding their deficiency if compared to liberal democratic conceptions such as the legitimation of the political regime and the mobilisation and socialisation of the population. This paper takes a novel approach towards the social significance of state-socialist elections, arguing that they conveyed imaginary understandings of the societies and polities of which they were part. The concept of the imaginary is discussed in conversation with Charles Taylor, who argues that public social practices are informed by mostly latent "understandings" that render them subjectively meaningful in the first place. Referring to historical research on state-socialist elections, imaginary understandings are identified that pertain in particular to the relationship between officially proclaimed "truths" and unofficial positionings towards them.

Keywords:
Soviet Union, elections, voting, imaginary, public sphere, political theory

/// Andreas Langenohl – professor of sociology with a focus on general comparative studies at Justus Liebig University Giessen, Germany. His research fields cover cultural political sociology, economic sociology, social and cultural theory, and the epistemology of the social sciences. Recent publications include *Security Infrastructures* (2020, a special issue of *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, co-ed. with Gideon Van Riet); *Conceptualizing Power in Dynamics of Securitization: Beyond State and International System* (2019, co-ed. with Regina Kreide); *Town Twinning, Transnational Connections, and Trans-Local Citizenship Practices in Europe* (2015). In 2019, he joined the editorial board of the journal *Behemoth: A Journal of Civilization*.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1239-3193

E-mail: andreas.langenohl@sowi.uni-giessen.de

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OF MONSTERS AND MEN: THE AESTHETICS OF THE ALT-RIGHT

Thari Jungen
Graduate School "Performing Citizenship," Hamburg

/// 1. Introduction

On 22 February 2017, Chelsea Clinton tweeted a picture of a magazine cover with the following headline: "Hillary Clinton Adopts Alien Baby." The picture is the cover from a twenty-six-year-old issue of the tabloid magazine *Weekly World News* (see Fig. 1). Along with the tweet, Clinton

Figure 1. Cover of *Weekly World News*, issue of 15 June 1993. Original available online at "Five Classic *Weekly World News* Covers," *Weekly World News*, 2.10.2008, https://weeklyworldnews.com/headlines/3075/five-classic-weekly-world-news-covers/, accessed 30.11.2019. Reproduced with permission from *Weekly World News*

derided the harmful disinformation and bullying tactics used to attack her mother: "I'd forgotten about my alien sibling from the early 90s. Oh the good old days when #fakenews was about aliens…" (Clinton 2017).

In autumn 2016, a few months before, the same collage had been widely shared on social media and blogs such as uspolitics.com by A., a fake-news producer from Veles, Macedonia.[1] The collage shows the former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton gently smiling while holding an "alien baby" in her arms. On Facebook alone, the distribution counted more than 5,000 clicks.

In December 2016, the small North Macedonian town of Veles became popular due to international reports on its fake-news producers and large amount of fake-news websites. Two months later, in February, the artistic collective Institute for Falsification (IFF) travelled to Veles.[2] As a member of IFF, I interviewed several fake-news producers and collected video and audio material to explore their motivations, the production of fakes, and the distribution of fake news on social media. The investigation is part of my artistic research and was presented in the video installation *Show Me Your Agenda*.[3] The video installation displayed the newly built, neoclassical city centre of Skopje, a result of the national branding campaign entitled Skopje 2014, which flaunted images of bags decorated with the labels of "Channel" and "Guci"; the installation also featured Tom Kummer's fictitious interview with Ivana Trump, citing Andy Warhol's biography.[4] On the one hand, these manifold forms of deception have their lasting effects on society, science, and arts. On the other hand, it can be seen from the effects that a universalistic mimicry thesis, which coined, for instance, the term "post-factual age," is barely enlightening for the purpose of a more precise differentiation between the particular forms and shapes

[1] In this article, the fake-news producer A. is anonymised. If texts with existing attributions are cited, the names are withheld.

[2] For more information on the Institute for Falsification (in German Institut für Falsifikate), of which this chapter's author is a member, see www.institutfuerfalsifikate.net (accessed 30.11.2020). In a series of diverse artistic research settings, the IFF investigates practices of faking and hoaxing in cooperation with everyday experts and (non-)citizens. It does not focus on spectacular cases of deception but on examining everyday practices in relation to prevailing discourses, relations of representation, and practices of governance, which appear to be constitutive for producing deception.

[3] In May 2017, the results of the artistic research project were presented in a multimedia installation entitled *Show Me Your Agenda* in Hamburg at K3, Kampnagel. The work was produced within the graduate programme "Performing Citizenship."

[4] Around the year 2000, former journalist Tom Kummer launched several fake interviews in the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. After the fakes' exposure, he claimed that he utilised a postmodern technique. Instead of meeting his interview partners, such as Ivana Trump, he appropriated existing statements, such as in this case from a biography of Andy Warhol, and put them in the mouth of the alleged interview partners.

of deception. In the following, I intend to use the results of our research to locate the Clinton hoax more precisely within the framework of the ongoing fake-news debate. My research perspective thereby involves a political as well as aesthetic approach.

By focusing on the Hillary Clinton hoax, I understand that this form of collage is a significant political-aesthetic phenomenon and that it is commonly used in order to distribute false information online. Its aesthetic characteristics refer to the imagery of cartoons; they fall back on well-known symbols from conspiracy theories and take a humorous approach. Upon closer inspection, I find that the fake-news producers are working with activist techniques and the aesthetics of the so-called guerrilla communication movement, by using images that refer to popular political symbols of the twentieth century.

Despite their popularity, fake-news collages like the one above are only of marginal interest to scholarly discourse. Based on an emphatic relation between truth and democracy, fake news is broadly discussed as an offence to democracy. Therefore, it could be argued that the scholarly fake-news discourse usually needs to concentrate on more serious issues than alien adoptions. As for the humanities, the discussion of fake news is mainly shaped from a political and philosophical perspective, by discussing a new positivist ideal of separating truth from attitude (Arendt 1972; Flatscher & Seitz 2018; van Dyk 2017).[5] Until the 1980s, in the arts and in journalism, hoaxes were commonly understood as the projections of the stories of swindlers or as fantasies of subversion when apprehended as emancipative practices of critique. Today, however, the fakes of right-wing organisations such as the Identitarian Movement are recognized as politically informed techniques (compare Ebner 2019: 46). Satirical, epigonal fakes, such as the Clinton photomontage, which is recognisable as a common form of online practice, are usually dismissed as "bullshit" (in accord with Harry Frankfurt's (2005) definition).

As a result of this theoretical gap, I propose to analyse the strategic function of the Clinton photomontage, since it is an example of a specific variety of fake news in social media. I assume that collages like the Clinton hoax have maintained a strategic role in the fake-news debate. To investigate the role of fake news more properly, a deeper understanding of the knowledge they convey is needed. Thus, I will take a closer look at the tactics of appropriation and humour in the image contents of the Clinton

[5] See Bernhard Kleeberg's discussion of "reactionary epistemologies" in the paper "Post Post-Truth: Epistemologies of Disintegration and the Praxeology of Truth" in this volume.

photomontage. In doing so, I propose a reference to Michel Foucault's notion of the dispositive as an apparatus. According to Foucault, the apparatus is a "sort of formation which has a major strategic function at a given historical moment [namely] that of responding to an urgent need" (Foucault 1980: 194ff.). Since this formation results, amongst other things, in the production and distribution of fakes, it is crucial to understand the fakes as a part of the dispositive of social media. Subsequent to a detailed analysis of the Clinton photomontage, it is my aim to characterise the role of images in the production of fake news. Therefore, it is first necessary to give a more accurate definition of the phenomena of appropriation and hoax in order to understand the diverse motives behind them and their multiple discursive effects.

1.1. The Aesthetic Appropriation of Signs as a Postmodern Subversive Strategy

In everyday language, "to appropriate something" means to take possession of something, even if one is not allowed to. Questions of purpose, ownership, and authenticity become obvious when appropriations are acknowledged as practices. I suggest understanding fake news as appropriations that adopt the form and content of media. Hoaxes, such as the one mentioned above, can be understood as materialised lies that fall back on established imagery and can be easily decoded as deceptions. Although they expose their epigonality openly, these fakes can get overwhelming attention and thousands of clicks. What makes them interesting for an investigation is, therefore, neither an ingenious nor an interesting process of deception, but rather their previously unknown significance within the fake-news discourse. Consequently, I claim that image–text combinations such as the Clinton photomontage, which initially seem to be meaningless satires, produce narrative, materialist, and technical levels of aesthetic and political effects that must be analysed by concentrating on their medium, performance, and symbolism.

In order to follow this analytic framework, it is necessary to first explore why the appropriation and reinterpretation of social signs can be understood as a subversive practice. Therefore, a brief digression into its specific postmodern frame of reference and culture is unavoidable. This notion goes back to the 1960s, when the situationist Guy Debord (amongst others) proposed a political power shift through the practice of decoding signs. In his book *Society of Spectacle*, Debord (1984) shows that society

develops through symbolic contexts of action, whose reality (and thus political aspect) disappears behind an illusory world of advertising, cliché, and propaganda, and therefore can only be experienced as representation. Debord argues that only decoding signs would help "to infiltrate the social body" and to "subvert" it from the inside. His theoretical idea inspired a whole repertoire of practices of appropriation and reinterpretation within the visual field. The Situationist International group (with its most famous member, Debord) was mostly influenced by the Dadaist photomontages of, for instance, John Heartfield and George Grosz, who visualised their political-artistic struggle against the mechanisms and logics of capitalist alienation.[6] Sticking to Heartfield and Grosz's methods, the Situationist International reacts to social and political crises with an aesthetic method called *détournement* (compare Debord 2008: 21), which involves the reinterpretation of existing signs: "It's about getting a truth, but using the same sort of weapons of fiction that the people in power use all the time" (Willmann 2004). During the following decades, *détournement* became a popular aesthetic strategy that alienates existing images, symbols, and language, for the effect of seizing, distorting, or destroying predominant codes and signs (see Certeau 2014). For this purpose, tactics of everyday life are used as alienation and over-identification (ibid.).

Since the 1980s, guerrilla communication collectives such as the German a.f.r.i.k.a. Gruppe have been living up to the traditions of the Situationist International when they stage multiple crises in the public sphere for the purpose of de-identification. According to the manual of guerrilla communication, artistic quality, as measured by standards of art history, is more important than usability as a means of subversive political practice (compare Blissett & Brünzel 2001).

The purpose of guerrilla communication, therefore, is to disrupt the reproduction of power relations and to break the euphemisms conveyed by advertisement and newspaper articles. According to Isabelle Graw (2004: 300), until the late 1980s visual appropriation practices in the arts were applied with self-affirmative efficacy to destroy critical discourse. As Fredric Jameson (1984: 113) states, reinterpretation, as well as the use of references, became an essential characteristic of postmodernism.

[6] As Vera Chiquet (2018: 15ff.) explains, Heartfield and Grosz acknowledged themselves to be fitters or engineers, as was also mirrored in their cooperation, which they called "Heartfield Grosz Konzern." Often dressed in a blue suit, Heartfield, who looked more like a mechanic (a *Monteur* in German), depicted the image of an anti-artist. It is fair to say that Heartfield's way of dressing inspired Grosz to call the practice of combining photo snippets "montaging."

1.2. Aesthetic Appropriations as Powerful Practices of the Alt-Right

Used as "tools of crisis," this repertoire of aesthetic practices, which has been the established imagery of the "political" since the French Revolution at the latest, can now also be found in the aesthetics of the alt-right (compare Schober 2009: 37). According to Anna Schober (2005: 5–6), practices such as montage, humour, and spectacle aim to problematise the daily trouble of being-in-the-world. As practical commentaries, montages intervene in the predominant order of society. According to Jean-Luc Nancy (2010), these forms of aesthetics invoke the staging of crises to rearrange and restructure their meaning afterwards. In contrast to the alt-right movement, the artistic avant-garde defined those acts, cultural productions, and perspectives as political forms that use a mutual exchange to question the structural principles of society (compare Schober 2005: 5–6). According to this definition of the political, images are understood as the central element of socialisation. Beyond such activist contexts, deconstructivist practices such as over-affirmation, humour, and falsifying imitation have, therefore, been turned into a well-known pop-cultural vocabulary (see Klein 2005). Around the year 2000, computer-aided manipulations simplified the production of montages; making, assembling, and rearranging images has become a daily practice. Thus, manipulated digital images resemble their analogue predecessors. Far-right associations such as the Identitarian Movement fall back on these techniques since they intend to transform the meaning of symbols and signs (from left to right, from international to national, etc.). They make use of irony, montage, and alienation in social media. All these methods are related to the practice of *détournement*. Moreover, the appropriated positions that previously counted as progressive are reformulated versions for their reactionary purposes (for example, employing women's rights for xenophobic arguments).

The purpose of Identitarian "meta-politics" (the term the members use to describe their campaigns) is to produce a power shift in regard to the movement's acceptance within the predominant cultural hegemony. With their actions and campaigns, they intend to gain larger public interest and force broader media attention. Unlike the artistic avant-garde, the Identitarian Movement aims not to break with traditions but to link their ideology to a (non-existing) past by using emotionalised terms, such as nationality, tradition, or *Heimat* in Germany.

The example of far-right agitation reveals that appropriation can neither be considered as innocent imitation nor harmless takeover but must be distinguished as a powerful practice. These practices are neither linked to an ideology nor to predominant relations. They require neither bottom-up principles nor do they question hegemonic relations. Edward Said's critique of "Orientalism" (1978) points to the double-edged meaning of appropriation when he explores the model of binary cultural relations. He argues that the West is using representations of the "Orient" to fulfil its desires and to affirm its power. In response to Said, the art historian Robert Nelson (1996: 127) states that

> in every cultural appropriation there are those who act and those who are acted upon, and for those whose memories and cultural identities are manipulated by aesthetic, academic, economic, or political appropriations, the consequences can be disquieting or painful.

This critique demonstrates that appropriations result from the inequality of power relations, in which the adopted culture has no power over its representations. This loss of control is mirrored by the appropriation practices of the alt-right in social media, when far-right movements ensure hegemonic power relations.

1.3. The Practice of Hoaxing as an Intervention in Cultural Grammar

Less than twenty years before the fake-news debate became an element of public discourse, the a.f.r.i.k.a. Gruppe defined the practice of hoaxing in their manual as one that relieves the "cultural grammar" of its normative connotation (Blissett & Brünzel 2001: 65).[7] The term "cultural grammar," as coined by Umberto Eco, defines a cultural convention that is transported on a semiotic level by language and images. According to the communication *guerrilleros*, reinterpretations and liquidations of the connotations of hoaxes function to review as well as to disrupt power relations. Their use

[7] In the handbook of guerrilla communication, the concept of cultural grammar, with reference to Umberto Eco, is understood as a system of rules that structures social relationships and interactions (see Blissett & Brünzel 2001: 14). This system of rules is described by Blissett and Brünzel (ibid.) as a semi-learned expression of social relations of power and domination, which seem essential for their production and reproduction.

aims to confuse social consent, in order to disturb "the order of discourse" (Foucault 1971), understood as a central basis of power.

According to this manual, the aim of hoaxes is to imitate the voice of power as well as possible in order to speak in its name (and its authority) for a limited period (compare Blissett & Brünzel 2001: 65). The media scholar Martin Doll (2012) defines this form of deception as a practical joke. As opposed to fakes, which are recognised as original, authentic, and truthful until they are accidentally unmasked, he claims that a hoax is intended to be exposed from the beginning of its production. Etymologically the term hoax refers to "hocus-pocus," a phenomenon described as "a humorous or mischievous deception, usually taking the form of fabrication of something fictitious or erroneous […]."[8] The unmasking of hoaxes is followed by uncertainties regarding their authority and factuality, which can thus be described as the goal of their political and activist use. In accord with Foucault's notion of discourse, Doll defines hoaxes as ambiguous figures which are built on the acceptance of dominant practices and orders and produced to unmask conditions of credibility, plausibility, and believability at the moment of exposure. He substantiates his analysis concerning the theorem of discourse by defining the indifference of the hoax to the field of truth. According to Foucault, this field of truth orders the truthfulness and falseness of statements at a given historical moment based on accumulations, regularities, and regulations. Doll's notion allows us to understand hoaxes as a marker of social acceptance. Regarding the academic discourse, Doll concludes that statements that are outside the field of truth are thus excluded. In contrast to Doll's theory, the fake-news debate has proven more than once that hoaxes and fakes do not necessarily aim to meet the requirements of academic discourse. Being excluded from the academic field of truth does not necessarily affect the distribution of fakes and hoaxes, nor their public confirmation.[9] Hoaxes such as the Clinton collage are not aiming to alter the social discourse, in which neither deficient logic nor lack of factuality is grounds for exclusion. Therefore, I will argue that hoaxes such as the Clinton photomontage are based on popular narratives of a kind often found in myths and stereotypes.

According to Willy Viehöver (2001), these narratives represent a central characteristic of the discourse structure, which are deliberately used

[8] In his treatise *Reflections on the Decline of Science in England, and on Some of Its Causes* Charles Babbage (1989: 90) described the effect of a hoax as the "ridicule of those who credit it before it is disclosed."

[9] This does not mean that there are no fakes that aim to expose the academic discourse for its own lack of authority or factuality. But it does mean that fakes are not necessarily pointing to factuality at all.

to provide world views and social practices with coherence and sense, qua repetition, with a certain regularity. To this end, I propose to acknowledge the Clinton hoax as a marker of what can be said and visualised in present social discourse.

/// 2. Veles, City of Deception

In December 2016, the media service BuzzFeed reported on the North Macedonian city Veles, where about 120 fake-news blogs were then being administered (see Ladurner 2016). Since that time, Veles has been recognised as an important centre for the global production of fake news. In this former Yugoslav border town, the IFF met A., a thirty-five-year-old fake-news producer. A. and his friends had been sharing content in the form of images and texts on fake-news sites and blogs, which had already been debunked at the time. He explained to us that he shares images and texts that evoke emotions and that content-related restrictions do not exist for him. When asked about the rise of fake news, he traced it back to a general tiredness with politics in society as the result of corruption scandals. To this day, Veles has a high unemployment rate and its inhabitants live in difficult economic circumstances.

According to BuzzFeed, fake-news production in Veles during the 2016 US presidential election campaign was influenced by the Russian government (compare Silverman et al. 2018). BuzzFeed's reporting refers to the *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election* – better known as the Mueller report – which proved collaboration between Russian troll factories and a marketing agency from Skopje, whose representatives wrote articles for Breitbart News (see ibid). The report says that a marketing agency from Skopje trained Veles youngsters to produce fake news.[10] However, A. told us that he did not need to attend this training because his work was so easy: it only involved copying, pasting, and sharing images. A. and most of his colleagues do not write editorial contributions; they distribute "found footage" on blogs and advertise their contributions on Facebook. A. gained his income from clicks on the user-oriented advertisement that is displayed on social media and that is counted and paid for by Google Ads and Facebook. Additionally, A. made up emotionalising headlines for his picture stories to heighten the click-through rates. Digital click-working is common among young people living in Veles. A fake-news

[10] Based on the Mueller report, an investigation by *Wired* magazine drew this connection for the first time (see Subramanian 2017).

producer called Dimitrij, who is particularly successful, showed reporters monthly invoices amounting to more than 8,000 euros. He was not surprised by the fact that "real news" is not as effective as fake news because "they are not allowed to lie" (Jaster & Lanius 2019: 39).

In 2016, A. switched from supporting Hillary Clinton to Donald Trump because the latter's campaign aroused more public interest and thereby a higher click-through rate. Pointing to the photomontage of Clinton (see above, Fig. 1), A. described the fakes he posted as harmless. The rasterised black-and-white print has a red frame. In the left corner, the title of the newspaper appears written in white sans-serif letters on a black-boxed background; below, the date of the issue is shown to be June 1993. To the right, there is another box with black letters that say "Space creature survived UFO crash in Arkansas." The photograph of Clinton, which probably dates to the same year, is arranged on the right side of the image. Her eyes look directly into the camera, her mouth is open. The photograph offers the impression that Clinton intends to give a statement. In her arms she holds a naked baby whose cranium is formed in a hypertrophic, hydrocephalus-like shape and who has wide-open, button-like, black eyes. The long fingers of the baby's right arm reach for Clinton's breast and point to a jagged-edged word-balloon claiming that the picture is an "official photo." On the left side, sans-serif typography fills the space with the words "Hillary Clinton adopts alien baby." Like a footnote, a caption at the bottom of the image informs us that the Secret Service is organising "a special nursery in the White House."

According to A., this image–text constellation was his most successful post at the time and therefore provided a high percentage of his income. We asked ourselves why this collage gained so much interest. To which discursive and implicit knowledge does it refer? And what is its significance within the fake-news debate? In the following section, I will analyse the role of the collage as an aesthetic and technical-medial objectivation of fake news in social media. I suggest using Foucault's theoretical notion of the dispositive representing the visible, tactile, and figurative objectification of discourses (Keller 2010: 73).

2.1. From Tabloid Journalism to Social Media

To fully understand the hoax's performative transmutations, appropriations, and adjustments, I will focus on its emergence. It is important to analyse the transmutations through which the hoax passed in the course of its

distributions: in the media (from tabloid journalism to fake news) and in its technical-aesthetic aspects (from a digital collage to blogs and social-media artefacts). When A. distributed the Clinton photomontage to social media networks, it was more than thirteen years old. The tabloid *Weekly World News* (*WWN*) was the first to publish the collage, on 15 June 1993. This tabloid is renowned for its cover stories on paranormal themes. In 1993, it published several articles that argued that Bill Clinton's election was endorsed by aliens. Although the paper's content is satiric, its articles follow an ideological programme which is significantly homophobic, racist, and apolitical.[11] As an effect of the crisis of print journalism, today the *WWN* is only available in the form of a blog, on which the Clinton photomontage is digitally archived.[12] Due to its distribution in social media, A. links the *WWN* programme to social media. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the tabloid's readership changed mediums as well.

The social media channels and chat rooms of the alt-right differ from analogue media not only by their different dynamics and the actualisation of their live feeds but due to their interest-led algorithms, which provide visibility and distribution. Due to this dynamic development, technical objects can be considered mere tools, since they respond poorly to social needs (compare Stiegler 2009). Moreover, the drastically changing conditions of communication and media substantially support the self-reinforcing tendencies of digital disinformation. The specific architecture of networks leads to enhancement (due to up-voting, liking, and sharing), differentiation (change in meaning, contextualisation, and commenting), and increased visibility. In doing so, that architecture can manipulate human behaviour and technical procedures, as is well reflected by the transformed use of the Clinton hoax – from a tabloid article to a social media artefact. As a result, social media artefacts follow the same strategy to gain attention as classical tabloid journalism, since the use of information, subjects, and images remains unchanged in social media: there is a reduction of complexity, a fixation on persons, emotionalisation, a tendency to reveal scandals, a preference for surprising topics, and preferential treatment of agonal structures (compare Diehl 2012; Meyer 2006: 88ff.). According to Bernhard Pörksen (2018: 75), these appropriations of tabloid media for-

[11] By using the term "apolitical," I point to the main thesis of Jacques Rancière, who understands political actions as a verification of equality. Accordingly, I use the term to claim that the *WWN*'s content has an exclusionary policy.

[12] "Five Classic *Weekly World News* Covers," *Weekly World News*, 2.10.2008, https://weeklyworldnews.com/headlines/3075/five-classic-weekly-world-news-covers/, accessed 30.11.2019.

mats can thus be understood as a "journalistic power shift" (*publizistische Machtverschiebung*).

2.2. Comet Ping Pong and Reptiloids: Conspiracy Theories as Aesthetic Appropriations and Reference Culture

The discursive and non-discursive practices of appropriation, which are displayed on the technical and media level, become apparent in the symbolic dimension of the photomontage as well. In addition to the sans-serif typeface, to the frames and dividing lines, the digital artefact is dominated by the photograph of Clinton and the computer-simulated image of an "alien baby," which gives the impression of a serious framing. It serves to imitate an institutional character, which underpins the fake's assertion of authenticity. Both the image of Clinton and of the "alien" have media iconicity, building the fundament for the transfer of conspiratorial and ironic narratives. The imagery draws a portrait of the present world seemingly on the verge of catastrophe. On the one hand, this form of exaggeration produces ironic effects, but on the other hand the references to existing conspiracy theories are used to link the protagonists to one another (compare Bonz 2006). Hence, these references are not only markers of belonging to certain groups, but essential characteristics of the groups. Both symbols are referring – and thereby actualising – different conspiracy theories, which link specific narratives of child abuse to the conspiracy of a capitalist world supremacy, but they also similarly evoke ironic effects.

A. posted the Clinton photomontage at the same time when the "Pizzagate" conspiracy theory was widespread. The Pizzagate conspiracy originates from a bizarre piece of disinformation, according to which the Washington, DC pizzeria Comet Ping Pong served as headquarters for a child sex ring backed by Hillary Clinton. Because the Clinton hoax was satirically commenting on Clinton's role as a caring mother, it can be read as a comment on the Pizzagate conspiracy. On the one hand, the satirical exaggeration of maternal concern exposes the dissonance over Clinton's role in the Pizzagate conspiracy. On the other hand, the narratives of the collage's symbols invoke gender norms (compare Butler 1998) as they actualise patriarchal knowledge. By invoking the normative role of gender, the viewer is invited to place Clinton in a specific relationship to the cited norm and to update stereotypes as background knowledge (compare Hecken 2005). At the same time, the juxtaposition of categories such as motherhood and

abuse creates a dichotomy between morally correct and morally wrong actions in the symbolism of the image.

Beyond Pizzagate, the image of the alien literally embodies the figure of the stranger, the intruder. The specific shape of the head and the long arms given to the baby are a reference to the conspiracy theory of the "Reptiloids," which are supposed to be partially reptilian, partially human, mixed beings, capable of taking human form. According to this theory, the elitist world supremacy consists mostly of Reptiloids. Widely disseminated during the 1990s by television shows and tabloids, this popular conspiracy theory traces back to the British ex-football professional David Icke. According to Juliane Wetzel (2005), government upheavals and the turn of the millennium affirmed various resentments that were present in society at the time, which were manifested as sexism and anti-Semitism and objectified through conspiracy theories. Icke, in his theories of pre-astronautics and criticism of the elite, linked anti-Semitic conspiracy narratives to an extra-terrestrial world-ruling class. This narrative involves a connection between politics and extra-terrestrials and is cemented in the collective memory through films such as *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* (compare Lewis & Kahn 2005: 4).

Furthermore, the Reptiloids conspiracy also links to abuse narratives. The conspiracy theory claims that the ruling elite of the Reptiloids, which consists of, among other people, Queen Elizabeth and Hillary and Bill Clinton, organises the molestation of children (compare Lewis & Kahn 2005). This is a rehashed narrative, which has appeared in numerous defamatory representations since the French Revolution: then the tabloid papers printed several different depictions of the dauphine Marie-Antoinette in the shape of a harpy. These depictions appropriated both the image of a monstrous beast and its behaviour, to which the dauphine's behaviour was likened.[13] Because her multinational origins inspired xenophobic prejudice, the harpy became a defamatory symbol for the dauphine, whose mere existence provoked fear and anxiety. In a stream of pamphlets and images at that time, the monarchy was condemned for its alleged monstrous incestuous-sexual appetite. Like the harpy, the figure of the alien has not completely lost its uncanny significance as an extra-terrestrial doppelganger. In entertainment formats involving uncanny conspiracy theories, the image of the alien remains a symbol of the Other, the inexplicable.

[13] Several depictions of harpies, of "Monstre Amphibie Vivant" linked to Marie-Antoinette can be seen in the Digital Archive of the French Revolution. See, for example, https://exhibits.stanford.edu/frenchrevolution/catalog/rf920px6566, accessed 1.03.2020.

These similarities show that conspiracy theories, as well as photos like that of the Clinton hoax, integrate known stereotypes into ever new stories. Therefore, I claim that the conspiracy of the Reptiloids is an illustrative ideology which itself functions like a collage.

Despite its monstrous function within conspiracy theories, the symbol of the alien brings ironic effects to the image. Thus, both symbols – that of a female politician and that of an alien, whose meaning oscillates between an object of popular culture and a subject of conspiracy theories – evoke a dissonance that triggers ironic effects. Here, humorous over-affirmation and conspiracy theory flow into each other and the boundary between factual and fictional narrative is deliberately blurred, while the claim to validity is maintained. Although the dissemination of the collage contributes to the cementing of a connection between anti-Semitic and sexist political phantasms, humour is an important visual medium to keep the ideology light. Given this context, I argue that the photomontage's function is to link apocalyptic narratives and pop-cultural symbols. Its references bring well-known conspiracy narratives up to date, but the ability to encode and decode them also determines affiliation to a particular group.

2.3. Memetics

Due to its aesthetic and technical appropriation strategies, the Clinton photomontage has similarities to meme images, for which sans-serif fonts and tabloid contents, as well as the reinterpretation of popular symbols, are characteristic. Memes can be defined as viral cultural products that are reinterpreting popular references using the tactics of guerrilla communication (compare Goriunova 2013: 71). Andrew Breitbart, a leading methodologist of right-wing power shifts in social media, describes these shifts of signs and symbols within popular culture as grounds for a political counter-revolution (compare Ebner 2019). While situationists like Debord have aimed to destroy the discursive sphere by reinterpreting single images, memes are profiting from the network character of social media, which supports the accumulation of visibility. Other than viral artefacts, memes involve a quantity of existing parodies, mash-ups, remixes, pastiches, and re-enactments (compare Goriunova 2013: 71).[14]

[14] The example of the meme "Pepe the Frog" shows the different levels of memetics through which the character passed, taking not only different forms but also changing its content from leftist to rightist ideology.

Although the Clinton hoax aesthetically and contextually refers to memes of the alt-right, it differs significantly, as A. shared the hoax again without making any changes. If the Clinton photomontage is considered a meme, it would have to be defined as one that remains at the lowest level of memetics, since it is not further developed (ibid.). On image-boards such as 4chan and 8chan, successful memes run through several mutations, which can be understood as evolutionary processes.[15] Defining and determining their value for the alt-right through up-and-down voting, these boards are trial platforms for racist, anti-Semitic, and sexist memes, the bulk of which are used by the alt-right to undermine leftist discourse. In doing so, they accumulate visibility within the dispositive of social media.

The exhibition *The Alt-Right Complex*, which opened in the autumn of 2019 at the Hartware MedienKunstVerein (HMKV) in Dortmund, reflects the memetic strategies of the alt-right artistically. As memes function as seismographs of political development, Inke Arns, the director of HMKV, analysed them as strategic tools of culture wars. The exhibition showed the diverse appearances of memes but also pointed to difficulties in defining the phenomenon. So far, the appropriation policies of the alt-right cannot be explained fully, since memes as a viral phenomenon have no limitation regarding form, symbolism, and effects. Consequently, Arns understands memes as maximum provocations (compare Backof 2019). Even if they often seem to be harmless and funny, they are markers of racist, sexist, and homophobic discourse and represent the powerful alliances between despots, conspiracy theorists, and trolls.

Even though the Clinton hoax did not undergo evolutionary mutations, it can be considered a marker of the speakable/visible in political and aesthetic artefacts. Putting the Clinton hoax into the context of memes means understanding it as an active intervention in society, since its political and aesthetic function is to produce social reactions and political resonances that aim to evoke effects of subjectivation.

2.4. The Perspective of Dispositive Analysis

The media dispositive incorporates manipulative tools, such as hoaxes, to react to ideological crises, that is, my preceding assumption is confirmed: dispositives appropriate discourse formations, since their contained signs

[15] 4chan and 8chan are websites on which images can be posted anonymously. Thus, they are discussed as platforms for radicalisation, since there are no restrictions in content. Both image-boards pursue an agenda of radical free speech.

assume a certain strategic function, which only becomes speakable/visible at a certain historical moment. Accordingly, the fake news from Veles did not appear accidentally but indicates a reaction to the crisis in existing power structures. Moreover, the dispositive of social media spells out the changed power relations in social discourses which are taking shape and further developing the available technical possibilities and social needs (compare Holly 2010: 155). In this sense, social media – which is, in general, a visual medium – represents, actualises, and shapes the public discourse due to the visible artefacts it contains. Virally distributed fake news mirrors the public debate and similarly strengthens its existence. The fake-news discourse organises the speakable/visible and the exclusion of the unspeakable/non-visible from the public discourse; then again, it is exactly this exclusion that links the speakable/visible implicitly back to this discourse. In this sense, conspiracy theories such as Pizzagate and the Reptiloids fall into the category of the abject (compare Kristeva 1984) due to their satirical exaltation. Therefore, the Clinton hoax functions as a reassurance of hegemonic knowledge, in which the practice of satire is used strategically to cite and to substantiate normalised and subjectivated knowledge so that it will not be forgotten. In expressing its rules by means of satirical collages, the media dispositive preserves the dispositive of sexist and anti-Semitic knowledge. Insofar as it refers implicitly to current interdictions by using the technique of satire, the Clinton hoax circumvents the prohibitions.

/// 3. Conclusion

In light of the research journey of the IFF, I have asked what role hoaxes such as the Clinton photomontage play in the fake-news debate. In contrast to other phenomena of the fake-news discourse, this collage posted by A. unmasks its epigonality on different levels. Consequently, I suggest extending the above-mentioned definition of a hoax.

The dispositive analysis shows that the hoax takes on the role of a pastiche, a collage in which various dimensions of appropriation and reinterpretation come into play. Defined as compositions, pastiches appropriate existing styles and use the work and details of other creators (here in the form of tabloid media and the aesthetics of memes). As epigonal satirical forms of deception, whose nature relies on the reinterpretation of popular references, such hoaxes are not out there for the effects that occur after their exposure. As Boris Groys (2008: 235) predicted in 2008 concerning guerrilla communication, fakes and hoaxes no longer aim to produce

something new. Rather, these practices negotiate the struggle over the distribution of privileges and the accumulation of symbolic capital. Therefore, I have argued that the appropriation of pop-culture references is a response to Breitbart's (compare Ebner 2019) demands for aesthetic warfare not only on a symbolic level but also in terms of the references' distribution within social media.

On a symbolic level, the hoax refers not only to popular symbols but also to sexist and anti-Semitic narratives. On the one hand, the popular reference to the alien humorously highlights the extra-terrestrial as a stranger, as a doppelganger of mankind. But, on the other hand, the hoax's imagery oscillates between well-known conspiracy narratives, such as a global world conspiracy and organised child abuse. Due to the appeal to the normative reference to her social role as a woman and mother, in conjunction with the Pizzagate conspiracy, the collage also refers to sexist resentments against Hillary Clinton as a politician by means of over-identification. Contrary to the argument of Romy Jaster and David Lanius (2019), in this context I claim that these hoaxes from Veles are not solely the result of economic interest. Moreover, I would like to argue that discussing their distribution on a uniquely economic level would miss the point, since the photomontage is connected ideologically and politically to the motifs of the alt-right and exemplarily demonstrates the alt-right's guerrilla communication tactics. In this light, it becomes obvious that the line of demarcation between knowledge that is accepted and knowledge that is oppressed is not as strict as I had initially believed.

On a technical level, I have shown that the function of social media consists in appealing to and normalising sexist, racist, and hegemonic orders. The intervention in the election campaign by viral fakes such as the Clinton photomontage therefore signifies an attack on powerful categories (compare Jäger 2000). The legitimation of existing power relations and the social as well as cultural production of meaning is revealed. Here, the practice of truthful speaking is constituted, saved, or even changed (compare Foucault 1971) in reverse demarcation (e.g., in echo chambers). Thereby, the paradoxical function of the media becomes obvious: they are preserving the system as much as they undermine it. Against this background, I conclude that the dispositive of social media implements regularities and techniques that structure the fake-news discourse in a supra-individual order (e.g., due to up-and-down voting), following certain regularities and accumulations (such as in specific forums).

Defining the Clinton photomontage as a hoax, therefore, means defining it as a materialised lie; it is an artefact that is neither what it pretends to be nor is it harmless. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, hoaxes like the Clinton photomontage are dismissed as "bullshit" in the academic debate. If they do not qualify for academic debate, they may cause even more severe damage. Oscillating between popular symbols and right-wing ideology, their ambiguity points to the blind spot of the fake-news discourse: the effects of this epigonal hoax aim to blur the borders between popular culture and politics, as the preceding analyses of the discursive characteristics of the Clinton photomontage have shown. Therefore, a positivist confrontation between truth and fake news is not sufficient, as the example of the Clinton hoax proves. Epigonal hoaxes like the Clinton photomontage confront the public debate and its own limitations regarding form, symbolism, and effects. I thus conclude that the radicality of the "fake news" phenomenon consists in presenting the inadequacies of the scholarly discourse to the academic world.

In contrast to Chelsea Clinton's appraisal, my analysis proves that the collage is not a harmless hoax, but that its viral distribution contributes to the publicist power shift, since it visually appropriates sexist and anti-Semite narratives in the form of satire. Moreover, the Pizzagate conspiracy, which might have seemed as harmless as the Clinton hoax, did not remain on a semiotic level. On 4 December 2016, an armed man entered the Comet Ping Pong pizza restaurant with the idea of releasing the children who were supposedly held and abused there. He shot a lock and a computer, and not having found what he expected, was arrested without protest.

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/// Abstract

In February 2016, the Institute for Falsification researched the production of fake news in Veles, North Macedonia. Focusing on a specific hoax distributed from Veles via social media, this article analyses the political and aesthetic effects of fake news. It argues that fakes and hoaxes (mis)use established references to renew pre-existing discourses, media techniques, and symbols. The present definition of fakes is therefore insufficient for these practices.

Keywords:
aesthetics, fakes, hoaxes, journalism, memes, social media dispositive

/// Thari Jungen – PhD candidate in the "Performing Citizenship" graduate programme in Hamburg, Germany. Her artist-based research focuses on fakes and hoaxes as phenomena of performing citizenship. She studied architecture and media art, sculpture and performance at Hochschule der Bildenden Künste Saar (HBKsaar) in Saarbrücken and at the Weissensee Academy of the Arts in Berlin. Her recent artistic production *Show Me Your Agenda* was shown in May 2017 at K3/Kampnagel in Hamburg. She is the author (with Paula Hildebrandt) of "Menschen, Tiere, Sensationen" in *Zeitschrift der Dramaturgischen Gesellschaft* (2016); "Re(Labelling): Mimicry between Subjectivation and Identification" in *Performing Citizenship* (2019); and the forthcoming "Collaborative Authorship – Or How to Overcome the 'Nightmare of Participation'" in *Constructions of Media Authorship*. She is also the founder of the artistic research collaborative Institute for Falsification.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3361-9777

E-mail: thari.jungen@gmail.com

MEDIAL PRACTICES OF TRUTH

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COLD WAR (POST-)TRUTH REGIMES: RADIO FREE EUROPE BETWEEN "STATES OF AFFAIRS" AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF HOPE AND FEAR

Anna Grutza
Central European University

/// Introduction

Dealing with truth has always meant entering a highly controversial arena. At the same time, as Hannah Arendt notes in regard to the political scene, no one "has ever doubted that truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other, and no one […] has ever counted truthfulness among the political virtues" (Arendt 2000: 545). However, this does not mean that various political actors and systems throughout history have not deployed truth as a rhetorical, symbolic, or propagandistic tool of political tactics. In fact, neither blatant lies nor naked truths seem to govern past or present political truth scenes alone. The political, like the scientific field, is also subject to diverse moral economies and does not operate without reference to human passions and emotions (see Frevert: 2011).

Generally speaking, whether in politics or science, truth has never been either pure or innocent (see Daston 1995; Merton 1938; Proctor 1991; Shapin 2010) and this despite the fact that objectivity has often been regarded as a warrant of truth. Objectivity appears, therefore, to be one of the major achievements and promoters of modernity. The appeal to objectivity guarantees a certain strength and stability to truth claims; it asserts distance, critical reflection, and the purity of "naked" facts, which can be studied

or grasped in a quasi-sterile environment carefully isolated from a subjective, emotional, or even irrational impetus. Subjectivity, if it is linked to anything at all, tends to be linked to a moral, spiritual, or inner truth that belongs to the private life of the individual and only occasionally and under exceptional circumstances enters the scientific or even the political field.

However, as shall be shown, in line with a praxeological approach to truth (Kleeberg & Suter 2014), there has never been – at least in the realm of social reality – a clearly detectable line between subjective and allegedly objective truths. According to Bernhard Kleeberg, truth has to be studied as *situated* and "cannot be analysed along the common oppositions of knowledge and belief, universalism and particularism, science and politics, objectivity and subjectivity, but is closely linked to *subjectivity*" (Kleeberg 2019: 27).

The study of the interdependency of truth, power, and subjectivity was one of the main scholarly preoccupations of Michel Foucault (2000a, 2000b). For Foucault, power, being deeply rooted in pastoral power – the Catholic ritual of the confession and the inquisitorial interrogation – is absolutely not indifferent to subjective truth (see Foucault 1988, 2000b). On the contrary, power displays a strong will to truth (Foucault 1980b); it continuously and with scrupulous precision requires the individual to reveal his innermost thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, and subjects them to various regimes of truth.

These kinds of rituals and the coercion to truth-telling not only constitute a technology of the self (see Foucault 1988) and a political tactic but also a technique of identity politics (Kleeberg 2019: 26). When social groups invoke truth as a social operator for their correct interpretation of reality and their specific identity formation then "an explicit reference to truth or to the objectivity of knowledge often obscures that we are not dealing with epistemological arguments but rather with […] the moral economy of a *Gefühls-* and *Denkkollektiv*, which Lorraine Daston (1995) has described" (ibid.: 27).

This article focuses on the Cold War as an era in which the organised and institutionalised employment of truth as a political weapon was paramount. It will also try to shed light on various truth situations or truth scenes (Kleeberg 2019) that were a constitutive element of everyday life under communism, on the resistance, and on Cold War truth regimes. The latter concern above all places, forms, rituals, and scenes of truth and knowledge or fact-making and the respective moral and social implications of these facts as agents of social, political, and epistemological change.

These chosen contexts will allow truth to be studied as multi-faceted and plural, including not only "hard facts," "undeniable certainties," and "naked truths," but also "'dirty' everyday truths" (Kleeberg 2019: 33) and the world of relativity made up of perceptions, emotions, narratives, metaphors, symbols, and belief systems. They will all be linked to one major institution: the American broadcaster Radio Free Europe.

In doing so, the article also follows Frieder Vogelmann's postulate for the future of critique in his recent article "Should Critique Be Tamed by Realism? A Defense of Radical Critiques of Reason":

> [W]e need to understand critique as a practice, free epistemology from the idea of sovereignty, and pluralize reason. The first step is to realize that critique doesn't [sic!] need a fixed standpoint. On the contrary, we can understand a successful critique to be one that moves us – that makes us change our standpoint. […] Only by clinging to a conception of critique that lays down the law by issuing timeless truths are we forced to think that critique requires a fixed standpoint. Yet there are alternatives. Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michel Foucault illustrate the notion of a critique that forces us to move, and that changes as it moves along […] (Vogelmann 2019: 12).

This article invites its readers to be "moved along," following the different standpoints that a "critique as practice," as well as "truth as practice," can take.

Accordingly, I argue that it is a plurality of vantage points that can broaden our understanding of truth and illuminate the dangers of post-truth discourses and politics. Hence, this article follows a suggestion made by Dominique Pestre, namely that we will never be in God's position, that there is no superior epistemological view, and that it is the "multiplicity of framing, scales, results and values that guarantees that we might understand anything worthy" (Pestre 2012: 435). In addition, in regard to the work of Radio Free Europe, its listeners and messengers, of particular importance is the quest or at least the tangible tension that draws the attention to a problem already investigated by Thomas Nagel in *The View from Nowhere*: "[H]ow to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included?" (Nagel 1986: 3).

Finally, in what follows, the different vantage points taken on matters and questions of truth in the context of the Cold War will draw upon this somewhat uneasy relationship between internal and external standpoints, subjectivity and objectivity, as well as on individual judgements and actions, and social and political interpretations of the world.

/// Radio Free Europe: Where "Truth" Gets Together

The place where "truth gets together" that I want to introduce here is Radio Free Europe (RFE), a radio station that was situated in Munich and worked under a US umbrella from the early 1950s onwards in order to "communicate anticommunist messages" (Johnson 2010: 7) to the people who lived behind the Iron Curtain. Together with Radio Liberty (RL) the station was in various regards a very particular one: "These were American-sponsored but distinctively […] national radio stations – 'surrogate' in the sense that their broadcasting identified fully with the interests, culture, history, and religion of the nations under Soviet and Soviet-inspired rule" (ibid.).

Hence, any sign of particular Americanism was carefully avoided. As the director Robert Long stressed in *The New Yorker* in 1950, RFE did not want to sound like Americans broadcasting to Eastern Europeans (Johnson 2010: 39). On the contrary, nationals were meant to speak to nationals. In this way, as a mass medium that was able to constitute an "imagined political community" (see Anderson 2006), RFE's broadcasting acquired its specific power and importance for Polish civil society. Marcin Król writes in this respect that "[l]istening to Radio Free Europe created for a vast number of Poles the perhaps artificial but nevertheless essential sense that one was living in a larger company" (Król 2001: 431). By transmitting stories of Polish dissidents and by reading Polish underground literature, RFE had the power to evoke national sentiments of belonging to a common interest group and the consciousness of the necessity and possibility for reform.

Nevertheless, RFE's mission and purpose were not at all innocent. According to Simo Mikkonen, we have to imagine the US authorities at the end of the Second World War not as powerful players and strategists in the wake of the new *Pax Americana* but as actors deprived of reliable access to valuable information, that is, as hesitant and almost ignorant actors lacking any certainty about the intentions and (expansion) plans of the Soviets:

> Immediately after World War II, U.S. authorities found themselves with very little information about conditions in the USSR. The United States, therefore, tried to reach across the Iron Curtain to increase its knowledge while avoiding direct military conflict and making an effort to cultivate indirect methods of getting at its adversary. […] It was in this context that Radio Free Europe in 1950 and Radio Liberation in 1953 (later known as Radio Liberty [RL]) came into existence (Mikkonen 2010: 772).

In the Cold War information war, radio was, as Linda Risso claims, "definitely one of the weapons of choice" (2013: 145). However, the creation of RFE was embedded in a more carefully placed public discourse of peaceful cultural diplomacy and the promotion of freedom and democracy, while the US State Department and CIA regarded it as a means of "psychological warfare." For the CIA in particular, RFE became a crucial supplier of information: "It seems that to the CIA, RFE may have been a more important provider of information about events in the Soviet bloc than the CIA's other sources. According to A. Ross Johnson, 'The CIA early became a consumer of rather than a source for this information'" (Machcewicz 2014: 37).

For these reasons, RFE created a "vast information gathering system" (Johnson 2010: 43), which included a research department, a monitoring section of communist broadcasts, and a collection of Eastern European publications. It conducted interviews with travellers and refugees. Above all, as Friederike Kind-Kovács notes, a particular kind of literature that became known as *samizdat* (self-published) and *tamizdat* (published-over-there) delivered crucial background information from inside the Soviet bloc and was archived by RFE on a large scale:

> [The station's] main driving force was their special awareness of the literary underground press's great potential for the rapprochement between the intellectual communities in a divided Europe. […] The oral transmission of the texts […] reached the listening people in a far more immediate way […] (Kind-Kovács 2013: 72–79).

RFE is of particular interest in regard to the truth regimes of the Cold War because it occupies a highly ambivalent and controversial position: on the one hand, it has been regarded as a propaganda tool and as an agent of the CIA's "psychological warfare" missions; on the other hand,

its strong and mutually beneficial connection with the Eastern European underground networks cannot be denied either. Lech Wałęsa and Václav Havel, for instance, have always stressed RFE's importance for their struggles and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the *International Herald Tribune* Havel once said: "If my fellow citizens knew me before I became president, they did so because of these stations" (Nelson 1997: 188). The example of RFE's truth practices shows that truth could take different forms in different truth situations.

Moreover, the reason why RFE is so interesting for the study of truth and truth regimes is because it was a place where various actors – Western and Eastern as well as human and non-human – came together. The reason for this was, on the one hand, RFE's alignment with other anti-communist institutions, such as the Free Europe Committee (FEC), and with the American government's plans to employ Eastern and Central European exiles and refugees for "keeping Stalin at bay" and, on the other hand, the employment of highly sophisticated collections of modern technology and of cataloguing systems designed to order and provide better legibility and retrievability of the huge amounts of underground pamphlets, files, and journals that RFE used in order to verify facts from falsities and faked news.

However, radio stations gather and produce not only facts and objectivity. Generally, it much more often happens that radio reporters, speakers, and interviewers – in trying to catch the distinct atmosphere of an event and report on the spot, and in seeking proximity to their audience – sacrifice the critical distance that would allow them to remain "totally objective," even though to be objective was RFE's self-proclaimed goal, which it tried to attain despite the clear obstacles it faced in reaching the place of events as well its audience and informants. At the same time, RFE's entanglement with American anti-communist institutions, the CIA, and the US government made its impartiality doubtful. RFE operated in a biased manner, relying quite often on its pre-existing Western attitudes; it was there to free the Eastern European and East-Central European "captives" and "slaves" of communism from their chains of innocence by appealing to their "hearts and minds."

RFE has to be analysed as an epistemic machinery that simultaneously engaged in broadcasting "truth" to the common people behind the Iron Curtain and in producing knowledge for the scholarly and political public interested in Central and Eastern Europe. However, the "truth" it appealed to did have various layers: it was the truth of a propaganda battle between

two superpowers; it was the truth of the Eastern and Central European dissidents who aspired "to live within the truth"; it was the truth of RFE's listeners who used their own agency to contextualise and interpret the station's messages in regard to their own everyday life experiences; it was the truth of the empirical events RFE's broadcasts referred to and the truth of certain selection and interpretation processes conducted by RFE's staff.

In taking a closer look at RFE (Figs. 1–5) we find first of all no bare words, no "naked truths," but masses of material, catalogues, and the newest technology; we see human actors carefully engaged in epistemic practices. István Rév, however, notes in regard to the same collection of pictures:

> The aura of professional care, devotion, the ambition of accuracy […] shine[s] through […] these calculated photographs. […] The photos and their captions, like documentary images in a mirror, were meant to persuade the US administration – the financial backer of the radio operations – the public, and the broadcasters themselves that they took the ethos of factual, reliable, but neither neutral nor disinterested or impartial journalism seriously. The photographs served to demonstrate that despite the physical distance, the broadcasters were up-to-date on local events […] (Rév 2019: 146).

Rév puts particular emphasis on the fact that the US administration and the US Information Agency thought it crucial to "create 'the *atmosphere of objectivity*'" (ibid.: 147).

The US Information Agency defined objective reporting not as neutral or disinterested but urged the radios, RFE and RL, to "sound objective" (ibid.), that is, "to tell the truth, providing dispassionate, 'genuine information'" (Georgiev 2019: 173) and to be convincing without engaging in "naked, shameless propaganda" (Rév 2019: 148) as the Soviets did. This meant at the same time that politicians as well as many Western journalists, as Rév argues, "seemed to be convinced that history (and truth) was on the American side […] Objectivity thus understood was not a 'View-from-Nowhere', but a View-from-the-West" (ibid.: 147).

In accord with Stephan Shapin and Adi Ophir (Ophir & Shapin 1991: 3–21), RFE was also, of course, a distinct place of knowledge-making involving different human and non-human agents and communities in practices and communication chains of "knowledge[-making] in transit" (Secord 2004: 654–672). James Secord analyses knowledge in transit as

Figure 1. Radio Free Europe workflow: the station of Czech monitoring. HU OSA 300-1-8:1/12 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Figure 2. Radio Free Europe workflow: press clipping archives. The thematically structured press clipping archives consisted of, *inter alia*, Subject Files and Biographical Files. HU OSA 300-1-8:1/81 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Figure 3. Radio Free Europe workflow: man operating the transmission control equipment. HU OSA 300-1-8:1/5 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Figure 4. Radio Free Europe workflow: senior Czechoslovak analyst Hanus Hajek examines biographical card files. HU OSA 300-1-8:1/84 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Figure 5. Radio Free Europe workflow: central news room. HU OSA 300-1-8:1/35 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

a form of "communicative action" giving "interaction between agents a central role in epistemology" (ibid.: 661). This allows him to refocus questions of trust, testimony, and communitarian objectivity on "questions of how knowledge travels, to whom it is available, and how agreement is achieved" (ibid).

For RFE especially, the question of trust in its messages and messengers was of paramount importance. RFE was supposed to sound not only objective but trustworthy as well. As journalists could not cross the allegedly hermetically sealed Iron Curtain themselves, RFE mostly relied on the accounts of travellers, refugees, exiles, and dissidents. Trying to ensure the trustworthiness of the information obtained as well as of the informants at the Polish unit of RFE, for instance, "the reports were carefully checked for accuracy and plausibility. Only those reports which passed the various filtering screening systems were recommended as subjects for producing radio programs."[1]

Nevertheless, there was neither total reliability nor total certainty but, at best, probabilities and degrees of certainty and reliability: sources were evaluated as "believed to be reliable," "usually reliable," or "fairly reliable."[2] The evaluation of an anonymised account about Warsaw–Bonn relations edited on 8 July 1970 gives an excellent example of the kind of epistemic uncertainty in which RFE operated:

> This important report originates from a serious and usually reliable source, who is well versed in the field of Polish politics […] and has access to the circle of the initiated. […] The second part of the report deals with source's personal contacts with some leading politicians in the FRG. For obvious reasons, this part of the report is almost impossible to check and we can only again stress that, on the whole, source is a reliable and trustworthy person and that nothing that he reports here strikes us as improbable.[3]

[1] See the content description of the information items and correspondence from RFE field offices of the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives' online catalogue: https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/jmLJ972r#context, accessed 17.07.2020.

[2] See the Information Items and Correspondence from RFE Field Offices. HU OSA 300-50-11, box 3. Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA) at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest.

[3] "Background Information on Warsaw-Berlin Relations," 8 July 1970. HU OSA 300-50-11, box 3. RFE Polish Unit Information Items and Correspondence from RFE Field Offices: Berlin News Bureau Slipped Information Items. Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA) at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest.

The allegedly reliable source of Polish origin[4] was regarded as trustworthy not only by his informants but also by his interlocutors, whom he met sometimes with his wife or alone "na piwko" (for a beer) in a restaurant. He passed on confidential information that he had access to as a trusted member of informal political circles, including from his private *tête-à-tête* meetings with well-known German politicians like Franz Joseph Strauß, Gustav Heinemann, Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg (senior), or Helmut Kohl.

Similarly, Pawel Machcewicz states that, in the post-Stalinist period, many prominent party members and even secret police collaborators were among RFE's sources; the network of contacts between the communist elite and anti-communist émigrés was highly complex and double-edged: "Outside Poland, the regime's most trusted journalists could talk openly with people from the 'hostile' radio station, which they fought fiercely in their writings back home" (Machcewicz 2014: 190). Well-protected and trusted members of the communist elite quite often remained unpunished even in case of their detection. In the context of the Andrzej Czechowicz spying affair,[5] for instance, RFE informants, who met with RFE's Polish Service correspondent Lesław Bodeński at informal luncheons at the United Nations in New York, were well aware of the fact that their conversations were surveilled by the Security Services: "[H]e [informant no. 3] brought to our meeting photostatic copies of some of my reports misappropriated by Mr. Czechowicz in Munich," Bodeński states in one of his reports, "and threw them angrily on the table at the end of the luncheon."[6] Despite this hall of mirrors of the allegedly omniscient Secret Services and the issued disciplinary warnings, the meetings at the UN continued to take place. Another informant of Bodeński justified his actions: "My superiors

[4] The source may have been Marian Podkowiński, a Polish journalist, publicist, and writer, whose circle of close friends included the most important people in West Germany and who was, *inter alia*, a correspondent of *Trybuna Ludu* in Berlin and Bonn. According to the diplomat and ambassador Janusz Roszkowski (2009), he did not stay long with *Trybuna Ludu* because of the fact that he did not avoid contacts with his fellow journalists from RFE. However, according to Pawel Machcewicz, Podkowiński was also a secret police collaborator: "[H]e also reported on his contacts with people who were close to RFE. It is not out of question that they treated their conversations with him, a player of the party establishment, as a source of useful information about the situation with the PUWP […]. Rumors about Podkowiński's contacts with RFE may have been an internal party intrigue in 1971" (Machcewicz 2014: 191–192).

[5] Andrzej Czechowicz was talked into collaboration by the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs as a new agent in RFE's Polish Service in the 1960s, where he photographed thousands of pages of internal documents (see Machcewicz 2014).

[6] Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA) at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest: RFE Polish Unit Information Items and Correspondence with RFE Field Offices, HU OSA 300-50-11, box 4, RFE Memo by Lesław Bodeński, New York, 26 November 1971.

investigated me on the basis of the reports stolen by that man. […] I am entitled to my opinions […]. I have known most intimate State secrets and was never guilty of any indiscretion."[7] Internal party intrigues, struggles for power, and personal political convictions were among the multiple reasons for this kind of collaboration and information exchange.

Moreover, some of the traveller accounts and above all the life stories of refugees and defectors were often biased and contradictory. Nevertheless, the émigrés were "considered to qualify as ideal mediators" (Kind-Kovács 2019: 464) and typical representatives. What RFE did not officially take into consideration was the fact that the émigrés themselves often had trouble making sense of their own Cold War experiences and quite often relied on Western interpretations of the events happening in their countries – interpretations they had received while listening to Western radios like RFE (see Feinberg 2017).

The mission the US administration had given RFE, that is, to discern truth from lies and objectively and dispassionately to assess the situation behind the Iron Curtain, was not one RFE or its messengers could perform flawlessly. On the contrary, the accounts were highly subjective and, as Melissa Feinberg has thoroughly explained, on both sides "government officials and their populations used the concept of 'truth' (or 'lies') to indicate their conviction in their own rightness and to give their view of the world the weight of a fact or moral absolute" (Feinberg 2017: xi). As Feinberg stresses, there was little room for "alternative points of view" (ibid.) and "truth was determined more by ideology than by any kind of objective corroboration of fact" (ibid.).

In the three following parts of this article, I want to take a closer look at the various further reasons why truth remained not easily discernible and why an objective as well as subjective judgement of reality constituted a challenge for Eastern as well as Western actors like RFE. These three parts are at the same time three further vantage points that illustrate how "various scenarios, participating actors, communicative practices, and horizons of theoretical reflection repeatedly produce *their own* forms of what is claimed as truth or what is subject to critique" (Kleeberg 2019: 32).

[7] Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA) at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest: RFE Polish Unit Information Items and Correspondence with RFE Field Offices, HU OSA 300-50-11, box 4, RFE Memo by Leslaw Bodeński, New York, 20 March 1972.

/// Move 1: Between Telling Lies and States of Affairs

There is a relation between the state of affairs and truth. At least – and this is what our common sense would say – there should be one in the world of social reality. There should be a certain dependency of what we claim to be true and what is happening out there in the world. If this relationship cannot be established – if a statement, written or oral, that does not merely deal with philosophical or metaphysical questions, misses any link to a current or past state – then we say the statement is false or we call it a lie.

However, what authoritarian and totalitarian regimes clearly teach us – as perhaps no other mode of government – is that we are able as human beings and as societies to construct whole political, social, and cultural systems and structures around what we call the state of affairs: the Cold War propagandists' ambition in particular was not depicting the world but "changing it, even with words. The conviction was that reporting what was not true (yet) might become true and real as a consequence of reporting, thus motivating and mobilizing listeners" (Rév 2019: 149).

In a similar line, Arendt noted in her elaborations on *Truth and Politics* that the liar in particular "takes advantage of the undeniable affinity of our capacity for action, for changing reality, with this mysterious faculty of ours that enables us to *say*, 'The sun is shining', when it is raining cats and dogs" (Arendt 2000: 563). For Arendt, the liar is the actor on the political scene par excellence saying what is not so "because he wants things to be different from what they are – that is, he wants to change the world" (ibid.). The liar can change the context, the whole factual structure.

Communism, for instance, was that successful in its construction of a new world fulfilling the promises of happiness and equality through various forms of mendacity during the Cold War that it succeeded in inverting the relationship between statements and the state of affairs. The former had to verify or perform the latter and consequently statements had to constitute the state of affairs. This inverted logic created certain states that were clearly detached from experienced reality but remained nevertheless very real as a pragmatic part of social experience. People acted as if things were as they were said to be. "Truth," that is, the truth, as a final outcome or assertion, was done, lived, or enacted despite the deviant states – with the obvious paradoxes of lived Cold War experiences that this entailed.

This phenomenon is not easy to explain and this is the point where the work of critique normally comes into play. Marxist scholars would have spoken of a "false consciousness" of the world proletariat; the Frankfurt

School would have analysed the commodity fetishism of capitalist societies. Both would have postulated that the actors do not know what they are doing and that it would be the role of a third party to "enlighten" them.

In contrast, I argue that during the Cold War this was less and less the case. People living under the premises of "real socialism" were not necessarily blinded; they were not cut off from their immediate reality and knew what was happening, at least in terms of the manifest experience of shortages around them and the empty and worn-out Five-Year Plan slogans and Party promises. However, truth indeed was used "as a *second-order concept* that relates to the observation and judgement of knowledge" (Kleeberg 2019: 26). These judgements were never value-free, objective, or neutral; they depended on the information available to the actors, who were making sense of their own world. Despite the relative individual agency of such reflections on one's own social reality, there wasn't always consent about it, while at the same time it was the highest concern of the Party not to make this schizophrenic world, which it was constantly producing, collapse. The parallel realities and worlds that co-existed in this way were not just antagonistic but irreconcilable. The ordinary people and sometimes even the political elite could not always invoke truth in order to strengthen their "own decision-making capabilities" (Kleeberg 2019: 31); their agency was limited by the "quasiautomatic [sic!] operations of a system that produce[d] lies for everyone, including its producers" (Kołakowski 2013: 60).

Arendt has described this process in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in which she claims that the result was "people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction […] and the distinction between true and false […] no longer exist[ed]" (Arendt 1958: 474). The Polish philosopher and historian of ideas Leszek Kołakowski makes a similar statement in his book *Freedom, Fame, Lying and Betrayal*, published in 1999:

> Lies in politics are a frequent occurrence, but in democratic countries freedom of speech and criticism protects us from some of their harmful effects; the distinction between truth and falsehood remains intact. […] The same cannot be said of totalitarian countries; […] There the distinction between true and the politically correct was entirely blurred. As a result, people half came to believe "politically correct" slogans which they had been mouthing, from sheer fear, for so long, and even political leaders sometimes fell victim of their own lies. […] This was not merely an instance

> of lying: it was an attempt to eradicate altogether the very concept of truth in the normal sense of the word (Kołakowski 1999: 30).

Eradicating this "normal" concept of truth became possible because people were forced to take for granted what was said. It was the strategic employment of violence – the paramount threat and terror of the Stalinist era – that enabled the Party to eradicate the concept of truth, to blur its boundaries dangerously with its antonym: "All these lies […] harbour an element of violence; […] although only totalitarian governments have consciously adopted lying as a first step to murder" (Arendt 2000: 565).

For the same reason, individual agency was curtailed; individuals were separated, even atomised; movement was often, as in the case of Hungary or the GDR, painfully restricted and surveyed. The state's aim was to force its population to ignore what they knew or might get to know and even what they experienced every day. As a result, what and whom the people knew was what and whom was in their immediate surroundings. In order to better understand this mechanism – without using the label "ideology" right from the start – it is worthwhile to go back to one of the most prominent thinkers of power and truth mentioned above, namely, Michel Foucault.

According to Foucault, these "pathological forms of power" – he specifically speaks of fascism and Stalinism – were not quite original despite their historical uniqueness: "They used and extended mechanisms already present in most other societies. More than that: in spite of their own internal madness, they used, to a large extent, the ideas and the devices of our political rationality" (Foucault 2000a: 328). Foucault identifies discourse – its control and distribution – as a main mechanism of political power. For Foucault the problem consisted in "seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses that, in themselves, are neither true nor false" (Foucault 2000b: 119).

Moreover, Foucault points out that our society is subjected to the production of truth, and thus he links truth to his concept of power. *Effects of truth* are produced because power persistently incites us to produce them: "[W]e *must* speak truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit" (Foucault 1980a: 93). Speaking truth is hence related to certain "acts of truth" (Foucault 1994: 125), which reveal the subject's inner thoughts and state of mind and which constitute political techniques that

enable a certain elite to govern others. These are the ideas and devices of our political rationality that were also incorporated in what seemed to be the internal madness of totalitarian regimes, where they were used to their absolute extremes.

However, power not only incites but also curtails the production of truth. In an interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino in June 1976, Foucault defined the role of truth in power relations as follows: "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true […]" (Foucault 2000b: 131). Each society establishes mechanisms to distinguish true and false statements by empowering a small group of individuals "who are charged with saying what counts as true" (ibid.) and who sanction those who claim the opposite.

Taking Foucault's reflections into account, the quasi-automatic operations of a totalitarian system that produced lies for everyone and that blurred the boundary between true and false could not function without a strong reference to the subject, the self, and its subjectivity. The system of lies was paradoxically at the same time a machine that incited people to speak truth. This way it could eliminate political opponents by "objectively" judging and sentencing them to death. The show trials inverted the relation between the state of affairs and statements as well.

/// Move 2: Revealing and Clothing the Naked Truth

In his essay "The Power of the Powerless," Havel gives a strong example of the most apparent consequences of the average man's revolt against the well-established rituals of communist power. Venturing into the realms of totalitarianism, Havel describes the system's core mechanisms, namely ideology, obedience, and a power structure that runs through the entire society. Embedded in this kind of ideological architecture, the citizens submit to everyday life routines that continuously perpetuate the basic automatisms of the totalitarian regime.

This is the context in which Havel places the parable of the greengrocer in one of his central essays. Havel's greengrocer, as part of his daily routine – automatically and almost *en passant* – places a sign in front of his shop window that reads "Workers of the world, unite!" He performs this repetitive action every day without any inner or moral involvement. "It is [just] one of the thousands of details that guarantee him a relatively tranquil life 'in harmony with society'" (Havel 2018: 359). However, this seem-

ingly insignificant action, this detail, contains all the logic of what Foucault has called the "microphysics of power." This form of power incites and subjects the individual to acts and rituals of truth, demanding the revelation and confession of her or his inner thought. The greengrocer's everyday routine constitutes, as Havel says, the "blind automatism" which "drives the whole system" (Havel 2018: 361), but it also performed what Foucault named "effects of truth."

Havel's parable offers the opportunity to analyse the consequences of an attempt to speak the truth about the real or bare foundation of a given state of affairs:

> Let us imagine that one day something in our greengrocer snaps, […]. He stops voting for elections he knows are a farce. He begins to say what he really thinks at political meetings. […] In this revolt the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie. He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game. […] His revolt is an attempt *to live within the truth*. [But] the bill is not long in coming (Havel 1996 [1979]: 171).

The greengrocer might be dismissed from his post or his wages might be reduced. Most probably he will be persecuted by society. He will be punished for his rebellion because he has not just revolted as a unique and insignificant individual but he has done something incomprehensible to his environment and hence something incredibly dangerous: "By breaking the rules of the game, he has disrupted the game as such. He has exposed it as a mere game" (ibid.). His speech act has dismantled the structure of power by showing it to be mere illusion and that its foundation is that simple in essence. Havel states it even more provocatively:

> He has broken through the facade of the system and exposed the real, base foundation of power. He has said that the emperor is naked. And because the emperor is in fact naked, something extremely dangerous has happened: By this action, the greengrocer has addressed the world. He has enabled everyone to peer behind the curtain (Havel 1996 [1979]: 172).

By stating openly what manifested itself so undeniably, the greengrocer stopped the system from being universally applicable. It is fundamental for the "truth games" (Rux 1988 [1982]: 15) of communist power that their

rules remain unchallenged by anyone. Soviet society had to be homogenized politically, economically, and socially.

Speaking the truth or "living in the truth" – an appeal that was made by many dissidents in Eastern-bloc countries – was in reality a much more difficult task. At the same time, Arendt, for instance, regards the mere telling of facts as not leading to any kind of political action:

> Truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues, because it has little indeed to contribute to that change of the world […] Only where a community has embarked upon organized lying on principle, […] can truthfulness as such, unsupported as such by the distorting forces of power and interest, become a political actor of order. Where everybody lies about everything of importance, the truthteller […] has begun to act (Arendt 2000: 564).

Moreover, the core of the parable deals with personal and collective responsibility and hence with individual and collective forms of action.

Like Havel, Arendt defines human freedom as "the appearance in the world of the moral person or personality who embodies the law" (Arendt 2003: xxii). However, for Arendt, thinking and acting have to be treated in an essentially different manner. While thinking is intrinsically linked to the individual, acting is only possible in reference to and in the company of others: "Thinking is self-reflective, whereas an agent can act only with others than himself […]" (Arendt 2003: xxi). Hence, *doing truth* (see Kleeberg & Suter 2014: 211–226) could have been possible only in and with the collective. It had to be a collective action that constituted the power of the powerless.

It appears that doing truth is related to the way we consider agency. Doing truth necessitates more actors then just human beings. Bruno Latour could as well have stated these doubts about the power of "pure words" or "pure discourse." While in Havel's parable of the greengrocer the facts can still be exposed as naked, Latour concludes at the end of *We Have Never Been Modern* that "[t]here are no more naked truths, but there are no more naked citizens, either. The mediators have space to themselves […]" (Latour 1993b: 149). In his article "Clothing the Naked Truth," Latour concludes that "[l]onging for the naked truth is like longing for the purely spiritual: they are both dangerously close to nothingness. I prefer truth warmly clothed, incarnated and strong" (Latour 1989: 115).

Latour would refrain from speaking of "naked truths" or of "naked emperors" but would focus on mediations, delegations, and translations; he would clothe the "naked truth" again because for Latour a sentence "does not hold together because it is true, but *because it holds together* we say it is 'true'" (ibid.: 101). Latour draws attention to all the allies which have to be recruited, mobilised, and mustered in order for "a statement to hold true, that is to resist all attempts at breaking or bending it […]" (ibid.: 102). Therefore, Latour focuses on material forms of discourses as resources that "have constantly to be brought in and mobilized in order for an account to resist" (Latour 1989: 114). In order for a fact to become incarnated and strong, it needs the ability to cause other entities – human and non-human allies, whole *dispositifs*, such as laboratories or factories, instruments, pronunciations and accusations – to mobilise, gather around it, and make it durable, solid, and robust: in short, to make it a harder fact.

However, all the apparatuses involved, the imbroglios of human and non-human actors and the whole cascades of ever-more simplified inscriptions, are gathered and multiplied because of a core characteristic of modern societies: "They simply put faith in superimposed traces of various quality, opposing some to others, retracing the steps of those who are dubious" (Latour 1986: 27). Latour puts emphasis on the *faithful* records – like underground literature and the networks of *samizdat*, *tamizdat* and *magnizdat* circulation during the Cold War – as having the ability to convince people and make them believe. These written traces are powerful as well because they can all be compiled in one place, where the balance of power may eventually be tipped. In this way, according to Latour, they allow for the study and control of barely visible facts to be explored "through the 'clothed' eye of inscription devices" (Latour 1986: 17).

As I have argued in section 2 of this article, without intending to overestimate the power of Radio Free Europe, RFE was exactly such a place where human and non-human actors worked together, where huge amounts of data, files, recordings, papers, and messages from dissidents and exiles from the "Other" Europe were gathered, selected, verified, catalogued, and stored, and where the newest technology and knowledge were co-responsible for producing what RFE regarded as the truth about the communists. As the reports it issued and used for its own information purposes "accumulated, they were transformed into evidence about everyday life behind the Iron Curtain, helping to provide a scientific basis for Western knowledge about totalitarian societies" (Feinberg 2017: 90).

At the same time, as Feinberg has shown as well, the process of verifying various information sources, especially interviews conducted with refugees and exiles, did not always result in a totally objective picture of reality: "[The] task of sorting facts from fictions, or truth from lies, was actually quite complicated" (ibid.: 89). On the one hand, the underground literature that RFE gathered was characterised by a "crucial epistemic instability of works whose truth […] value could not be taken for granted" (Komaromi 2015: 139). On the other hand, "claims about emotions were hard to verify. Because they came from personal experience, claims about emotions like fear were generally taken at face value" (Feinberg 2017: 90). Feinberg notes that negative emotions and respective stories about life behind the Iron Curtain were often taken as a confirmation for pre-existing Western attitudes, which RFE ultimately broadcast as the truth about Eastern and East-Central Europe.

To conclude, invoking the truth involved a considerable risk for the common man in the countries behind the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, the mere telling of truth, the saying what is – that the emperor is naked because this is the actual state of affairs – was only a necessary but not sufficient condition to give the needed strength and power to the powerless. That the truth-teller could make any significant impact was conditioned, on the one hand, as Arendt noted, upon the very fact of the all-pervasiveness of lies, and on the other, as Latour would argue, upon a collective that was able to mobilise huge networks of material and human allies and to bring these actors and traces together in one place. The case of RFE, however, shows that the task of truth-telling is also distorted in being handed over to an institution with its own mission and political purpose.

/// Move 3: Radio Free Europe and the Epistemology of Hope and Fear

Focusing again on RFE and everyday life under communism, I aim to analyse whether the line between facts and emotions or subjectivity and objectivity reveals how much the Cold War itself manifested patterns of what we call today the post-truth era. Can an anthropological approach help to uncover the ordinariness and emotional as well as symbolic side of these "big words that make us all afraid, [but that] take a homely form in such homely contexts" (Geertz 1973: 21) as the radio listening environment? What can emotions like trust and distrust or hope and fear tell us about Cold War epistemology? The experience of living during the Cold

War, especially in the Stalinist period, can exemplify to what extent small "facts speak to large issues [and] winks to epistemology" (Geertz 1973: 23), that is, to what extent issues of common sense, everyday matters, and alleged banalities influenced Cold War truth regimes. In this sense, I aim to further elaborate on the question that Feinberg asked in *The Curtain of Lies*: "How did the existence of something as subjective as fear take on the status of fact […]?" (Feinberg 2017: 89).

An important concept that helps illuminate this epistemological problematic is the notion of common sense. According to Clifford Geertz, "When we say that someone shows common sense we mean to suggest more than that he is just using his eyes and ears, but is, as we say, keeping them open, using them judiciously, intelligently, perceptively" (Geertz 1983: 76). For Geertz, common sense remains still vaguely defined and urges the scholar to redraw the line "between mere matter-of-fact apprehension of reality […] and down-to-earth, colloquial wisdom" (Geertz 1983: 75), which gets blurred for those who refer to their common sense. More generally, common sense is an organised body of considered thought as well as a cultural system that "rests on the same basis that any other such system rests: the conviction by those whose possession it is of its value and validity" (Geertz 1983: 76).

Furthermore, one has to understand the way emotions like trust, fear, and hope operate and guide or influence common judgements of available knowledge and experiences of everyday life. In his book *Trust: A History*, Geoffrey Hosking draws attention to the significant contribution of anthropology to the study of trust (Hosking 2014). For Hosking the decisive clue that anthropologists gave to historians in particular consists in the anthropologists' long-established analytical perspective on human relations as being deeply rooted in symbolic systems and everyday life rituals of exchange: "[T]hey [the symbols] generate both meaning and relationship. They join together signifiers from disparate spheres of knowledge so that they gain new meaning by their combination" (Hosking 2014). In addition, the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer, to whom Hosking refers, regards the human world as much more ruled by our senses and emotions than by objective reasoning: "[M]an does not live in a world of hard facts, […]. He lives rather in the midst of imaginary emotions, in hopes and fears, in illusions and disillusions, in his fantasies and dreams" (Cassirer 1944: 43).

To an extent that must not be ignored, emotions such as fear and hope or trust and distrust were key to everyday life experiences of the Cold War. They were part of social reality, structuring and changing it in the same

way as truth and lies did. Especially during the great purges of Stalinism, life was penetrated by all-pervasive fears, suspicion and distrust. One might think, for instance, of the first chapter of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, which caries the title "Arrest." At its very beginning, the narrator asks: "How do people get to this clandestine Archipelago?" (Solzhenitsyn 1974: 3). The reader realises that with a question about the roads that take the suspects to the Gulag, she or he has entered the realms of a world that is neither totally imaginary nor real, starting with the arrest. "But there is [sic!] where the *Gulag* country begins," writes Solzhenitsyn, "right next to us, two yards away from us" (ibid.: 4). The Gulag begins with the neighbouring apartment, the well-known stranger living next door and the symbolic universe of the arrest.

The arrested will remain in his disorientation and incomprehension for a longer time, while the arrest itself will turn into a warning symbol and shape the memory of the witnesses:

> And everything which is by now comprised in the traditional, even literary, image of an arrest will pile up and take shape, not in your own disordered memory, but in what your family and your neighbors in your apartment remember: The sharp nighttime ring or the rude knock at the door. The insolent entrance of the unwiped jackboots of the unsleeping State Security operatives. The frightened and cowed civilian witness at their backs (Solzhenitsyn 1974: 4).

The experience of the arrest culminates in a cultural frame of meanings, in which sounds like knocks on the door, sharp rings, and even the smallest gestures and hardly perceivable patterns of behaviour became socially established codes and were interpreted in light of a language of fear and distrust that was brought into being by the Party-state.

As in Solzhenitsyn's account, Feinberg has shown that what Hungarian people were haunted by most under Stalinism was "bell fear" and "uniform fear": "The bell fear […] was the terror people felt whenever the doorbell rang […]. Uniforms according to the sources symbolized state power and conjured images of house searches, arrest and torture" (Feinberg 2017: 88). The source that was interviewed by RFE in 1951 saw it as "completely rational for Hungarians to be living in this state of extreme fear" (ibid.: 88), in which *everybody knew* what was hiding behind the symbols of fear and in which *everybody knew* how to adapt their behaviour in accordance with these

warning signs. Fear, hope, trust, and distrust dictated a worldview – not without reason.

In the words of Geertz, the knowledge everybody had about the arrests and the terror under Stalinism, which was established not only through facts but through rumours, fantasies, and emotions as well, entered into the systems of common sense. However, common sense can at the same time appear to be strongly dependent on a steadfast conviction in its validity and hence bears the danger of dogmatism. When a certain worldview is once incorporated into a system of common sense, contradictions to this worldview will rather be excluded from it. It is a frame that tends to guide the observer of an outer reality towards congruencies rather than towards the discrepancies of its presumptions: "As frame of thought […] common sense is as totalizing as any other: no religion is more dogmatic, no science more ambitious, no philosophy more general. […] it pretends to reach past illusions to truth, to, as we say, things as they are" (Geertz 1983: 84). To speak with Stuart Hall, it is precisely common sense's '"naturalness', its refusal to be made to examine the premises on which it is founded, its resistance to change or correction ….] [that] makes common sense […] 'spontaneous', ideological and *unconscious*" (Hall 2004: 67).

This corresponds as well with the study of interviews conducted with Polish, Hungarian, and Czechoslovak refugees in 1951–1952 by Siegfried Kracauer and Paul L. Berkman, who state the following:

> Instead of perceiving all the basic differences in the two streams of communication [Western and Eastern] the Satellite people tend to concentrate on selected factual similarities and parallelisms. Instead of accepting the content of one and rejecting the other [of Western and communist propaganda], they assimilated elements of both, transforming them into mutually-supporting evidence of what they want to believe (Kracauer & Berkman 1956: 169).

Pre-established belief systems of "colloquial wisdom," that is, of common sense, that were grounded in fear and hope, guided the people's unconscious selective reading and listening behaviour.

Looking at RFE's and RL's broadcasting, this meant above all two things: on the one hand, the "freedom and truth broadcasts" confirmed the common-sense knowledge that terror and surveillance were omnipresent and the Soviet regime capable of any kind of cruelty (see Feinberg 2017). On the other hand, as the American broadcasters "had succeeded in

framing their wartime international broadcasting as a beacon of hope and truth" (Spohrer 2013: 35), those who hoped for liberation read "weighty meanings of impending war and liberation" (Kracauer & Berkman 1956: 170) into the broadcasts and "interpreted in the light of their hopes even the most unlikely kinds of Western information" (ibid.: 174).

For RFE this selective process had tremendous consequences. Its sources were also interviews with travellers and refugees from the Eastern-bloc countries, which RFE conducted from the very beginning (see Figs. 6–7). RFE and RL developed special questionnaires which were sent from the bench offices to the Research and Analysis Department in Munich:

> The Research Department kept an archive of information coming from all sources. […] After just the first few years, this archive, often called simply the card catalogue, had become one of the most important collections in the West on the countries behind the Iron Curtain (Machcewicz 2014: 29).

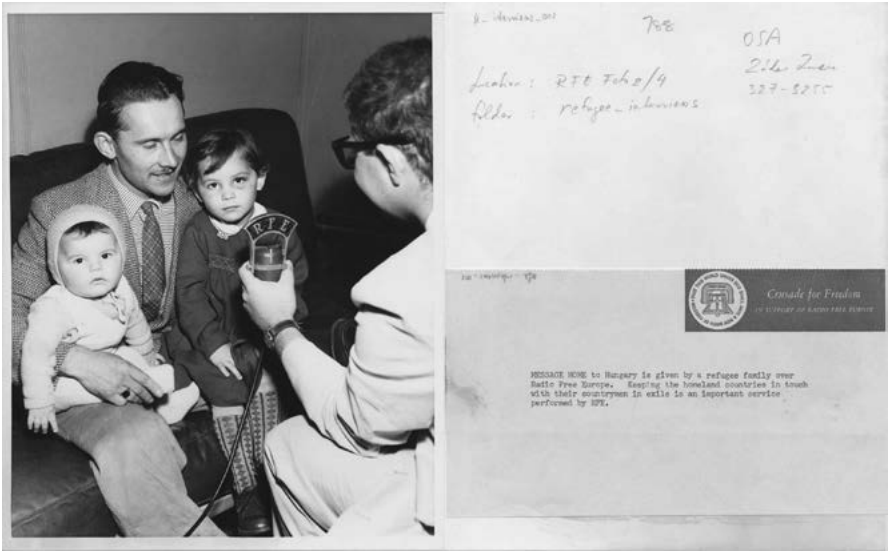

Figure 6. Radio Free Europe interview: message home to Hungary is given by a refugee family over Radio Free Europe. HU OSA 300-1-8:6/1 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Figure 7. Radio Free Europe interview. HU OSA 300-1-8:6/2 RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files, unprocessed series, © Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

These interviews and the information retrieved from them were very questionable in terms of epistemic reliability. The sources were not only politically biased but "the radios played an active role in shaping and framing the interviews" (Kind-Kovács 2019: 468). In order to win the trust of the refugees during the interview, these truth scenes, as the pictures show, were established in a particular way: "The interviewers should create an informal relaxed atmosphere, sit with the refugee in a café and chat informally for an hour over a cup of coffee or a glass of beer before asking careful and diplomatic questions" (ibid.: 467). The priority was given to a highly subjective relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee(s);

truth-telling – or rather the act of speaking one's political judgements – still remained linked to the self and to subjectivity; emotions of fear and trust, and psychological as well as physical tensions and relaxations, played a major role.

At RL even, under the guidance of Max Ralis, the director of the Audience Research Department (ARD), in order not to arouse suspicion the interviews were only "conducted informally and orally without recording equipment or note taking" (Mikkonen 2010: 777). Although this was not always the case at RFE, Kind-Kovács draws attention to the fact that the interviews "were taken to portray 'average opinion' and serve as 'typical representatives' of certain national or social groups. Hence, individual life stories, extracted from the interviews, were scrutinized to uncover collective experiences and general attitudes" (Kind-Kovács 2019: 465). As a result, what was *only* common sense was transformed into proven facts and thus it aligned with as well as fostered – in the form of feedback loops and through the affirmative radio broadcast – both interpretative frames in East and West.

This does not mean that RFE or RL did not engage in any fact-checking. On the contrary, the whole information apparatus, including the monitoring section, the research department, the library, and the card catalogue, were supposed to facilitate fact-checking processes:

> While information gathering was one of the radio's most central undertakings, also much effort was invested into fact-checking, as the radio cared particularly about the veracity, reliability and truthfulness of the information they received. Much background research was conducted to scrutinize the contents and experiences presented in the interviews. As RFE considered "information" not as "merely journalism" but as "primarily political analytical work", the proper handling of information through EERA [East European Research and Analysis Department] was considered key in creating a bridge "between research and analysis, policy, implementation of policy and programming" (Kind-Kovács 2019: 468).

The "information items,"[8] which resulted from the interviews and were used for broadcast and background reports, were all classified according to

[8] In his review of Feinberg's book *Curtain of Lies: The Battle over Truth in Stalinist Eastern Europe* A. Ross Johnson puts, however, emphasis on the fact that the information items were only one and rather a non-scientific source of information: "Even in the early 1950s, the interviews were

an evaluation scheme and annotated with comments that judged their veracity as "rumours," "not confirmed by other sources," "generally known," or "corresponding with other information and reports obtained."[9]

Moreover, the interviewing techniques also contained methods for the evaluation of the subjective accounts of travellers and refugees, which did not much differ from the methods applied by Kracauer and Berkman: "By focusing on the inconsistencies of the answers, on the slips of the tongue, by reading between the lines of the interviews, the analysis attempted to outweigh the inherent biases of the interviewees" (Rév 2010: 241). While Geertz remains very sincere in regard to such techniques and claims that cultural analysis "is guessing at meanings, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses" (Geertz 1973: 20), the RFE interviewers were certainly less frank about their method. Although, as Kind-Kovács notes, RFE constantly reminded its interviewers to mistrust their informants and to formulate judgements "of the interviewees' mental abilities, educational background and ability to speak freely, which introduced every interview report" (Kind-Kovács 2019: 466), the statements of the interviewees could not always be double-checked or confirmed by previously obtained and carefully catalogued sources at RFE. As a result, the information stored and processed by RFE was often of a contradictory nature.

Finally, the frame that RFE and RL used to select information and to judge its content was not objective but favoured those stories that corresponded to their anti-communist idea of a Soviet threat. They, too, transformed the gathered information into mutually supporting evidence. As Kracauer and Berkman note, although the two ideological frames of East and West were designed to confront and annihilate each other, "the two streams actually tend[ed] to reinforce each other" (Kracauer & Berkman 1956: 169). Emotions such as hope and fear were among the driving forces that shaped the interpretative frames and selective patterns on both sides.

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one source of information about eastern Europe for RFE, along with comprehensive monitoring of communist media, information from western journalists, travelers and diplomats, and accounts of high-level defectors such as Józef Światło. The Items (as documented in archived organizational histories) were produced by émigré information staff who were not 'analysts' or 'researchers' […] but whose job was to provide information to émigré broadcasters and American policy officials who made their own judgments. While Feinberg's critique of some first-order 'evaluation' comments is apt, those were not the views of RFE broadcasters or policy officials. My own judgment (as an RFE research analyst in the late 1960s) of the Items as a source of information was that some were golden, some interesting, and many useless" (Johnson 2018: 1071–1072).

[9] See the Radio Free Europe Information Items Collection at the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (OSA): https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/?f[digital_collection][]=RFE%20Information%20Items, accessed 17.07.2020.

RFE not only engaged in epistemic politics in broadcasting truth beyond the Iron Curtain, it "stimulate[d] fantasy, it fe[d] hope" (Rév 2010: 240).

/// Conclusion

RFE and the historical context allow truth to be studied as a practice, a process, and a product. In all the examples by which I have tried to analyse how truth operates and is operated upon, truth appears to be highly linked to everyday life experiences, attitudes, opinions, and behaviours. The different truth situations or truth scenes studied here never refer to an absolute or scientifically objective truth. They were an intrinsic part of social reality and in this sense very dynamic, instable, or uncertain and linked to human experiences and judgements, including thoughts as well as emotions. The truth of social reality hence can and does change over time; it is relativistic in the sense that the actors, too, adapt to a steadily changing world. RFE was a place where stability and certainty were established not only through qualitative assessments of alleged facts, but through the purely quantitative accumulation of materials and mutually supporting evidence. Individual accounts were often taken for proofs about the nature of more general occurrences, even despite the lack of evidence or the lack of confirmed information.

What this tells us in relation to the so-called post-truth era is that truth encompasses subjectivity and emotions as part of human reality, and thus our insistence on a certain kind of objectivity that admits neither subjectivity nor emotions to be valid grounds for truth is misguided. The same is true for our understanding of rationality, which is often defined by leaving out a part of our senses, ignoring that whatever was a rational action in a certain period of time might have appeared totally irrational in another. Placing the sign "Workers of the world, unite!" in the shop window was a rational action through and through, but it did not reveal any truth.

At the same time, "truth" would not need to be "revealed" in a Heideggerian sense if we were not social beings who live in highly complex societies or, as Latour defines it, in technologised and complicated ones. In an unmediated world of face-to-face interaction, doing truth or speaking truth might have much more immediate effect. Havel's greengrocer would have the power of the powerless just by speaking what he clearly sees and knows. In a small circle of actors, breaking the rules of a certain truth game could indeed have the potential to cause it to change or collapse. Nevertheless, we are generally dealing with a different sort of cir-

cumstances. The world in which we live and the world of the Cold War are and were highly complicated systems. For almost everything that happens in this world there is the need for mediation, intermediaries, technology, or media, which are not only passive means of our actions, but, indeed, actors that are co-responsible for enacting history, truth, and hence the world as it is or was.

Furthermore, while the Western and institutionalised quest for objectivity strongly reduced the plurality of viewpoints, flattened or denied ambiguities, inconsistencies, and contradictions, and prioritised a solely American view of truth as well as history, it was not truth but subjectivity that returned through the backdoor of epistemology. Although, as Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison point out in their monumental study of history and the nature of objectivity, "[o]bjectivity was summoned into existence to negate subjectivity" (Rév 2019: 145), the self and the subject remained the source of truth, whether as an active shaper of reality, as in the parable of the greengrocer, or as an interpreter and judge of social reality.

As analysed, this plurality of subjective viewpoints and interpretations, which were also governed by emotions and resulted from the difficulty of living in a world of subverted facts and the omnipresence of lies, was subjected to the inflexible interpretative frames available to RFE as a place where truth was gathered and hence where power over truth was accumulated. The atmosphere of objectivity that RFE was called upon to create was preceded by an informal atmosphere of proximity, staged and calculated friendship, alleged trustworthiness and subjectivity. RFE's reporting was not subjective per se – although neither was it purely objective (see Rév 2019) – but the truth scenes and situations it created for its interviewees, as well as for its listeners, who received RFE's messages in the homely contexts of the radio listening environment, incited the articulation and involvement of subjectivity.

Furthermore, as Rév argues, for journalism, "the antithesis of being objective is obviously not the cultivation of the self or being subjective. […] The problem with reporting is not that their views are highly subjective, but that the stories […] can be fictitious, untrue, fake, calculated, sensational, overdramatized or blatantly false" (Rév 2019: 145). The interview methods that RFE employed give rise to doubts about the staff's ability to sort lies from facts. To a certain extent this did not even appear to be RFE's major goal: broadcasting the truth meant broadcasting the American truth, which did not necessarily allow the needed neutrality for an

objective judgement of individual accounts and life stories. The Western frame dominated.

Finally, the world of the Cold War, like the world of Cold War politics, was not, according to Arendt, a world of truth but a world of lies. In contrast to the traditional political lie that was employed to safeguard state secrets and intentions, the modern political lie, said Arendt, deals "with things that are not secrets at all but known to practically everybody […] [and] meant to deceive literally everybody" (Arendt 2000: 564–565). Once lies become hard reality and part of commonly shared perceptions, to tell the truth means to take huge risks and even becomes a political action. For Arendt, it is only in this sense that we *do* truth and *speak* truth. Only when political lies become the world of everybody, can it happen that hard facts will not necessarily change hard reality any longer. This is the danger that our post-truth era shares with the Cold War experience.

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/// Abstract

In accord with recent scholarly appeals, this article advocates a certain intellectual tolerance and modesty in regard to the juxtaposition of conflicting or even supposedly rival approaches to questions of epistemology and truth. By rejecting the idea of a fixed epistemological standpoint and by moving the reader along a multiplicity of frames and truth situations, the author argues that if the post-truth problematic can teach us anything new about truth, it is the necessity to (re-)acknowledge that there is no omniscient position for the scholar and that none of our scholarly approaches taken separately enable us to grasp the totality. Hence, truth is investigated in

this article as a variable shaping and being shaped by a highly dynamic and uncertain social reality – a reality that is neither constituted of "hard facts" nor of a "soft relativism" alone. From a consideration of the selected Cold War context and the laboratory-like setting of the American broadcaster Radio Free Europe, it can be concluded that a new media-archaeology of the fact requires not only a revision of our understanding of truth but of agency, rationality, and objectivity as well.

Keywords:
Cold War, common sense, Radio Free Europe, state of affairs, truth regimes

/// Anna Grutza – PhD student in comparative history at the Central European University in Budapest/Vienna, Hungary/Austria. Her fields of interest are Cold War history, media theory, epistemology, the history of everyday life, new imperial history, and science and technology studies. In her research she focuses on Cold War truth regimes, Radio Free Europe, the circulation, production, and reception of information during the Cold War, and Soviet and US imperialism. Her publications include *Radio Free Europe and Cold War Truth Games: Messages beyond the Great Divide* (2019) and *Verführtes Denken: Das "Schöne" und das "Wahre" im Kalten Krieg. Literarische Aushandlungen zwischen Ost und West* (2019).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9943-915X

E-mail: grutza_anna-eva@phd.ceu.edu

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"WE MIGHT GIVE PEOPLE A SENSE OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM": ON THE TRUTH DISCOURSE ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE FIRST PHASE OF THE POLISH #METOO (#JATEŻ) ACTION (OCTOBER 2017) ON FACEBOOK

Paweł Bagiński
University of Warsaw

/// Introduction[1]

The #MeToo movement started in 2006 with a campaign led by Tarana Burke, an African-American activist who works with survivors of sexual violence in minority communities (Adetiba & Burke 2018). The hashtag employing the phrase ignited a digital activist movement in social media networks on 16 October 2017, when a group of American film stars reported allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment by the prominent Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Actress Alyssa Milano published a Twitter post with the hashtag encouraging women to share their stories of sexual harassment and/or abuse publicly to "give people a sense of the

[1] This paper is based on a part of my MA thesis, which I defended in 2018, under the supervision of Roman Chymkowski at the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. I would like to thank my advisor, Adam Ostolski, for inspiration and the suggestion to include the notion of parrhesia in this analysis. I also thank the editors of this issue and especially one peer reviewer for their helpfulness and insightful remarks.

magnitude of the problem." The hashtag instantly went viral. During the first twenty-four hours, it reached 12 million posts, comments, or reactions among 4.7 million users, on Facebook alone.

For the Polish #MeToo movement, the Black Protests that started in 2016 against a fundamentalist Catholic legislative initiative to wholly ban abortion provided a crucial context. The black colour in the visual identification of the protest (clothing, etc.) symbolised both the resistance and the mourning of women who are structurally deprived of control over their own bodies. Poland already has a strict abortion law that proscribes the termination of pregnancy due to difficult socio-economic conditions. This law was adopted after the collapse of state socialism, when there was an overall re-traditionalisation of the gender order (Szelewa 2016). The protests in 2016, 2017, and 2018, which were held online and throughout the country by the grassroots organisation Polish Women's Strike (Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet), were among the largest social mobilisations in recent years. Ewa Majewska described these demonstrations as a strategy of "weak resistance" by feminist counterpublics against hegemonic, heroic, and masculine political practices in the public sphere (Majewska 2018). Numerous women's rights initiatives have derived from these protests (Korolczuk et al. 2019), adding a layer of mass social movement to the constant efforts on the part of experts, feminists, and activists fighting for reproductive rights. In the wake of the Black Protests, which moved the problem of systemic violence against women into public discourse, #MeToo arrived in Poland, on ground that was already stirring.

Polish #MeToo (#JaTeż) started as a mass action based on sharing personal experiences of patriarchal violence and occurred mainly on Facebook, the leading social media platform at the time.[2] In contrast to the US action, #JaTeż did not disclose any high-profile figures. The turning point of the action, however, was the article "Papierowi feminiści. O hipokryzji na lewicy i nowych twarzach polskiego #Metoo" [Feminists on paper: On the left's hypocrisy and the new faces of Polish #MeToo], published in the online magazine *Codziennik Feministyczny* on 27 November 2017. For the first time in the Polish #MeToo action, public figures were revealed as perpetrators, a development marking the beginning of the second phase of #JaTeż in Poland (Grabowska & Rawłuszko 2018: 77). In the article,

[2] In the third and fourth quarters of 2017, the user penetration rate of Facebook in Poland was about 62% (Instagram 24%, Twitter 18%). At the end of 2017 there were about 14 million active users, which makes about 37% of the country's population (Statista Research Department 2020; "Internet in Europe Stats").

a group of women shared their accounts of sexual harassment, assault, and rape, and identified two liberal-left journalists as the perpetrators. The mostly critical reaction of the symbolic elites (i.e., journalists, feminists, academics, etc.) towards "Feminists on Paper" turned the attention from systemic violence against women to the presumption of innocence and the credibility of the rape allegations against one of the journalists. This shift of focus in turn changed the dynamic of the action, possibly halting other disclosures about abusive individuals in positions of power (ibid.). It could be argued that #JaTeż was enthusiastically backed as long as it exposed patriarchal norms, not particular individuals.

In this study, I examine public posts published between 16 and 20 October 2017, and thus during the first phase of the Polish #MeToo action, on Facebook, when thousands of women shared their personal stories of subjection to systemic violence, without disclosing the individual male perpetrators. I decided to focus on the first phase of the action rather than to discuss the effects of the backlash to "Feminists on Paper" in order to identify the processes that made sexual harassment more visible in the public discourse and in everyday life in the long run. I attempt to address the first phase of the #MeToo action as the affective production of a truth discourse countering the normalisation of violence against women. To this end, I start with a discussion of the research material, followed by a brief introduction to the post-Foucauldian framework applied in this study: dispositive analysis and modes of truth-making in avowal and parrhesia. Next, I proceed with an analysis of the role of the circulation of affects in countering patriarchal norms, the right to define sexual harassment, and a critique of the normalisation of gender-based violence. I focus on the role of courage and solidarity in #JaTeż posts. Finally, I conclude by examining the normative function of #JaTeż and sketching its impact on both individual and social levels.

/// Research Material and the Hashtag Network

This study covers all public posts with "#jateż" and "#jatez" hashtags published on Facebook during the first five days of the action (16–20 October 2017). The database was restricted to the Polish version of the hashtag, because the "#metoo" phrase could not have been exclusively associated with Polish-language public posts using media monitoring tools. Nonetheless, the database of 2,863 public posts and commentaries with #JaTeż (1,733 of them posted by women) was sufficient for the purpose of qualitative analy-

sis and a basic quantitative description. In comparison, during the next five days, "#jateż" appeared ten times less frequently (286). Additionally, the research sample was extended by several dozen Polish "#metoo" posts from the same period, using non-probability sampling on phrases such as "victim," "harassment," "shame," and so forth.[3]

While #JaTeż testimonies were predominantly given in written form, their linguistic character fits those of oral expression. An analysis of the relations between speech and written word in online communication is beyond the scope of this paper. It is important to note, nevertheless, that according to David Olson, context for written words is reduced to the content of the words used, in contrast to context in a speech act (Olson 1994, quoted in Sikora, forthcoming: 186–187). Furthermore, context is immediately denoted in the hashtag network, as there is no need to ask about the intent of any single post under the #MeToo-related hashtag. #MeToo (#JaTeż) posts are performed *as if* in oral communication, but still without non-linguistic features, such as gestures and intonation.

Technically speaking, hashtags were introduced to categorise the massive spread of information by using organically created metadata tags to wire up all the relevant posts in a network ("I got here looking through the posts under the hashtag, curious about these stories, wondering how much I've contributed to the problem unintentionally" (M)).[4] In this sense, the #MeToo action was a viral event with memetic elements. The viral object is transformed into a meme when it is appropriated, imitated, and altered for other uses by a considerable number of people, for example, in hashtag derivatives (#MenToo, #NotMe, etc.; Edwards & Lang 2018: 124).

/// What Is Dispositive Analysis?

I approach the #MeToo (#JaTeż) action and its impact upon the normative views on violence against women using the tools of dispositive analy-

[3] I took into consideration only those posts which had the "public" setting turned on. The overall database was estimated to consist of around 3,000 posts, half of which were published on 17 October 2017, the day after #MeToo (#JaTeż) started. Research material was extracted with the brand24.pl media monitoring tool to prevent bias in the data. I would like to thank the brand24.pl crew for free access to the service and for helpdesk support.

[4] After the Cambridge Analytica data breach in 2018, Facebook changed its data policy and restricted access to some types of archival data from 2017. For this reason, I was not able to extract the exact date and time of the analysed posts while editing the paper in 2020. These posts are cited here with gender symbols ("M" for male, and "F" for female Facebook users), as they appeared originally in my MA research. Quotes that do not contain hashtags are comments on posts that do. All translations of quotations from Polish are my own work.

sis, which is a post-Foucauldian research perspective on relations between the forms of subjectivity and power-knowledge. In this framework, the dispositive is a heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discursive and non-discursive elements connected in a network of power relations, which produces a truth discourse about the world and plays a strategic function in responding to urgent needs (Foucault 1980: 194–197). Dispositive analysis aims to study how various mechanisms shape social reality, understood as the resultant of the orders of knowledge intertwined with the techniques of power (Nowicka 2016: 179; Raffnsøe et al. 2014).

In discussing Michel Foucault and gender studies, Patricia Amigot Leache and Margot Pujal i Llombart introduced the dispositive of gender which produces and regulates sexual identities and the subordination of women (Amigot Leache & Pujal i Llombart 2011: 6). The authors did not, however, refer to the element of urgency. I support the claim that a disclosure of systemic violence in #MeToo (#JaTeż) was that urgency towards which the dispositive of gender responded. In the following analysis, I attempt to show how the power-knowledge and affects accumulated in the hashtag network by means of the circulation of #MeToo (#JaTeż) countered the patriarchal dispositive of gender and the normalisation of gender-based violence in public discourse.

/// Avowal and Parrhesia in #MeToo (#JaTeż)

Two modes of truth-telling – avowal and parrhesia[5] – are of interest to this study as they serve to explain how a subject speaks her truth from the subordinated position in power relations. In his 1981 Louvain lectures Foucault defined avowal as

> a verbal act through which the subject affirms who he/she is, binds himself/herself to this truth, places himself/herself in a relation-

[5] In *The Courage of the Truth* lectures Foucault signalled that parrhesia is not a technique of truth-telling such as rhetoric or confession, but a mode anchored in the criticism of ethos of individuals and situations (Foucault 2011: 14). On that basis, Foucault claims parrhesia is not performative. He differed performative speech acts, with effects "known and ordered in advance," from parrhesia, whose defining characteristic is the extent to which truth-telling "opens the situation and makes possible effects which are, precisely, not known" (ibid.: 62). At this moment, however, he seems to limit the "performative" to the illocutionary effects of the heavily contextualised performative speech act. It is worth noting the difference that J.L. Austin indicated (1962: 101–104) between illocutionary acts, with their conventional effects (e.g., the remission of sins by a priest), and perlocutionary acts with actual, unconventional effects, such as the abandonment of faith by a priest after hearing a confession. Thus parrhesia may have some performative effects, which are identified here with the work of affects.

> ship of dependence with regard to another, and modifies at the same time his [/her] relationship to himself [/herself] (Foucault 2014: 17).

Avowal was first identified with the liberation of the speaking subject when confession was made an obligatory practice in the Catholic Church, and gradually ceased to be exercised as a form of external coercion but as a common technique of truth production in Western societies (Foucault 1978: 60). The ritual allowed for the process of subjectivation, by simultaneously creating the sinful "self" to be responsible for its deeds and the obligation to acknowledge them. A priest who held pastoral power over community members was a necessary figure in order for a subject to come into relation with her own truth.

Dave Tell examines the Foucauldian critique of confession and concludes that "confession is a *sine qua non* of modern power – it is an essential component without which modern power could not be exercised" (Tell 2010: 98). Tell refers to disciplinary power and recalls Foucault by claiming that confession as a technique of power is interchangeable with Bentham's panopticon (Foucault 2004). Through Catholic confession, a truth-speaking exercise was inscribed into modern governmentality, by which Foucault meant to describe the set of practices in control of both the individual soul and the whole political body (Folkers 2016: 9–10).

But #MeToo participants did not report any "sins" other than being a woman in patriarchal society, and this points to the structural reason for including avowal in a #MeToo analysis. In her article on the feminist-Foucauldian approach to countering sexual violence, the American scholar Dianna Taylor claims that asserting the subjectivity of women who have experienced gender-based violence is "ultimately insufficient as a strategy of resistance" (Taylor 2013: 89). Taylor is interested in contemporary strategies for countering sexual violence that would have similar effects to those of parrhesia in the context of antiquity: disobedience and anti-normalisation (ibid.: 99). Parrhesia was frank public speech, a mode of truth-telling in which a speaker expressed his personal relationship to truth (Foucault 2001: 12). Socrates is probably the most renowned parrhesiastes – his defence during his trial served as evidence of his truthfulness, which ultimately led to a death sentence. A parrhesiastes speaks his/her mind as clearly and directly as possible, regardless of the dangers this may evoke, since a parrhesiastes' moral duty is to criticise the injustice of superior or major opinion from a subordinated position, for the sake of improving

the community (ibid.: 17). Taylor argues that "a parrhesiastic self-relation represents what in modern/contemporary terms can be characterised as an anti-normalising alternative to the confessional self-relation that subjectivity inherits and reproduces" (ibid.: 96). While Taylor underlines anti-normalisation at the level of parrhesiastic self-relation, the social function of parrhesiastes was progressively to impact the injustice of existing norms.

Referring to the truth-production modes of avowal and parrhesia, #MeToo posts are understood here as performative acts whose replication and accumulation produced a truth discourse on systemic violence against women. The apparently paradoxical union between the "self," which is subjectivated in avowal and empowered in parrhesia, highlights both the personal and public characteristic of the #MeToo action.

/// Norm-Countering: Affect Circulation in the Hashtag Network

The Polish #MeToo movement started on 16 October 2017 when Stowarzyszenie Kobiet 8 Marca, the organisers of Warsaw Manifa, an annual feminist demonstration on Women's Day (8 March), shared a Facebook post written by the American actress Carmen Ruby Floyd, with a Polish translation:

> #metoo #Jateż
> If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote "Me too." as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.
> Jeśli wszystkie kobiety, które były kiedyś molestowane seksualnie napisały „Ja też" w statusie, być może pokazalibyśmy ludziom jaką skalę ma to zjawisko.

Over the period under consideration, 570 posts with identical or slightly modified content were published, making it a standard formula and a most frequently shared post. The "#MeToo" tag itself could be extended to the confessional expression "I was sexually abused, too," which serves to establish the identity of women who have experienced sexual harassment while throwing light on the normalised violence against them in a patriarchal society. The following sentence in the post aims to counter the patriarchal norm from the subordinated position in power relations. The use of the conditional seems to express symptomatic uncertainty in terms of the importance of women's voice in public. The reference to scale

("if all women") indicates how the normalisation of sexual violence makes many forms of abusive behaviours unnoticeable to perpetrators and victims alike.

> [I]n many cases we do not even realise that we are victims of abuse. violence. it is not a matter of repression… it is a matter of the norm in which we were brought up. we: victims and aggressors. all from the same world (F).

The action aimed at exposing and countering patriarchal norms through the replication of #MeToo posts accumulated in the circulation of affects which globally took over social media in October 2017. In Brian Massumi's classic definition, an "affect" is a social potentiality that becomes accessible to awareness when it is actualised as an intelligible emotion (Massumi 1995: 96). Otherwise, an affect may be understood as a tension between bodies and things. At the peak of #MeToo, with which this analysis is concerned, Facebook was highly saturated with the various emotions shared by thousands of people. In this respect, the #MeToo action fits Kathleen Stewart's definition of an affect as "public feelings that begin and end in social circulation" (Stewart 2007: 5, quoted in Edwards & Lang 2018: 125). Building on Dustin W. Edwards and Heather Lang's understanding of hashtags (Edwards & Lang 2018: 120), I suggest that hashtags are material-discursive practices for the accumulation of affects. The contagious feature of both hashtag and affect makes them a vehicle for power-knowledge distribution. With every #MeToo hashtag repetition, the affective flow in the network increased, broadening its visibility and possible impact.

/// The Right to Define Sexual Harassment: Against the Patriarchal Normalisation of Gender-Based Violence

Like most penal codes, the Polish Penal Code has no definition of sexual harassment. This not only creates significant problems when seeking justice in court, but also explains the weakness of the law in regulating behaviours that do not fall under the sexual-violence paragraphs.[6] Admittedly, Article 199 § 1 of the Polish Penal Code provides that

[6] Further reading: *Breaking the Taboo: Report on Sexual Violence* by the Foundation for Equality and Emancipation STER (Grabowska & Grzybek 2016).

> whoever, abusing a relationship of dependence or by taking advantage of a critical situation, subjects such a person to sexual intercourse or makes him/her submit to another sexual act or to perform such an act shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years.

However, this paragraph does not cover most of the acts identified as sexual harassment by victims. A definition of sexual harassment exists in the Polish Labour Code, but it does not account for situations outside of the professional field. Additionally, the uncertain meaning of a "workplace" in late capitalism leaves the qualification of abusive actions to the patriarchal norm.

Moreover, victim-blaming, the low effectiveness in solving cases of sexual violence, and other practices of the state apparatuses have produced a lack of confidence in the police and justice system. In *Feminism and the Power of Law*, British sociologist Carol Smart argues for a feminist strategy to question the power of law as an inherently patriarchal truth discourse with a tendency to dismiss alternative discourses of knowledge (Smart 1989: 162–165). The ability to redefine the truth of events, outside the legal discourse, allows for direct political action in which "feminism can (re) define harmless flirtation into sexual harassment" (ibid.: 165). Truth works here as a social operator that integrates #MeToo participants and allies in the critique of violent, patriarchal morality (Kleeberg 2019). In some of the #MeToo (#JaTeż) posts, participants insisted on their right to define what sexual harassment is, on the basis of an inferior position in the gender order. The "right to define" is equal here with the "ability to identify":

> [P]recisely because of the lack of a "sexual harassment" definition in law, women decide what it is. Today I had a discussion in which some girls said that wolf-whistling was sexual harassment. They did not want to go to court right away, just wanted the guys to stop doing it (F).

The feminist redefinition of sexual harassment and call for change to the norms of conduct between men and women corresponds with the concept of rape culture, where "rape is our everyday reality and any behaviour that denigrates women because of gender opens up the field to rape" (Staśko 2017: 7). Rebecca Solnit elaborates on rape culture in her 2014 es-

say on #YesAllWomen, an action analogous to #MeToo, but with far less global impact:

> We tend to treat violence and the abuse of power as though they fit into airtight categories: harassment, intimidation, threat, battery, rape, murder. But I realise now that what I was saying is: it's a slippery slope. That's why we need to address that slope, rather than compartmentalising the varieties of misogyny and dealing with each separately (Solnit 2014).

The rhetoric of a slippery slope is based on the belief that the first and relatively small step starts a chain of related events that inevitably lead to a serious, unintended effect. Rape culture draws attention to the systemic character of sexual violence by describing how the normalisation of any kind of gender-based violence paves the way for sexual assault and rape to occur. This approach is frequently met with comments that undermine the power-knowledge on the systemic characteristics of violence against women by referring to a legal qualification, implausibility, or an emotional burden that is not striking enough:

> There are people who survived tragedy and live with trauma – how in their eyes does it look when someone gets upset because they got felt up? These posts don't stand in solidarity with people who are really abused, they only rub salt into their wounds and remind them of situations they want to erase from memory. I have yet to meet someone who was abused, but really abused, to actually join the hashtagging and talk about what they survived (F).

This statement takes sexual violence for a traumatic experience that prevents victims from sharing stories in public. The argument was put forward by women and men who ignored or depreciated the wide spectrum of sexual violence, claiming that only criminal acts like assault and rape should be considered as such. An alleged attempt to symmetrise in #MeToo (#JaTeż) was attacked with a concurrent demand for justice for the victims of sex crimes. This critical reaction employs the Habermasian division between the private and the public sphere, which excludes women who experienced sexual harassment from participating in public discourse (Fraser 1992). When #MeToo (#JaTeż) took place in Poland, a secondary victimisation also occurred broadly – probably because many forms of

verbal and physical sexual harassment experienced and problematised by women had not previously been taken seriously in public discourse.

Some participants drew attention to the cognitive dissonance evoked by contact with #MeToo (#JaTeż). They understood that the perpetrator is guilty and should be ashamed of his act, but at the same time they felt the emotional burden: "[E]ven though I know who is guilty, I am very ashamed and I am afraid to talk about it" (F), or "[T]hey should feel shame and fear, not me" (F). The lack of a non-patriarchal normative framework for sexual harassment favours the individualisation and rationalisation of this experience by victims who are forced to take responsibility for the causes of their emotional state. Meanwhile, the perpetrators can remain ignorant or indifferent to the violent nature of their acts. Truth-tellers risked the danger of social stigma, shame, and secondary victimisation. One of the liberating effects experienced by some #MeToo participants was shedding emotional sanctions and responsibility: "I have experienced situations I want to forget, but becoming aware that I'm not the only one made me feel that it was not my fault" (F). Community support and awareness of the institutional nature of violence against women enabled the victims' sense of personal responsibility to be lifted.

The second most frequently shared post in the Polish #MeToo movement was a detailed definition of sexual harassment from the Feminoteka Foundation website, a feminist organisation which coordinates a Polish edition of the global action on violence against women One Billion Rising – Nazywam się miliard (105 shares in the database).

> Sexual harassment is any form of unacceptable behaviour that aims to humiliate or violate another person's dignity in relation to her gender, or which is of a sexual nature. Harassment is often associated with a sense of power over another person […] ("Nazywam się miliard").

Feminoteka Foundation's expert knowledge thus became an important point of reference for the #JaTeż discourse. Adding more forms of sexual violence to physical abuse, this definition qualitatively and quantitatively broadened how sexual harassment was identified. In the #JaTeż discourse, its meaning oscillated from the definition above, through disregard for the violent characteristics of harassment and in favour of "rudeness," to complete denial by some men, who ignored the performative effects of speech and/or identified harassment with sexual assault ("A large percent-

age of these hashtags are there because the ladies have been victims of brutal verbal assault like 'such a nice ass' or 'I would bang her'" (M)). I do not elaborate on men's various reactions to #MeToo (#JaTeż) in this paper and merely point to the male backlash against women who described their experiences of gender-based violence ("Girls open up about painful things while the boys put it under the microscope to show that it's not actually harassment" (F)). Due to the danger of an aggressive reaction, speaking up against the patriarchal norm requires courage (Foucault 2001: 16). Hashtag circulation contributed to a construction of sexual harassment that covered a wide range of behaviour described by aggrieved women: "Cat-calling, loud and vulgar comments on my appearance, trying to feel me up, stupid gestures, bawdy propositions and staring at my boobs or ass, I experience that daily" (F).

The prevalence of sexual harassment is a normative phenomenon at the intersection of gender, law, and culture. While the #MeToo action does not produce law, it confronts unaccepted practices, calling for normative change on the basis of popular sovereignty in the assembly (Butler 2016). In her *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, the American philosopher Judith Butler develops the Arendtian conception of "the space of appearance" as a political domain in respect to the affective characteristic of public assemblies. Butler puts forward the conception of "the right to appearance" as a performative claim on what is not legally codified yet, or cannot be codified at all (ibid.: 68). Butler emphasises that "the right to appearance" is ensured by popular sovereignty, which allows the creation of a community in the act of self-constitution (ibid.: 149).

/// "The Personal is Political" Revisited: Courage and Solidarity in #MeToo (#JaTeż)

The identification of individual experience with systemic violence has enabled women to articulate a collective demand for their safety and well-being to be increased.

> #metoo # jateż at first I thought that this topic does not concern me, but while reading more posts I felt huge depression and pain, as well as rage that so often we, women, are the ones who feel ashamed and embarrassed, and because of that we remain silent (F).

The statement above demonstrates in a nutshell how the awareness of being a victim of systemic violence gradually emerges, as the author moves from the first-person singular ("At first I thought") to plural identification with other women through their shared emotional burden ("we, women, are the ones who feel ashamed"). Nevertheless, almost all the posts under #JaTeż that contain personal experiences are written in the first-person singular, where the speaking subject is at the same time the object of the statement.

> #metoo #jateż In the seventh grade in elementary school a group of peers pulled me into the basement, after which the head of their gang put his tongue in my throat. It was my "first kiss." Then they repeatedly stalked me on the street and kept ringing my doorbell. I was afraid and I felt ashamed (F).

The confessional nature of this story lies in the courage needed to share in public a detailed description of sexual assault, continuous harassment, and inflicted harm. Foucault mentions five features of parrhesia that occur in #MeToo (#JaTeż) posts: sincerity, truthfulness, danger, criticism, and moral duty (Foucault 2001: 19–20). Bearing this in mind, Magdalena Nowicka and Karol Franczak point out that parrhesiastes speak on behalf of the silent majority – of those who cannot speak (Nowicka & Franczak 2016: 10).

> #metoo #jateż Great respect for those who have the courage to speak up, and of course to those who do not have this courage. I have not experienced the worst scenarios; I do not know how I would function then, but even such situations as described above [a verbal form of harassment] can paralyse, take away courage and a sense of security (F).

The courage of truth unfettered by fear, shame, and guilt in many cases proves to be stronger than the disciplinary function of confession: "[M]aybe someone needs my confession, or maybe I need it myself, and that is also okay" (F). If there is any justification for speaking in someone else's name, it might be the sense of mutual experience and thus of understanding why the other person cannot or simply does not want to speak: "[…] but there is something more than solidarity between us[,] these stories change into something[,] courage appears[,] the victim disappears, the sto-

ries told change us[.] I am waiting for what will grow[,] how we will grow because there is in us, girls, strength" (F). Solidarity is distinguished from a victimhood associated with powerlessness and sacrifice ("[W]e victimise ourselves hiding behind our shame. We're not victims when we fight for change" (F)). The ethos of solidarity manifested in #MeToo (#JaTeż) was consolidated in an affect that emerged from shared experiences with systemic violence. On that basis, the claim for gender justice and an elementary sense of security is expressed in collective rather than individual categories. The explosion of rage in the first days of the action did not drain #JaTeż of its fighting spirit. Instead, it became organised in the economy of rage, owing to which the action acquired a long-term nature (Sloterdijk 2011: 65–70). According to Peter Sloterdijk, along with the rise in the organisation of rage, the rationalisation of vindictive energy occurs (ibid.: 73). Accordingly, the initial impulse of aggrieved women is turned into a project of collective awareness-raising, and finally, into a revolutionary movement which undermines the patriarchal order.

Hashtag circulation affected social media users, but decisions on whether to take part in the #MeToo action remained autonomous. Some of the participants suggestively problematised their resistance to the coercive function of confession:

> It seems to me that #metoo #jatez is righteous, but I feel conflicted about this action […] Those who bear responsibility should be the ones to feel shame and explain themselves (F).

Stressed here is the resistance to the subjectivation in confession, which serves to victimise:

> [B]ecause that's how the gagging mechanism of "avowal" works – you don't just say something, you turn on "whining" victim mode, and a wimpy crybaby gets treated they way he most likely deserves to be treated due to his own fault. […] I don't want to write about it because I don't want to victimise myself. That's all the more why I have to do it, to make it harder for those who would like to see me weaker only because I'm a woman (F).

Here, parrhesia and avowal as modes of truth-telling in #MeToo connect: the courage to speak up against the patriarchal norm while being subjected to it, effected in the social production of power-knowledge on

violence against women. The subject of #MeToo oscillates between the states of being a subject and an object of disciplinary power – one is at the same time subjectivated (forced to confess) and engaged in a struggle for the improvement of social norms ("SPEAK OUT #jateż, so that future generations don't have to" (F)). Foucault's thesis on avowal as a means to the transformation of speakers rather than listeners is confirmed with the supposed increase of social awareness about sexual violence among women in the first place.

Enthusiasm for #MeToo at least partially came from faith in the beneficial influence that truth may have on social relations. Indeed, to acknowledge a structural problem by making it visible or perceptible at the level of repeated individual events can be a first step towards its resolution. On that basis, the "personal is political" slogan from second-wave feminism takes on new life in social media. In the safety section of Facebook's Community Standards, there is a paragraph on the "Sexual Exploitation of Adults" (II/8), which was updated after the #MeToo action:

> We recognize the importance of Facebook as a place to discuss and draw attention to sexual violence and exploitation. We believe this is an important part of building common understanding and community. In an effort to create space for this conversation while promoting a safe environment, we remove content that depicts, threatens or promotes sexual violence, sexual assault, or sexual exploitation, while also *allowing space for victims to share their experiences* (Facebook 2018; emphasis added).

In other words, "the right to appearance" is officially encouraged by Facebook, which stands for liberal values and declares its intent to moderate offensive content. The company endorses sharing personal stories as a proper means of moving towards gender justice, at least in the space controlled by the platform.

/// Conclusion: #MeToo (#JaTeż) as a Normative Phenomenon

Growing concerns over Facebook's political irresponsibility turned attention to the insufficient regulations within the virtual space managed by US technology corporations. Against the background of recent disturbing events, such as personal-data breaches and election interferences, #MeToo provided an uplifting moment for Facebook. In his testimony to the

US Senate over Cambridge Analytica, Mark Zuckerberg mentioned the #MeToo action as one of the benefits of social networks, as circulation of the hashtag in social media caused an explosion of interest in the problem of sexual violence. In this regard, it is vital to look at how slacktivism – which is a pejorative term for digital activism – is deemed to be an illusory belief in the causative power of online action requiring little involvement from the participants. Contrary to this opinion, an analysis of the #MeToo (#JaTeż) discourse confirms the emotional involvement and courage needed to engage.

In this paper, I have described how the #MeToo (#JaTeż) action affectively produced a truth discourse on structural violence against women. In #MeToo (#JaTeż) posts some features of avowal and parrhesia intertwine: women testified about their subjection to systemic violence, but at the same time they spoke up against patriarchal norms and codes of conduct between genders. Circulation of the hashtag on social media increased the visibility of sexual harassment and created a "space of appearance" in the absence of adequate social regulations. Consequently, a patriarchal dispositive of gender, which normalises violence against women, was disclosed and countered by the #MeToo movement, showing that no violence is a private matter.

The #MeToo action is a recent example of how the second-wave slogan "the personal is political" merged with social-media technology (see Rogan & Budgeon 2018). Michael Salter claims that social media enables the creation of counterpublics in which statements regarding sexual violence are processed in an opposite manner to the established social and legal norms (Salter 2013). After the Black Protests in Poland, the feminist pursuit of raising social awareness on women's rights shifted from critical discourse towards the mainstream, which came with a growth in "femvertising" and the commodification of feminism in general.

The difference between the first and second phase of Polish #JaTeż, as well the US #MeToo, shows that accusations were not focused on a few "rotten apples," but rather on the whole structure of power (Duggan 2018). Systemic oppression, however, stems from singular, repeated events of subjugation and violence. As the article "Feminists on Paper" made clear in addressing both the individual and social levels, parrhesiastes' truth-telling risks provoking the hostility and hatred of the social environment (Foucault 2011: 25). While the dynamics of normative change are usually disappointing for individuals and inflict more harm on them by way of social drama, in the wider scope

it works to make better community standards, which ultimately benefit everyone.[7]

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[7] For more on the normative function of callout culture and pain in a specific group, I recommend the anthropologically tinted podcast "The Callout" by Hanna Rosin and Alix Spiegel for NPR (Rosin & Spiegel 2018).

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/// Abstract

This paper considers how a truth discourse about violence against women was produced with the #JaTeż posts published on Facebook between 16 and 20 October 2017, during the first phase of Polish #MeToo. It applies a post-Foucauldian perspective of dispositive analysis to outline how the circulation of #MeToo (#JaTeż) in social media affected the patriarchal dispositive of gender, which had to give way to women speaking truth. The replication of posts and accumulation of affects in the #MeToo (#JaTeż) network allowed the normalisation of violence against women in public discourse to be countered. Michel Foucault's work on parrhesiastic and confessional modes of truth-telling is employed to analyse courage and solidarity in #MeToo (#JaTeż), as well as to connect individual engagement in the action with the collective claim for a normative shift in favour of women's rights.

Keywords:
dispositive analysis, Facebook, #MeToo (#JaTeż), truth-production, violence against women

/// Paweł Bagiński – PhD candidate at the Doctoral School of Humanities, University of Warsaw. He has published in *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* [Culture and society].

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1804-2247

E-mail: plbaginski@gmail.com

BOOK REVIEWS

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"LOOK AT A HUMAN BEING, AND LEARN TO SEE HIM": ON ALBERT PIETTE'S "EXISTANTIAL" ANTHROPOLOGY

ALBERT PIETTE, *THEORETICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OR HOW TO OBSERVE A HUMAN BEING*

Antoni Głowacki
University of Warsaw

Albert Piette is frustrated with anthropology. He wants to understand human beings, but anthropology does not help him see them properly. While ostensibly focusing on people, the gaze of anthropologists routinely passes through them to reach other things: society, culture, religion, interactions, systems of kinship or knowledge, sports, media, or political systems. Why does this happen, Piette asks. Why is the human subject so elusive? Why is there a need to dilute him in culture, or to see him as a sum of disjointed parts? After all, in our non-academic life we do not experience other people as vehicles for society or culture, but as living beings, solid and unified. Yet when we look at them as scholars, we suddenly cease to see them clearly, and we can only treat humans as a means to grasping something else. For Piette, this constitutes a fundamental failing of anthropology. In his work, he wants to talk about people – not as indicators of abstract notions but as valid research objects in their own right.

Albert Piette is a French anthropologist, currently working at University Paris X Nanterre, and a member of the Laboratoire d'ethnologie et sociologie comparative at CNRS. During the 1990s, he became known mainly as a scholar of religion, publishing a number of books and articles

dedicated to understanding the practical functioning of religious and quasi-religious action. The most comprehensive account of this period can be found in *Le fait religieux. Une théorie de la religion ordinaire* (2003b). Later, he focused on epistemological and methodological questions. Throughout his works, Piette seeks to establish a scientific method that would allow anthropologists to grasp the specificity of human existence. He accentuates the need to consider the details of everyday life, and the specific ways in which people engage in activities.

Theoretical Anthropology or How to Observe a Human Being is Piette's latest work dealing with these questions, and it serves as a manifesto of sorts: he gathers here principles for his own approach to the systematic study of human beings (or, as he prefers to call them, human volumes). And while in the past he devoted considerable energy to debate, in *Theoretical Anthropology* he focuses on presenting a positive research programme. A mainly methodological work, *Theoretical Anthropology* is aimed primarily at practising anthropologists, but it could certainly be of interest for the broader public of social scientists, as sociology is a constant presence, albeit mainly as a negative point of reference. Piette develops an intriguing perspective, examining the foundations of anthropology and questioning its role as a social science.

Theoretical Anthropology appears as the first volume in ISTE and Wiley's Research, Innovative Theories and Methods in Social Sciences and Humanities set, which is coordinated by Piette himself with Emmanuelle Savignac. Piette's proposition is, indeed, innovative. It consists of nothing less than a total remodelling of anthropology and its rebuilding with a new focus, better suited to the discipline's stated purpose. It would no longer be a social science but rather a proper study of individuals. According to Piette, the initial promise of anthropology – contained in the discipline's very name – was instantly conditioned with limiting adjectives: a *social* anthropology or a *cultural* one. Such adjectives suggest a narrow view: anthropologists are interested in humans only as social or cultural beings, in specific dimensions of their lives. Thus, anthropology concentrates only on parts of the human being, neglecting the whole; it fragments its own object of study, and dilutes individuals in social relations and interactions. On the other hand, anthropologists do not focus on people they observe, but rather try to see through them to study society or culture. As such, anthropology is nothing more than a sub-discipline of sociology, marked by the use of the ethnographic method. But, as Piette reminds his readers, a method does not constitute a field of study. It is then crucial for anthro-

pology to construct the human being as a proper object of scientific inquiry and to develop a new research scale: that which is neither sociological nor biological, but properly anthropological. Only this would allow the curious absence of research on actual human beings to be remedied. As for now, the "human being is an astonishing entity in the sciences," claims Piette. "It is possible to work on a cell to understand a cell, or a city and an institution to understand a city and an institution. However, we look at the human being in search of other things" (Piette 2019: 116).

From this observation ensues Piette's main methodological advice, which may seem deceptively simple: "Looking at a human being means looking at him and nothing else," though "this is not easy" (2019: 61), as the author hastens to add. He proposes viewing humans as volumes: clearly delimited and separate from their environment; comprising multiple qualities, while providing structuring unity; occupying a certain amount of physical space; observable; and finally, preserving their unity through changes in time. With his volumocentric focus, Piette aims to change the way we observe the world: to highlight the figure and not the background; to look at a person and not its environment (a process described as "anthropological reversal," since it contradicts the usual way of looking).

For Piette, there are five crucial points illuminating the concept of a human volume. First, when observing an individual, we should keep in mind that a volume is comprised of elements but is also an entity with a certain consistency; we should consider the volume and its contents simultaneously. The notion of "voluments" designates elements that are situated inside a volume, and cannot exist separately.[1] The anthropologist's task consists of indicating active voluments (several are always compresent) to describe the density of a volume. Second, a volume is an entirety which cannot be fragmentised and described as a sum of its parts. It has a specific unity, formed by the interplay of voluments; it is thus inutile to extract only some of them for analysis, as social sciences routinely do. Rather, anthropologists should try to describe the details of a volume conceived as a whole. Thirdly, each volume has a specific nature; it is distinct from others. Contrary to the anthropological figure of a person as a vehicle for shared traits, human volumes are not interchangeable. Fourth, volume has a consistence over time; it remains in continuity even though specific voluments may change.

[1] They can include, among others, "actions, gestures, words, the body, a body posture, thoughts, mental images, reasons (for action), perceptions, sensations, feelings, affects, emotions, desires, wishes, intentions, moods, memories, values, cognitive abilities, types of consciousness, knowledge, know-hows, so-called social and cultural characteristics, various memberships and roles, different habits or style" (Piette 2019: 3).

Each human has his own distinctive style. Finally, a volume is marked by a certain "lessereity," or indifference to the outside world. This constitutes an important organising principle for the voluments; an individual is never fully committed to an action, there is always more going on inside of him, detaching him from his environment and protecting his singularity. Taken together, these qualities of a volume allow it to be treated as "an individual unity separate from the others" (Piette 2019: x) and "a separate body that is about to continue" (ibid.: 47). Importantly, the unity of a volume is not understood as unifying an individual in a strong sense of self; rather, it is an empirical quality of being a discrete entity. Subjectivity is considered only as one volument among others; as Piette puts it bluntly, "[I]n a volume, there is no 'I.' It may be at most an effect, occasionally felt, of voluments bouncing off one another" (ibid.: 8–9).

Since Piette intends to shift anthropology's focus to a different object of study, it is only fitting that he should propose a novel methodological approach too. He suggests replacing ethnography by a "volumography" – the art of describing human volumes. The scientific study of human beings should be based on continuous, detailed observation of individuals. "Ideally," writes Piette, "we would obtain a film of each human showing all his life uninterruptedly" (ibid.: 30). This would allow the researcher to meticulously track voluments as they come to the surface and recede, undergo mutations, influence each other, or react to external stimuli. It could also allow the elements that contribute to the volume's personal style, pervading all his actions and marking it by a definite continuity, to be identified. This is not all speculative, as Piette bases his methodological approach on an analysis of a twelve-hour uninterrupted film following him as he fulfils his daily tasks (ibid.: viii). To reach those voluments that are not directly observable, Piette suggests using explicitation interviews and detailed diaries. Descriptions of individuals could then be compared, both diachronically (when comparing the same person at different stages of life) and synchronically (when comparing different people) to develop a scientific understanding of the functioning of human volumes.

Throughout his work, Piette remains a consistent empiricist, insisting that all the qualities of a volume can (and should) be observed. The core theoretical argument of the book is presented as a guide on how to observe human beings, and what properties to consider. In effect, seeing is central to Piette's approach, on both a methodological and a rhetorical level. And since the social sciences routinely neglect human beings, Piette turns for inspiration to the arts. The anthropologist's gaze should resemble that of

a sculptor, who does not observe his subject from a fixed point of view (as does a painter), but rather tries to construct a multidimensional, detailed model of a living, moving individual.

Piette calls his approach "existantial anthropology" (this spelling signals separation from existentialism and underlines the root in "existants"), and positions it in contrast to virtually every other line of anthropological thought. *Theoretical Anthropology* is conceived as a positive proposition, aiming to showcase Piette's thinking without engaging with his main opponents: relational and interactionist social scientists, including (among others) Bronisław Malinowski, Erving Goffman, ethnomethodologists, Pierre Bourdieu, Bruno Latour, and the representatives of the recent "ontological turn" in anthropology.[2] Nevertheless, a fair share of Piette's latest book is devoted to differentiating "existantial" anthropology from other approaches, which could seem similar: phenomenology, existential and personalist philosophy, as well as the works of Tim Ingold, João de Pina-Cabral, and Cristina Torres. Seeking footing in the tradition of anthropology, Piette turns to structuralism, although he intends to follow the spirit, rather than the letter, of Claude Lévi-Strauss's approach. While this reclaiming of intellectual lineage may seem surprising, it becomes more understandable in the light of one of many different definitions of a "human volume" proposed by Piette: it is "a whole that includes all of his components and a way of structuring" (ibid.: xx).

Piette does not conceal the fact that, for him, the re-founding of anthropology constitutes a project of great personal importance. He "cannot bring [himself] to accept that anthropology forgets the scale of the human being and the continuous instants" (ibid.: 149). For Piette, focusing on individuals is necessary for anthropology to justify its own disciplinary distinctness. "If one wants to practice anthropology," writes the author, "one should do so in radical terms and not by bypassing the human being himself. Either there is anthropology or there is no anthropology" (ibid.). But even more importantly, Piette writes from a position of personal disappointment. It is clear that he is passionate about the human being as an object of study; he devotes his time and effort to understanding the functioning of real humans in real situations. This has been the focus of his work from the beginning, as attested by studies such as *Les jeux de la fête. Rites et comportements festifs en Wallonie* (1988) or *La religion de près. L'activité*

[2] Piette's polemical thinking can be found for example in *Contre le relationnisme* (2015a), *Existence in the Details: Theory and Methodology in Existential Anthropology* (2015b) or *Separate Humans: Anthropology, Ontology, Existence* (2016).

religieuse en train de se faire (1999), which are detailed accounts of the lives of the people he studied. He wants to observe humans in a rigorous, scientific manner, but does not find an established methodology that would entirely satisfy him.

But it is not enough for Piette to find answers for himself; he wants to convince others. The text is highly argumentative, and often utilises conventions approximating oral lectures. The key concepts are constantly repeated and illuminated from different perspectives, to ensure the reader understands them well. At times, Piette makes use of unorthodox methods of conveying his message – as is the case with his drawings, illustrating the main qualities of human volumes. And while the use of amateurish sketches for visualisation might seem eccentric, they ultimately prove effective for the elucidation of Piette's arguments (just as a quick scribble made on a blackboard during a lecture might, although few would consider it worthy of publication).

Piette's work presents a novel approach to the study of human beings; it is a perspective worth exploring even if one would not want to adopt it wholeheartedly. It underlines singularity without being essentialist, and allows the scholar to concentrate on individual existence without giving up empirical rigor. Indubitably, *Theoretical Anthropology* is a work by an exceptionally skilled observer of humans – it could not have been written had Piette not spent hours tracing small gestures and almost imperceptible changes. For sociologists, it could serve as an inspiring point of reference, pointing out the artificiality of a fragmentised and over-socialised vision of individuals. On a more abstract level, a demand for research on a scale that would not be sociological, psychological, nor biological, but specifically anthropological, could open new perspectives for the study of human beings.

At the same time, Piette's proposition is certainly controversial. It is hard to imagine that his anti-sociologism would become widely adopted in anthropology, nor is it obvious that it should be. After all, as the author himself admits, the discipline was founded on investigating social phenomena. For this reason, Piette's critique of anthropology may seem misguided: as if he accused the discipline of not being what it never intended to be in the first place. In this context, even if we were to accept Piette's diagnosis that there exists a gap in scientific knowledge, it is not entirely clear why it should be anthropology's task to fill it. At times, Piette seems to disregard the real discipline, as it is practised, for an ideal "science of human beings." Moreover, while his aim of establishing a properly anthropological scale of research is alluring, in the absence of an exemplary analysis it is not entirely

clear what type of conclusions should arise from the (comparative) studies of human volumes proposed by Piette. There would certainly be a risk of becoming buried in individual observations, with any type of synthesis being hard to reach. As always, the cost of antireductionism is the danger of a too-detailed analysis.

Despite these reservations, reading Piette's work might be beneficial even for scholars who do not want to reject the sociological perspective, as he highlights several important points about human beings which could be inspiring even for those working in different, more traditional lines of research. Among these points, continuity and lessereity seem especially pertinent.

Piette underlines the crucial role of personal style, which pervades an individual's actions and allows him to maintain his unity in time. Crucially, those stylistic elements are specific for every human volume, as they originate within, from the repeated patterns of interplay between voluments. Obviously, they can incorporate outside sources; but the impact is never the same for different people, as their internal constitution differs. Combined with the fact that volumography is always a temporal analysis (because it traces the voluments as they mutate over time, while keeping their unity), this approach can illuminate the way in which cultural or social factors are integrated in each individual. They are incorporated, but the change does not break the volume's continuity. Crucially, this allows individuals to be viewed not as disjointed but as unified – maintaining relations with the outside world but not defined by them, as is the case in the relational social sciences. For Piette, personal style – each individual's specificity and continuity – constitutes the basic principle of our understanding of others.[3]

Similarly, the notion of lessereity is a product of the attentive observation of human beings and the way they function in real situations. It calls attention to the fact that human beings are never fully committed to action; there is always the possibility of distancing oneself. This observation refers back to Piette's earlier works on religious faith (see, e.g., Piette 2003a, 2014). Believers are not necessarily following the logic of faith to its conclusions; they stop short of admitting the necessary implications, condition their faith with a "yes, but…," or hold contradictory convictions simul-

[3] It is worth noting that Piette's insistence on continuity posits him in contrast with Latour's perspective, emphasising discontinuity (e.g., in Latour 2012). Although today Piette positions himself as anti-relationist, some of his earlier works were influenced by actor–network theory. See, for example, Piette's *La religion de près* (1999), and its endorsement in Latour's *Reassembling the Social* (2005: 119). Later, with the development of the project of "existantial" anthropology, their paths have decidedly diverged.

taneously. Over time, the intensity of their belief oscillates: sometimes it comes to the fore; sometimes it recedes, depending on circumstances. This type of lessereity can be found in all the areas of human activity, and just as the concept of oscillation served to illuminate the way religious faith functions, it can also shine a new light on other domains. Moreover, those earlier analyses prove that the core concept of lessereity can function independently of the greater frame of Piette's anthropology.

Taken as a whole, Piette's approach is certainly quite idiosyncratic. But *Theoretical Anthropology* is also refreshing; it presents methodological reflection as a personal quest to find answers to burning questions. It is also a necessary work, for its author, at least – since Piette cannot satisfy his scientific ambitions using conventional methods he has no choice but to develop his own, and produces a whole new anthropology in the process. In accordance with this goal, the volumocentric perspective offers a novel way of looking at the human being: as an individual – unified, continuous, and distinct – but also as a base for a properly anthropological scale of research. Obviously, this individual exploration does not need to become standard for the whole discipline. Ultimately, Piette's proposal might be rejected for reasons equally personal: the unified and unique human being is simply not what social scientists are interested in. But it is worth remembering that adopting a perspective always necessitates disregard for some aspects of the object of study. At least, Piette's *Theoretical Anthropology* may serve as a reminder of what we give up when we adopt a sociological point of view: the richness and individuality of each human being.

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/// Antoni Głowacki – PhD candidate at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw. He completed his studies at MISH UW and EHESS in Paris. He specialises in sociology and anthropology of religion, and he has conducted research on Catholicism in Poland and France. His most recent publication is an article in the *Qualitative Sociology Review* (""To Each His Own Way to Live His Faith': Models of Religiosity in Parisian Catholic Parish," vol. 15(1), 2019).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9553-7238

E-mail: a.glowacki@is.uw.edu.pl

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POLAND IN ECONOMIC PURSUIT OF THE WEST

ANNA SOSNOWSKA, *EXPLAINING ECONOMIC BACKWARDNESS: POST-1945 POLISH HISTORIANS ON EASTERN EUROPE*

Marcin Kawko
Warsaw School of Economics

The book *Explaining Economic Backwardness: Post-1945 Polish Historians on Eastern Europe* by Anna Sosnowska is an extensive work in the field of historical sociology. The author is a sociologist working at the University of Warsaw's American Studies Center and studying the impact of migration from Eastern Europe and other peripheral countries on the development of American cities in post-industrial times. Before the publication of the work reviewed in this article, she published two books in Polish: *Polski Greenpoint a Nowy Jork. Gentryfikacja, stosunki etniczne i imigrancki rynek pracy na przełomie XX i XXI wieku* [Polish Greenpoint and New York: Gentrification, ethnic relations, and the immigrant labour market at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries] and *Zrozumieć zacofanie. Spory historyków o Europę Wschodnią (1947–1994)* [Understanding backwardness: Historians' disputes over Eastern Europe (1947–1994)]. *Explaining Economic Backwardness* is an updated translation of the latter.[1]

Sosnowska's book describes the post-war debate between Polish social and economic historians over the sources of Poland's – and more broadly,

[1] In the English-language translation, a short subchapter on religion was removed and examples referring to the contemporary political scene in Poland were added.

Eastern Europe's – economic backwardness. Apart from trying to identify the sources of backwardness in this region, Sosnowska tries to answer the question of the extent to which backwardness in Central and Eastern Europe is specific to the region, and to what extent it can be compared with backwardness in other parts of the world.

The core of the work are the models of backwardness of Eastern Europe proposed by the most important post-war researchers of Polish socio-economic history: Marian Małowist (1909–1988), Witold Kula (1916–1988), Jerzy Topolski (1928–1998), and Andrzej Wyczański (1924–2008), as well as some of their students. The boundary works in Sosnowska's analysis are Kula's habilitation lecture in 1947, "Social Privilege and Economic Progress," and Topolski's book entitled *Polska w czasach nowożytnych. Od środkowoeuropejskiej potęgi do utraty niepodległości (1505–1795)* [Poland in modern times: From Central European power to the loss of independence (1505–1795)], which was published in 1994.

/// A Broad Discussion of the Causes of Backwardness

The book consists of five chapters in which the theoretical background is established first and then the models themselves and their implications are provided. Chapters 1 and 4 present specific models created by foreign and Polish authors, respectively. Among the foreign authors, Sosnowska discusses the works of such researchers as Immanuel Wallerstein, Iván T. Berend and György Ránki, Fernand Braudel, Robert Brenner, Perry Anderson, and Jenő Szücs. In the second chapter, Sosnowska presents four major Polish social historians, whose debate she later analyses. Both the detailing of the political and social background in which they worked and their relationship with Marxism are extremely valuable for understanding the perspective of these scholars. Thus, the reader learns that Małowist, Kula, and Topolski were not only closely connected with Marxism in the ideological sense but also partially cooperating with the state apparatus. Sosnowska notes that for this very reason these authors were excluded from the post-transformational debate on the sources of Poland's backwardness. Sosnowska becomes a kind of advocate for these scholars, explaining that, first, they worked in specific times and in a specific place (unlike, e.g., Oskar Halecki, who was writing in the United States), and second, the social sensitivity of Małowist and Kula was determined by the effects of the Great Depression in the years 1929–1933. The Marxist approach appears

throughout Sosnowska's entire work, as will be noticeable in the models created by the Polish historians.

In the third chapter, Sosnowska analyses the geographical terms used in Polish and global models of backwardness in Eastern Europe in more detail. At the beginning, she emphasises that she uses the hermeneutics of suspicion (Sosnowska 2019: 105) – which can be reduced to the assumption that the historians consciously and intentionally used specific geographical concepts. In her opinion, semantics is of considerable importance as it defines the perspective from which the region is presented in relation to other parts of the world – primarily Western Europe. It does seem worthwhile to go beyond the division of Europe into West and East, as defined at Yalta. In this part of the book, we learn how the geographical region of which Poland is an immanent part is perceived as being Slavic, *Mittel*, Central, or East-Central European. Each of these concepts has specific geopolitical implications, which are both historical – for instance, *Mitteleuropa* as a concept used by the Nazis – and closer to the present day: Slavic Europe as a myth serving to expand the influence of the Russians; or Central and Eastern Europe as an attempt at a post-transformational tearing away from the Soviet sphere of influence, while emphasising the European character of the region.

The last – fifth – chapter, "Explaining Economic Backwardness," is a combination of summary and a selection of the book's key theses concerning research on the social structure. This part of the work outlines the broadest perspective, as Sosnowska goes beyond the Kula and Małowist schools to refer to the works of a dozen other scholars. The entire chapter is an analysis of Polish social groups and institutions engaged in or affected by the backwardness of Eastern Europe (the so-called agents of backwardness), through the prism of two concepts introduced by Kula, that is, "rentiers of backwardness" and "pioneers of progress" (Kula 2001 [1963]: 578), and one added by Sosnowska: "victims of backwardness" (Sosnowska 2019: 243).

The first part of the fifth chapter analyses the debate by Małowist and Wyczański on the role of farms in the development (or rather progressive backwardness) of Polish society. In his model, Małowist assumes that the institution of the *folwark*, which eliminated the culture-creating role of the cities and the social role of the state, contributed permanently to the backwardness of the inhabitants of Polish lands. He argues that the nobility and Western immigrants were the main rentiers of the farm system, with the peasants being its greatest victims. Wyczański disagrees with this ap-

proach, noting that the financial situation of the peasants in the sixteenth century improved significantly and working in the *folwark* system was their deliberate choice. According to Wyczański, it was a choice dictated by the need for security, which he contrasts with the situation of the peasantry in Western Europe, where peasants who had their own farms often went bankrupt and incurred huge debts towards the upper social classes.

The above dispute perfectly outlines the core of the debate analysed by Sosnowska. Both later in chapter 5, where she describes the development of towns and villages, the situation of the peasants and nobility, the role of western immigrants and the implications of the emergence of new social strata (i.e., the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie), and in the rest of the work, one side of the debate is formed by Kula, Małowist, and their students, and the other side by Wyczański and Topolski. While according to Kula and Małowist, Eastern Europe has always been a kind of periphery of more developed civilisations, both Wyczański and Topolski believed that it is possible to point to a period in Poland's history when the Commonwealth was as highly developed as its European trading partners. In general terms, the first two historians can be called pessimists, and the other two represent the so-called optimistic approach in Polish historiography (Sosnowska 2019: 82).

/// The Backwardness of Eastern Europe in the Eyes of Foreign Social Researchers

However, in order to be able to analyse the models proposed by Małowist, Kula, Topolski, and Wyczański, it is worthwhile first briefly to present the international debate that has been underway for several decades over the backwardness of Eastern Europe. Sosnowska emphasises several times in her work that this debate takes the form of a tension between Weberism and Marxism. While the first view is based on the cultural factors for a society's development, Marxism is based on the principles of historical materialism. Both in Poland and elsewhere, it was Marxist materialism that defined the debate about the reasons for the backwardness of some countries (Sosnowska 2019: 104).

In the context of the backwardness of the world's poorer regions, the most frequently analysed issue is the social structure, which is perceived through the prism of class struggle. It is almost as common to attribute the consolidation (and often creation) of backwardness to capitalism. This is how Wallerstein created his world-systems theory. In his model, it was

capitalism that made the wealthy countries develop earlier and subjugated other regions, which he called the periphery. The powers belonging to the first group deliberately act in such a way as to subdue poorer countries and to be able to derive tangible benefits from this relationship of power. Importantly, Wallerstein saw the economy as a zero-sum game, so in order for powers to become richer, the poorer must lose. In this model, Eastern Europe – along with Latin America – is the first periphery of the system, whose heart is Western Europe. Wallerstein considered the reasons for this state of affairs to be the poor development of Eastern European cities in the sixteenth century, the lower population density in these lands – which meant that landowners had no impulse to innovate – and the Turk and Tatar invasions which devastated the eastern part of Europe towards the end of the Middle Ages (Wallerstein 1974: 98). The Hungarian historians Iván T. Berend and György Ránki (Berend & Ránki 1982, quoted in Sosnowska 2019: 34) applied the Wallerstein model directly to the realities of Central and Eastern Europe.

The concept of the peripheral nature of Eastern Europe was also developed by Fernand Braudel of the Annales school in Paris, who noticed the positive sides of capitalism (flexibility in terms of investment and divestment) but at the same time blamed it for increasing the differences between the rich and the poor. Capitalists, as the highest form of socio-economic development, were assumed to break the laws of the market by taking advantage of their greater knowledge, creating monopolies, and using numerous sources of credit and asymmetrically distributed information (Braudel 1992: 455). What distinguishes Braudel's model from Wallerstein's is the identification of the main actors in the above process. While Wallerstein considered that the great owners of land and industry were the "exploiting class" (in line with Marxist theory), Braudel assigned this role to Western merchants monopolising the grain trade in Eastern Europe. Thus, it is not capitalism itself that is to blame for backwardness, but rather its misuse by merchants, who had subordinated the producers to themselves (Braudel 1992: 272).

The other researchers mentioned by Sosnowska had a slightly different perspective. Robert Brenner makes the contrarian claim that development is something extraordinary, while underdevelopment and stagnation are ordinary states. Thus, differences in economic development depend on many convergent factors that may occur in some countries and not in others. Even more original is Perry Anderson, who attributes the development of capitalism in Western Europe to the Roman-Germanic legacy and to the

complexes Western Europeans acquired due to the devastation of Roman culture by the Germanic tribes.

In summarising the international debate, Sosnowska notes that the backwardness of Eastern Europe has been analysed in the West mainly through the prism of the development of the West itself and the emergence of capitalism. In her opinion, Western sociologists have always treated the development of Western Europe as something special. Central Europe, on the other hand, is not perceived by them as a backward version of the Western path but as a backward region that did not choose this path (for various reasons – failure to follow suit, historical backwardness, peripheral status). The factors of perpetuating backwardness most frequently cited in the international debate are population density (mainly in rural areas), relations between the nobility and peasants, and the very fact of the existence of serfdom in Eastern Europe.

/// Polish Models for the Economic Backwardness of Eastern Europe

It is not without reason that the perspective of the Polish authors coincides with that of the international debate. Wallerstein referred in his work, *inter alia*, to Małowist's model, while Kula (and his students) collaborated with the Braudel school. It can thus be said that Western sociologists in some way adapted the models that previously existed in the debate between Polish social historians. Sosnowska's analysis in chapter 4 of the discussion that took place in post-war Poland is thus all the more valuable.

The first model Sosnowska presents is the model of colonial development that Marian Małowist proposed in a work published in 1973, *Wschód a zachód Europy w XIII–XVI wieku. Konfrontacja struktur społeczno-gospodarczych* [East and West Europe in the thirteenth–sixteenth centuries: A confrontation of socio-economic structures]. Due to Wallerstein's later adaptation of the model, it can be concluded that the Małowist theory is still the most widespread view on the causes of Poland's backwardness before 1989. As the name suggests, the Małowist model is based on the colonial subordination of poorer countries to richer countries, that is, those which developed a capitalist system earlier. Małowist claimed that the differences that arose in the sixteenth century contributed to the perpetuation of backwardness in Eastern Europe and that the differences were brought about by the specialisation of production in the European market. He was later criticised

by other scholars for not having analysed the short-term benefits that that specialisation brought to Poles.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, when Western Europe was consumed by a great socio-economic crisis, merchants sought new markets where they could acquire the necessities for their economies: wood, flax, cattle, grain, and minerals. Among other places, the lands of modern Poland came to be such a market. The local nobility noticed that they could get rich relatively quickly from the grain trade, and therefore they began to intensify production in that branch of the economy. In this way, a specific production monoculture was created, which made Eastern Europe responsible for supplying raw materials to Western Europe. The inhabitants of richer countries could focus on the development of more efficient branches of the economy – crafts and trade – and, consequently, start non-European colonial conquests.

The system constructed in this way meant that the Polish nobility, motivated by huge profits, sought to expand the scope of serfdom among the peasants. Despite the initial development of crafts (thanks to increasing incomes), at the turn of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries the cities began to decline as the internal demand for their inhabitants' goods decreased: the peasants were losing land, which was incorporated into the farms of the nobility, so they could not afford excess consumption. The key factor for the Małowist model is the fact that the Polish nobility did not use the cash they raised to invest in greater productivity but rather increased their consumption of luxury goods imported from the West. In the seventeenth century, however, the system collapsed as wealthy countries in Western Europe imported raw materials from the colonies, reducing demand in the Eastern European markets. The weakness of the central government, which was unprecedented in the West, was an additional factor contributing to the crisis: the wealthy nobles had won enormous privileges for themselves and became virtually uncontrollable. Thus, in the sixteenth century, the *folwark* and serf-based economy began the division of Europe, which would deepen in the following centuries.

Andrzej Wyczański did not agree with such a pessimistic vision of Poland in the sixteenth century. As a historian specialising in the sixteenth century – Poland's "golden" age – he proposed a model in opposition to the "colonial model," one of "catching up with Europe." He admitted that in the sixteenth century Poland and its neighbours were backward in relation to the countries of Western Europe, but many economic and social factors prove that these countries were on their way to "catching up"

with the so-called West. It is worth noting here that despite Wyczański's repeated denial of Marxist doctrines, the core of his model is evolution. Accordingly, there is one – linearly defined – path of development that all societies follow.

Wyczański believed that the reason for Poland's temporary backwardness was its later adoption of Christianity, which allowed it to join Latin civilisation only at the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries. It was, however, already at a quite average level of development for Europe, as shown by both the economic indicators (the amount of crops, the level of material culture, a general monetary system, and the percentage of the population "employed" outside agriculture) and the social indicators (law, education – parish schools and Jagiellonian University, which had extensive contacts with Italian universities). The data for the areas of the Crown, which was well developed, are particularly suggestive. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which was attached to the Commonwealth, had slightly different characteristics. Wyczański explained the country's agricultural monoculture by the fact that grain was a commodity that could be effectively produced in Poland. Thus, we see in Wyczański's model a reference to David Ricardo's classic theory of comparative advantage, which says that states need to specialise in the effective production of specific goods (Ricardo 1817).

In spite of effective economic development, the Polish nobility did not adopt the Western social model. The increase in demand for the production of Polish grain thus entailed the intensification of serfdom instead of the freeing of the peasants and turning them into farm tenants, as happened in the West. The standard of living of the nobility was comparable to that of their European counterparts, but the property and social gap between the nobility and the peasantry grew disproportionately, in contrast to Western Europe, where capitalism began to develop and, in connection, the peasantry was liberated (Wyczański 1987: 79). According to Wyczański, the reason for the backwardness of Poland and its neighbouring countries was therefore their effective catching up with Western Europe in terms of economic development, with their simultaneous failure to adopt the Western social structure.

Sosnowska's next protagonist, Jerzy Topolski, agreed with Małowist that the difference between the East and West of Europe arose at the turn of the Middle Ages and early modern times and was expressed primarily in the relationship between the nobility and peasants. Only in Eastern Europe was a system adopted in which the peasants were still subjects of the

upper classes, whose wealth was increasing. However, Topolski's model is distinguished from Małowist's by the much lower weight that Topolski assigned to trade relations with Western buyers. According to him, the key to understanding Polish backwardness is the social structure of Poland in the sixteenth century. Moreover, it is not without reason that Topolski calls his model "an unfortunate set of historical circumstances," as he introduces the breakdown of international trade caused by the import of raw materials from European colonies as a significant variable, and – more importantly – the consequences of the numerous wars that consumed the Commonwealth in the sixteenth and especially the seventeenth century. The core of Topolski's model thus centres on social relations, the strength and mentality of the magnates, the weakness of the peasantry, and external economic and political events.

In analysing the situation of the nobility and peasants in Wielkopolska, Topolski opposes Małowist and Kula. He believes that the majority of the nobility in Wielkopolska was of middling wealth, producing for the local market and not, as Małowist suggests, solely for export. The entrepreneurial attitude of members of the upper class allowed them to create a quasi-capitalist system in which a landowner would own as many farms as he was able to manage effectively (Topolski 1977: 267–281). Topolski's distinctiveness was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that he was the only one of the four historians to be from outside the Warsaw community: he worked at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. However, this does not diminish the importance of the fact that the nobility of Greater Poland (and Pomerania) displayed much more entrepreneurial attitudes than members of their class living in other parts of the Commonwealth.

Sosnowska devotes the most space in her book to Witold Kula's model of hybrid development. Its complexity, which was noticed among others by Braudel, allowed Kula to include in his analysis both social and cultural factors (as did Topolski and Wyczański), as well as external factors (as did Małowist). The essence of the Kula model is to point to the destructive role of the *folwark* system, especially in the degradation of cities, which in Western Europe were a culture-creating form of social organisation. In developing the *folwark*–serf model of the economy, the Polish nobility used the money they earned from the grain trade for the consumption of Western luxury goods. Thus, capital was not accumulated and reinvested locally but flowed back to the West.

In addition, the great *folwark* farms built in Poland tried to be self-sufficient and therefore did not participate in the market trade. Instead of

capitalist proto-enterprises, they became feudal organisations using free – serf – labour. The estates organised in this manner grew rich on foreign trade, while the smaller peasant farms produced only to meet their basic nutritional needs. In this way, a dual economy developed in Eastern Europe (a generalised term, as Kula's analyses covered solely Polish lands).

Trading conditions are crucial for the Kula model. Due to the high demand for Polish grain on European markets, the large *folwark* owners had the best bargaining position. With time, the difference between the various classes of Polish society began to grow in terms of the conditions that their members obtained in relations with Dutch merchants. The impoverished peasants were reduced to misery, which in turn limited internal demand. The trade structure, which was focused on exports, collapsed in the seventeenth century with the influx of goods from European colonies, and this ultimately led to the collapse of the Polish economy (Kula 1976: 132–133).

Kula's model can be called hybrid for two reasons. First, he includes in his analysis both external criteria (trade conditions) and internal criteria (the social structure). Second, he takes into account not only economic indicators, but also "humanist" indicators, such as average life expectancy, which is still one of the key criteria in assessing the level of development of countries (Sosnowska 2019: 233).

In summarising the models of the four most important post-war social historians in Poland, Sosnowska notes that all four models place the development of Eastern Europe in opposition to that of Western Europe. In common, they locate the causes of Poland's backwardness, which started at the end of the sixteenth century, in the country's social structure, the polarisation of the income structure (and assets), and citizens' rights. However, the Polish historians do not agree on the economic indicators used. For Małowist and Kula, the crux of the problem lay in relations with Western European merchants (for Małowist, in asymmetry in trade, and for Kula, in trade conditions), while Wyczański and Topolski attached greater importance to political and cultural factors (Wyczański to the role of the state, and Topolski to the mentality of the gentry).

/// Advantages and Disadvantages of a Sociological Historiographic Analysis

The presence of the word "economic" in the title of Anna Sosnowska's book seems to suggest to the reader that economic issues will be addressed at length. The work is a broad – and therefore quite general – presenta-

tion of models constructed by historians who, with one exception (Witold Kula), had not received an education in economics. A reader with an expectation of a broader economic analysis dealing with the subject of – economic, after all – backwardness, for example, in connection with the highly developed quantitative models of Robert W. Fogel, winner of the Nobel Prize (see, e.g., Fogel 2014 [2000]), or the in-depth analysis of the literature by Tomáš Sedláček (see Sedláček 2012 [2009]), may be disappointed. Sosnowska is a sociologist, not an economist, and therefore in her book she presents the problem from the perspective of a sociologist. In terms of economics, one valuable aspect of the work is the correct and quite frequent use of economic terms, such as economic growth, capitalism, production, trade, profit, or competitive advantage. It is also worth remarking that the author herself summarises the problem, writing that "the language used by my protagonists treats economics as one of the social sciences, and not (solely) a set of objective mathematical models" (Sosnowska 2019: 312). While one might agree with this perception of contemporary economics, in the work itself it is difficult to find any in-depth economic analysis of the phenomena presented.

The methodological differences and variety of views among the authors analysed are another noteworthy element of Sosnowska's work. Wyczański himself accused Małowist of referring in his research to legal documents instead of to the actual state of Polish society in the sixteenth century, as illustrated, for example, by the economic indicators that he, Wyczański, gave. Topolski did not agree with Małowist on a slightly different matter: while Małowist presented Mikołaj Rej as the archetype of the Polish nobility's desire for a quiet, idyllic retirement in the countryside, Topolski spoke of the Protestant "spirit of capitalism" informing Rej's entrepreneurial activity (Sosnowska 2019: 262–263). The divergence in the time period and thematic scope of the four historians' research is also worth noting. Małowist studied the economic and social structure of Europe, Topolski and Wyczański studied national communities, and Kula focused on the production and distribution of income in Poland. Sosnowska, however, quite skilfully explains such a procedure, noting that all their analyses cover – if from different angles – the sixteenth century, which is the most important period for the subject of the book; all four also deal with the topic of social stratification, which is ultimately the major reason for Poland's backwardness in Western Europe.

The historical relativism manifested in the works of Małowist, Kula, Topolski, and Wyczański can be regarded as both a negative and, in a sense,

positive argument. The perspective they adopted is a kind of transfer of the post-Yalta order onto the social relations that prevailed in Europe over 400 years earlier. Sosnowska notes that such presentism is a common danger for research conducted within the frame of historical sociology. Sociologists are looking for historical reasons for the phenomena they encounter today and which they consider to be the most important, and this leads to the adoption of a teleological concept: the studied phenomena had to have effects in the past and in the future, which we do not fully know (Sosnowska 2019: 303–304). It is noteworthy that all four historians changed their models with the development of social history. They did so both because they tried to broaden their perspectives and for purely utilitarian reasons, such as adjusting to the post-transformational debate in Polish historiography.

Among the undoubted merits of *Explaining Economic Backwardness* are the author's rejection of a popular presentation of events and facts in favour of the methodology used in sociology; the extension of the debate on backwardness to include the voices of poets and writers, such as Czesław Miłosz and Milan Kundera; an interestingly presented chronology of exchanges and changes of views, including under the influence of foreign academic discourse, for example, Topolski was the only one of the four historians to take an active part in reformulating the paradigm in historical sociology (Sosnowska 2019: 156, 214); numerous references to the works of other authors analysing the theories and models of the four main historians (e.g., Jerzy Kłoczowski, Jacek Kochanowicz, Henryk Samsonowicz, or Benedykt Zientara); and the linking of works concerning the living conditions of sixteenth-century Europe with contemporary phenomena. The latter is best illustrated in the Małowist model (profits were siphoned from Poland by foreign merchants) and in the Topolski model (the optimal size of the enterprise was of key importance for the economy, enabling it to be managed in such a way that it was possible to identify the people responsible for economic decisions – Sosnowska 2019: 266). In addition, it is also worth mentioning the advantages of the works of the protagonists of Sosnowska's book, including the multi-factorial nature of their models, which take into account such criteria as the economy, social structure, law, and demography, as well as diplomacy and the international position of the state, and, partially at least, culture, education, art, and religion, and the application of Polish models to a wider reality, as is visible, for example, in the adoption of the Małowist model by Wallerstein and the Kula model by Braudel.

After presenting the advantages and disadvantages of Sosnowska's work, it is impossible not to refer to the key issue for the structure and the whole concept of the book, namely Marxism and its influence on the works of the authors Sosnowska analyses. In the very first pages, she refers to the claim that the four historians' research was lacking due to communist censorship. As Krzysztof Brzechczyn noted in his review of the Polish edition of Sosnowska's book:

> The aftermath of the Second World War, in the form of the Yalta division, which persisted until 1989, meant that, at least in our part of Europe, the debate on the causes of economic backwardness had to take place in a more or less ideologised Marxist language in order to reach wider intellectual and social circles. After all, the elimination of historical backwardness was one of the important propaganda arguments justifying the installation of communist systems in the eastern part of Europe and giving legitimacy to their exercise of power (Brzechczyn 2007: 255).

Sosnowska clearly emphasises that she does not agree with the view – which was popular in Poland after 1989 – that the only source of Poland's backwardness was socialism and central planning, and that social researchers functioning within the system were completely tarnished by it. As an argument, she cites the breadth of analyses by the Polish historians, their impact on the research of great world sociologists (including the cooperation of the Kula and Małowist schools with scholars developing Wallerstein's and Braudel's theories) and the quality of the explanations for the backwardness of Eastern Europe characterising the Polish historians' models.

In regard to the influence that Marxism had on Małowist, Kula, and Topolski, the author admits that such an influence was significant. However, these authors were not dogmatists and nor was there any great opportunism in their activities. They rather referred to Marxist theory and methodology. The issue of opportunism, however, is debatable after reading Sosnowska's work, from which we learn that these three historians more or less actively collaborated with the communist state apparatus (or, as in the case of Topolski, were an immanent part of it – Sosnowska 2019: 100). According to Sosnowska, the relations of the three historians with the communists were the reason why their models were excluded from the historical debate that occurred in Poland after 1989. However, as they

were supposedly excluded by some very enigmatic "salon" (Sosnowska 2019: 96), it is difficult to evaluate the allegation.

In concluding the subject of Marxism, it is worth commenting on the analyses and works themselves of Małowist and Kula. Despite adopting a deeply Marxist narrative, Sosnowska has ignored two inaccuracies that emerge from the models of these two historians. In analysing economic reality through the prism of class struggle, Małowist did not seem to notice that the isolated specialisation of Polish villages, which he believed occurred in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and which he himself described as highly negative, was also an economic emanation of Marxist central planning. The effects of that specialisation, which went beyond the eleventh and twelfth centuries and are still visible in contemporary Poland, were even criticised by Kula, who was inspired by Marxism, in noticing that the post-war industrialisation of socialist Poland was not successful despite the noticeable increase in the number and size of production plants. That industrialisation had not entailed social change: instead of opening Polish society to contact with foreign countries, with the related mobility, it had done the opposite – it had closed Poland to the West, using extremely harmful isolation practices (Sosnowska 2019: 230).

However, Marxism is not directly the subject of Sosnowska's study, and therefore this topic should be treated rather as adding a certain hue to the discussion. In general, apart from the few above-mentioned inaccuracies and a number of fairly controversial theses in regard to the weaknesses of the Second Republic, the ascribing of class differences to a so-called Catholic mentality (Sosnowska 2019: 306), or the comparison of contemporary nationalist movements to German Nazism (Sosnowska 2019: 311), Sosnowska's work is an unusually wide-ranging project. It is worthy of attention for the number of works by Polish post-war social historians it analyses, as well as for its (successful) attempt to juxtapose the debate within communist Poland with the discussion on the same subject that took place outside its borders.

Explaining Economic Backwardness is therefore a work worth recommending, in which the reader will find answers to many questions related to the causes and consequences of the backwardness of Eastern Europe, which can be considered to have begun in the sixteenth century, a period commonly referred to in Polish history as having been "golden." The book's presentation of the debate between Polish social historians also makes readers aware that the post-war era was not a lost time for Polish social scientists. The sociological models they created gained the recognition of

international scholars and, on the one hand, allowed the question of the economic and social backwardness of Eastern European countries to be considered in the international scholarly debate, and on the other hand, meant that the contours of this debate were to a certain extent outlined by native historians. Sosnowska's work is not only a summary of their achievements, but also a synthesised list of the issues and problems that have not been clearly explained in historiography until today.

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/// Marcin Kawko – graduate of finance and accounting, PhD student in economics at the Institute of Enterprise at the Warsaw School of Economics, social activist, member and participant of the Catholic Intelligentsia Club, publicist at the Jagiellonian Club. His research interests focus on business ethics, civil economy, relational goods, and family business. He works at the junction of business theory and practice.

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1493-4918

E-mail: marcin.kawko@doktorant.sgh.waw.pl

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MORTGAGE LOANS AND THEIR SOCIAL EFFECTS

MIKOŁAJ LEWICKI, *SPOŁECZNE ŻYCIE HIPOTEKI*

Marta Olcoń-Kubicka
Polish Academy of Sciences

In *Społeczne życie hipoteki* [The social life of a mortgage] Mikołaj Lewicki addresses the social aspects of mortgage loans. The author, a researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw, specialises in the field of economic sociology, with particular emphasis on the sociology of money, the market, and finance. This book is the result of several years of research on processes related to household indebtedness and particularly financialisation. Mortgage loans, which have been available in Poland for just over two decades, have become so entrenched in social practice during this time that they have managed to influence the daily home life of borrowers and have significantly transformed the housing market and the social structure. It is these social effects of mortgage loans that Lewicki looks at in his monograph. He regards mortgage loans and the consequences of their functioning from various angles and on different scales by focusing on the phenomenon from the perspective of households, financial institutions, and the state, and by showing the different meanings of a dwelling: as a home and object of aspiration, but also as a resource subject to capitalisation.

The book has appeared at a time when the emergence of asset-based welfare is being widely discussed and there are ongoing debates in economic sociology and political economy regarding expectations and valuation practices, financialisation processes, the temporal dimensions of capital-

ism, and assetisation. *Społeczne życie hipoteki* addresses these current debates by offering new evidence and analyses regarding the Polish context.

The monograph consists of three main parts preceded by an introduction. In the introduction, Lewicki situates his approach within the sociology of markets and finance, and presents the analytical categories of "fictional expectations," derived from Jens Beckert, and of "social dispositives." These determine the direction of his further analyses. His main argument is that a mortgage loan should be recognised as a kind of dispositive that gives rise to obligations and expectations. He looks at how these are manifested at various levels of social life in separate parts of the book.

The first part ("The Experience of Living with a Mortgage") presents the debt situation from the perspective of borrowers' households. The second ("The Political Economy of Mortgage Loans") is devoted to the financialisation processes of housing and the mortgage loan market in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe. The last part ("Stratification and the Class-Creating Power of a Mortgage Loan") focuses on socio-demographic analyses of Polish society, with particular emphasis on the financial situation of borrowers.

The first part, which is devoted to the experience of living with a mortgage, shows how a loan, or rather the indebtedness it masks, is experienced by borrowers in the practice of everyday life. In his analyses, Lewicki relies on qualitative interviews (conducted partly in cooperation with Mateusz Halawa). These analyses, which Lewicki refers to as household microsociology, focus on the expectations of borrowers: how they reason, how they experience taking a loan, and how they justify their debt situation. I appreciated Lewicki's perspective on the household, on systems of ties, and on ways of setting the rules related to domestic monetary practices, as this approach is close to my way of thinking about household economy and until recently, these matters constituted a "black box" in economic sociology.

However, Lewicki's presentation of field research outcomes left me with a feeling of wanting more. His analyses use the concept of "orders of worth" advanced by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, representatives of the French pragmatic school. Lewicki's manner of discussing the individual situations of borrowers, with the classification of their justifications in the repertoire of communities (inspired, domestic, fame, industrial, and market), means that these situations are not brought sufficiently to the fore. The exception here is the civic community, which Lewicki reconstructed from an analysis of the discourse concerning borrowers who took mortgages in Swiss francs (i.e., the "franc borrowers"). Lewicki's presentation

of the politicising of mortgage loans through the franc borrowers' movements is in-depth and convincing.

The author's most coherent and exhaustive arguments appear in the second, most extensive part of the book, in regard to the field of political economy. He considers the processes of financialisation, that is, the growing importance of the financial sector for the functioning of the economy and households. These analyses are inspired by Manuel Aalbers's works showing the links between the expansion of financial markets and the real estate market. Lewicki reconstructs the process of households becoming "mortgaged," that is, of their becoming connected to the financial sector, and shows how the mortgage loan has become a particularly important instrument in the process of financialisation.

He conducts his analyses from a comparative perspective. His reflections on the course of housing financialisation processes focus on selected countries of Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe, that is, on Spain, Hungary, and Croatia. Comparative analysis makes it possible to show the specificity of the financial sector in individual countries; Lewicki shows how local conditions and dominant ideologies have made home ownership and private investments a social norm and have been grounded in practice. At the same time, he shows local differences in forms of housing capitalism, with the impact of mortgage loans on the situation of households, and the kinds of economic crises that have been experienced in different regions of Europe.

In this context, he considers the specific situation of Poland, a country characterised by a familial model of housing capitalism. The model involves a high percentage of private property (due to the privatisation of the housing stock in the 1990s) and the importance of intergenerational transfers for home buyers. These conditions are accompanied by a low percentage of apartments for rent and of social housing. Lewicki shows how the dissemination and democratisation of credit occurred and took a central place in the housing financing system after 2000. He looks at the role of the state in this process and its changing attitude to regulatory issues in regard to foreign-currency loans or the amount of a buyer's downpayment.

What I found of particular interest in this part was the author's showing how the spread of mortgage loans appeared along with the state's simultaneous elimination of its housing policies and support of market solutions. State-run programmes such as "Housing for the Young" or "The Family in Its Own Home" became instruments for the active development of housing ownership through mortgage loans. In this context, Lewicki's

analyses constitute an important voice in the current debate (which was recently joined, *inter alia*, by Łukasz Pawłowski's book *Druga fala prywatyzacji* [A second wave of privatisation]) on the withdrawal of the state from public services related to social security.

This part of the book is the most informative. The author recounts for the readers the history of financialisation processes in particular regions of Europe, provides data, and uses it effectively in comparative analyses. His explanations are solid and credible, and his analyses are well grounded in facts and literature. He familiarises readers with the current debates related to the growing importance of housing in financialisation processes and proposes his own interpretations, with particular emphasis on the situation in Poland. Viewing Poland's situation in comparison to other models of housing capitalism allows us to better understand the economic, social, and cultural processes associated with the spread of mortgage credit. Lewicki carries out his analyses in an orderly and exhaustive manner, and this is the main virtue of this part of the book. He is competent and skilful in dealing with issues of political economy and clearly feels at ease with the subject as he has published articles in the area before. This part of the book is the most consistent and could be viewed as a complete entity in itself.

The last part of the book (which was co-written with Krzysztof Tymicki) introduces another direction of thinking about the social consequences of mortgages. It is focused on considerations on the class and stratification dimension of mortgage loans. The researchers decided to examine the financial situation of borrowers (including those who have loans in Swiss francs) against the financial situation of home owners and tenants. For this purpose, they analysed data from research conducted by the Central Statistical Office (*Household Budget Research 2016*), and focused, among other things, on such aspects as living space, income and its sources, subjective measures of consumption comfort, and the structure of household expenses. On the basis of their analyses, they concluded that borrowers were better situated: they had achieved higher social status and had greater life chances than the rest of the population. The intention of the authors was to show the selection and classification properties of the mortgage loan, which divides households into "winners" and "losers."

In their reflections, the authors introduce an extremely important topic: the diversification of wealth distribution and the role of a mortgage in individual enrichment. In this way, they join the current debates on the rising importance of wealth – as opposed to income or profession – in social stratification. This development is important for understanding the pro-

cesses shaping inequality, and is particularly important in Poland, where, as the NBP research cited by Lewicki shows, the main source of assets and wealth is not income from work but from running a business. More empirical research is certainly needed on this issue. For instance, in further analyses, the inclusion of data on social background, inheritance, and access to family wealth would help highlight the quest for social mobility through a mortgage.

The chapters on stratification and classifications related to mortgages are strictly empirical in nature. The authors draw conclusions on the basis of their analyses, but by no means place them in the wider discussion on capital, wealth, inequality, and social classes initiated recently by Thomas Piketty in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Apart from short references to the concepts of Weber, Bourdieu, or Lamont, I missed a discussion of the current theories of social class and housing that point to the importance of assets and housing ownership in class stratification, as undertaken, for example, by Mike Savage and his team (Savage 2015). The authors' omission to set their conclusions in the context of the broader literature is a weakness in these chapters. Of course, consideration of the subject of class in Poland is not an easy task; there is still no agreement among researchers as to who belongs to the middle class in Poland, or whether a middle class exists at all, or whether the majority only aspire to belong. All this is especially the case if we compare the authors' criteria for assigning people to the upper or middle class with the criteria applied to classes in Western societies of well-established late capitalism. It emerges that we are dealing not with the upper and middle class but at most with the upper middle class and middle class or those aspiring to the middle class, who by striving to own a home by means of a loan are trying to raise their position. Nevertheless, the conclusions proposed by Lewicki and Tymicki will allow researchers dealing with social stratification to start a discussion on the connection between having a mortgage and social position.

In conclusion, Lewicki returns to the discussion of the mortgage loan as a social dispositive generating a number of effects in various areas. He recalls how individual actors in the housing market – households, the state, and financial institutions – formulate their expectations for the future, and how those expectations contribute to the development of the mortgage market. Again, he devotes the most space to aspects related to the political economy of mortgages, this time focusing on the institutional changes of capitalism in Poland and engaging in discussions with Polish researchers in this field.

Due to my own research interests, my attention was drawn in the conclusions to essential topics that Lewicki had previously only mentioned in passing, such as the role of intergenerational transfers in obtaining property, the deepening inequalities based on property differences, or the emerging culture of rent. By drawing this picture, Lewicki once again proves his ability to see the entire range of social conditions and the consequences of mortgages. However, this loaded ending, which is saturated with many extremely important topics, raises more questions and hypotheses than it gives answers. In this sense, it leaves the reader wanting more and with open questions for reflection, for example, on the subject of rentierism, that is, thinking about a dwelling in terms of its being a resource subject to capitalisation, generating passive income, and offering financial freedom, and thus deepening the financial difference between home owners and tenants. Lewicki writes about the "winners" and "losers" of the processes taking place on the mortgage market. The question is to what extent this game and its rules are recognised by the actors participating in it. To what extent should the state intervene in this game in which some have increased opportunities for social mobility, while others are deprived of it? Lewicki in fact does not mention the cadastral tax, but thinking about various instruments of fiscal policy will be necessary if Poland is to move towards asset-based welfare to the same degree as Western countries dominated by the liberal regime of the housing market.

What draws the reader's attention is the fact that the various parts of the book seem to constitute separate entities, written in different language. This is a consequence of the ambitious choice of a broad view of the social aspects of mortgages and to some extent it also results from the fact that each of the individual parts selects a different object of analysis, while referring to different debates and theoretical inspirations. Similarly, the diversification of the data leads the analysis in different directions. Lewicki himself draws attention to these limitations: households, with their internal complexity of relations and rules of operation, which were reconstructed and discussed on the basis of qualitative interviews in the first part, become once again a black box in the third part, which is based on statistical data. There are no internal inequalities, including gender ones; there are no differences in access to family resources, and the life cycle is not visible. In addition, the breadth of gaze causes both the language and the argumentation in the individual parts to change, while the main argument concerning expectations has a different resonance in them. After the first reading, the reason for the juxtaposition of various subjects remains unclear; the reader

is left to guess and to navigate between the introduction and the ending to recreate it. This is undoubtedly a reading that requires concentration.

Both the thematic diversity and the form mean that the recipients of individual parts will probably be different readers. The first part will attract more people with an interest in the sociology of everyday life, household relations, and valuation practices. The second will find readers who are interested not only in economic sociology or political economy, but also in finance, housing, and public politics. The third should be of interest to researchers who study stratification, social classes, and inequality.

In summary, *Społeczne życie hipoteki* is a dense, extensive, and multi-issue monograph on the functioning of mortgage loans in Poland. It is certainly a necessary and useful book for understanding the impact of this instrument on social life. It presents the phenomenon in a broad fashion, while simultaneously familiarising the Polish reader with the current debates in economic sociology and political economy in the area. In this context, Lewicki's voice is important because his deliberations on Poland provide evidence enabling further comparative analyses with countries from Central, Eastern, and Western Europe.

This book, which crowns years of research by the author, is at the same time an open project. It is an invitation to discussion, and its major advantage is that it sets directions for further research. Having been awarded the Ludwik Krzywicki Prize at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences in the field of sociology, this book has already made its mark and can be expected to take a place in the academic debate.

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/// Marta Olcoń-Kubicka – economic sociologist and researcher in the Max Planck Partner Group for the Sociology of Economic Life at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Her work focuses on cultural analyses of economic life and on ethnographic research into money practices in households. She was a principal investigator in the project "Practices of Handling Money in Close Relationships in Young Family Households" (2014–2017). She is currently leading the research project "Intergenerational Transactions: Relational Work and Moral Frames in Transfers of Wealth from Parents to Their Adult Children" (2019–2021).

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3080-7166

E-mail: marta.olcon@gmail.com

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WILL WE START TRUSTING THE NEWS ON THE INTERNET?

A REPORT ON THE DISCUSSION ABOUT THE CREDIBILITY OF DIGITAL MEDIA

Filip Łapiński
Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

On 27 January 2020, a discussion on the credibility of digital media was organised in the Tarabuk bookstore by the editors of *Stan Rzeczy* [State of Affairs] and *Res Publica Nowa*. The meeting concerned the 2/2019 issue of *Res Publica Nowa*, which was devoted to information sovereignty. Prof. Renata Włoch (*State of Affairs*), Piotr Górski (*Res Publica Nowa*), and Bernard Osser (Agence France Presse) took part in the discussion, which was moderated by the editor-in-chief of *Res Publica Nowa*, Dr Marcin Zaborowski.

In the beginning, Marcin Zaborowski briefly presented the *Res Publica Nowa* special issue. Its topics include, on the one hand, the crisis of media credibility and the erosion of traditional mass media, and, on the other, the appropriation of public media and the uncontrolled nature of information flows on the web.

Next to speak was one of the editors of *Res Publica Nowa*, Piotr Górski, whose article in the journal is about the struggle for information sovereignty in an era when the role of the internet is continually expanding. In the article, he addressed the phenomenon whereby the influence of opinion-forming media is increasingly being mediated by the internet. According to him, the most important question that should be answered concerns the extent to which we want sources of information on the internet to be regu-

lated. As he pointed out, while the rest of the public space is in some way regulated by custom and law, the internet still eludes such restrictions – it is an enclave excluded from all jurisdiction. It can even be said that the internet resembles the Warsaw of the 1990s, when there was considerable disorder in the streets along with extensive freedom – cars could park in any place and, until driving and parking rules were instituted, pedestrians often had difficulty getting where they wanted to go. Despite the far-reaching structuring imposed on that street chaos some twenty years ago, it is hard to feel that we have lost our freedom. Similarly, legal regulations regarding the flow of information on the internet need not necessarily mean a restriction of our freedom.

Would it be beneficial to regulate social media? When radio broadcasting was introduced in the 1930s, there was also chaos at the beginning, before regulations were applied. The same thing happened with television. Is it the internet's turn now? Twitter regulates itself, for instance. Can we consider the social media space a public space?

Another important issue for Piotr Górski is sovereignty and the related right to vote. When do we consider an individual or community to be sovereign? In answer to this question, democratic elections are most often indicated. One of the limitations of voter sovereignty in this sense is the principle of one vote and the possibility that undue influence can be exerted on voters: by buying their votes, for instance. The spirit of democracy can be destroyed without breaking democracy's formal rules. A similar threat to the sovereignty of citizens on the internet is the activity of bots, which undermine the democratic nature of the processes taking place, breaking the "one vote" rule and exerting a disproportionate influence on internet users.

As Marcin Zaborowski noted, the genuine sovereignty of a democratic entity is significantly threatened when citizens are unable to verify the truthfulness of the information they receive. With the erosion of traditional media, the appropriation of public media, and the huge amount of fake news circulating on the web, access to verifiable information is becoming increasingly difficult.

Bernard Osser responded to the issue by talking about his experience of working in an information agency. In the past, agencies only dealt with information that had been verified to be truthful. Today, however, false information is also of interest. It is investigated, shown to be false, and then announced as fake news. Such investigations are hard work – it can be harder to prove that a piece of information is false than to prove that a piece of information is true. The news agency's goal is also to provide

tools to enable readers to select information themselves. As modern times are characterised by a very high concentration of "information noise," the verification of incoming news is becoming more and more difficult. Hence, modern news agencies employ people who only deal with fact-checking, which has become a service in itself.[1] Bernard Osser also explained what the fact-checking procedure is about – it is not about proving that an interpretation of given events is false but only about verifying facts that are not subject to opinion. Facebook also collaborates with Agence France Presse, providing statistics on the popularity of posts and topics. The agency then checks the credibility of the most popular information at the moment and on finding it false informs Facebook administrators who "restrict the reach" of such entries and information.

Renata Włoch, *State of Affairs*' representative, addressed the question of the impact of fake news and new flows of information on society. In her opinion, an analysis of contemporary times should not omit reference to Foucault's observations. Who produces knowledge and power? Who is producing the truth? Thus, the questions posed do not relate to knowledge but rather to its sources within the framework of an appropriate discourse. There is an impression that the academic world no longer produces the discourse anymore – information is rather increasingly the province of experts working on behalf of large corporations. These corporations subtly steer the processes of knowledge production and information dissemination.

In making her second argument, Renata Włoch agreed with the American scholar Susan Aaronson, who points out that in the modern world we have three information regimes: Chinese, European, and American. Under the American regime, knowledge is generated by corporations that exercise imperceptible control over information, maintaining an illusion of gratuitousness. In the Chinese model, information is controlled by the state, and under the European regime, data may be treated as a subject of civil rights and therefore deserve legal protection. This is difficult, however, because the flood of false information is considerable and fact-checking itself has become very hard. According to Renata Włoch, today we are witnessing the collapse of the Enlightenment project of rational politics and – perhaps – the end of the public sphere of which Jürgen Habermas wrote. Today, even the belief that deliberation based on factual arguments can occur is weakening. Expert discourse has collapsed and been devalued, as social trust in it has dissipated. Not only does this breakdown threaten to weaken or even destroy the practice of fact-checking itself, but it cannot be

[1] See https://factcheck.afp.com/, accessed 4.11.2020.

ruled out that the decline of democracy and the emergence of succeeding authoritarianisms are happening before our eyes. Renata Włoch was also interested in the question of the recipients of discourses: to what extent does the reception of information depend on the recipients' education?

In the face of such threats, regulation of the flow of information on the web is urgently needed. However, effective implementation will be much more difficult here than in the case of radio or television; there are currently no tools to guarantee the effectiveness of the regulations introduced. Only collaboration between countries and large corporations could bring success.

But what is fake news, which is such a vital threat to the condition of modern democracy? As Piotr Górski noted, it is information intended to elicit a certain emotional reaction. Thus it is not just falsehood but a falsehood with an impact. The challenge posed by fake news is even greater in regard to so-called deep fakes. In the face of so much convincing false information, our society could turn towards total distrust of the media or total indifference to information. Either of these would result in a deep erosion of social life. There are so many dangers. What then are the opportunities associated with social media? Let us recall Barack Obama's election campaign – the first campaign to be heavily based on social media. How is it that social media can be viewed as either hero or villain? As Renata Włoch pointed out, in the democratisation associated with social media the greatest problem is the lack of a rational point of reference and the emergence of bubbles. Bernard Osser offered a slightly more optimistic thought: as time flies on the internet, perhaps Facebook will be replaced by another, healthier channel of communication.

At the end of the meeting, the audience could comment and ask questions. The editor-in-chief of *State of Affairs*, Dr Jakub Motrenko, drew attention to the often-overlooked democratic nature of internet communication. After all, radio, television, or print media were one-way channels of communication. Perhaps the introduction of the internet gave a voice to those who were previously unable to express their opinion.

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Pfeiffer J.W., ed. 1991. *Theories and Models in Applied Behavioural Science*, vol. 4: *Organizational Models*, Cambridge University Press.

Article in a journal

Ross N. 2015. "On Truth Content and False Consciousness in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory," *Philosophy Today*, vol. 59(2), pp. 269–290.

Articles with DOIs

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Online references

Butterworth Ch. 2010. *Leo Strauss in His Own Write. A Scholar First and Foremost*, http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/Theory/Transcript_Butterworth.pdf, accessed dd.mm.yyyy.

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FORTHCOMING

ISSUES IN PREPARATION:

1(18)/2020 /// Heresy

Heresy is a call to change; it is a questioning of the existing order. It seems to us an interesting reflection of the world in a time of engrossing – and often even disturbing – change. Historically, the idea of heresy (from the Greek "*hairesis*," "choice" or "chosen thing") is one of the source categories of Christian thought, as heresy is dialectically connected with the concept of orthodoxy. The term was used to define the internal tension and conflict in the early Christian community or simply erroneous teachings. However, the idea could also be used to describe social and cultural phenomena that are not connected with the Christian tradition. We want to test the dialectical potential of heresy in contemporary debate. How does the idea of heresy function not only in the theology of various religious faiths but above all in philosophy, the social sciences, and the humanities? In what manner could the idea of heresy be used by anthropologists, economists, cultural anthropologists, philosophers, religious scholars, or sociologists? We are also interested in the category of heresy itself, as well as studies of particular instances (historical phenomena and the fates of heresiarchs).

2(19)/2020 /// Monuments

Monuments are a phenomenon as ancient as historical communities. Created out of stone or other material, resistant to the passage of time, they were made to preserve a memory. Generally involving a pedestal or column, they were intended to ensure the visibility of those events, persons, or ideas that had obtained social recognition. The image of a triumphal military leader has an outstanding political aim: to communicate the legitimacy of his rule. Beginning in the times of the French Revolution, a certain fundamental change has occurred in this area: monuments began to be raised to persons or events that previously had been less visible – the victims of wars and other conflicts, or of mass tragedies. These monuments form an element of a broader phenomenon, the "political cult of the victim" (Koselleck), which changes the fallen into a political tool. Reformative and revolutionary iconoclasm proved monuments are able to evoke extreme emotions and serious disputes or acts of vandalism. At the same time, the majority are increasingly overlooked as minor architectural elements. In this issue, we reflect on monuments in the context of shaping social identity, commemorating victories, developing the political cult of the victim, and violence towards monuments.